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Beyond Don't Ask, Don't Tell

Portland's Dr. Mary Ann Humphrey-Keever weighs in on repeal

BY RYAN J. PRADO

Just a few weeks removed from the historic repeal of the U.S. military's ban on gay men and women serving openly, emotions continue to run high, its soldiers of change standing tall. Among those personally affected by the legislation brave enough to lead the fight against it is Dr. Mary Ann Humphrey-Keever.

Humphrey-Keever's book, *My Country, My Right to Serve*, was published by Harper-Collins in 1990—a full three years before the Clinton administration's "Don't ask, don't tell" policy was signed into law. The book pieced together the riveting stories, as told to Humphrey-Keever, of 42 ex-servicemembers whose military careers were destroyed by the ban on gays serving, and became a cornerstone of dialogue on reversing the law. Upon its publication, *My Country, My Right to Serve* was bestowed the Oregon Literary Arts Association Award for creative nonfiction, as well as a nomination for a Lambda Award, among other accolades.

Humphrey-Keever, 67, is a longtime faculty member at Portland Community College's Rock Creek campus, where she teaches physical education. She was working at PCC in the '80s, too, while simultaneously serving a commission position in the Army Reserve.

In 1987, after nine years of service and as a newly promoted major working as an Affirmative Action, Equal Opportunity officer—ironically enough—Humphrey-Keever was forced to resign for being a lesbian following what she says was the revenge of a former colleague and friend at PCC, whom she'd unwittingly forced out of his position. He was also a reserve lieutenant colonel in the U.S. Marine Corps.

It wasn't until Humphrey-Keever visited a psychiatrist to help her resolve her distrust of peers, and mankind in general, that an epiphany hit: "Perhaps you could be a pioneer, a spokesperson," Dr. Kenneth Paltrow suggested to Humphrey-Keever during a session. "You could even write a book."

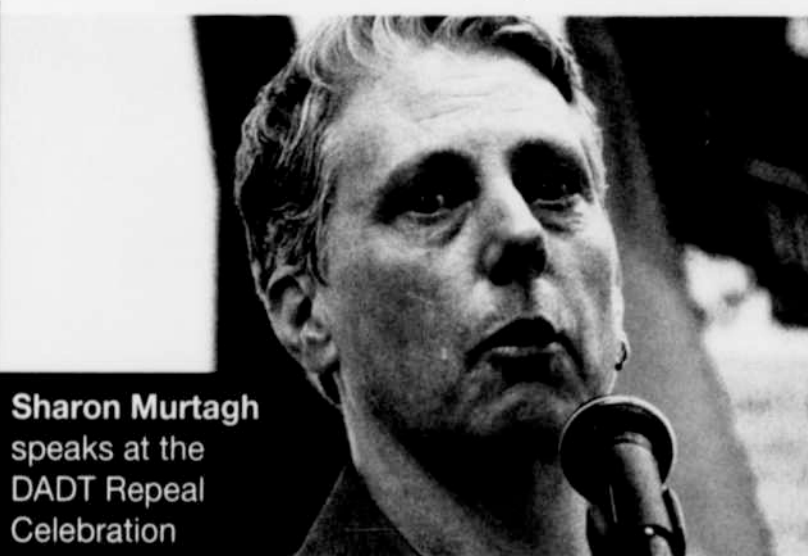
And so began a 20-plus year campaign for awareness. Humphrey-Keever and her partner Debra—who have been registered domestic partners since 2008, together for 26 years and, as a political statement, have been married a whopping three times, whenever and wherever they can—became poster children for any issue in the Pacific Northwest that had to do with gays in the military. She co-founded Veterans for Human Rights in 1992, and has led the Color Guard holding the American flag at the

start of Portland's Pride parade for the past 18 years. She also led a contingency of 2,000 gay and lesbian servicemembers in the 1993 March on Washington.

Humphrey-Keever's work undoubtedly played a big role in the eventual repeal of DADT. Now that it's over, she says, the real challenge will be for servicemembers to learn how to confront the inevitability of continued discrimination.

"There will be the guys in the military who find out someone's a lesbian and say, 'You haven't had the right guy yet,' [or there's] 'the guy who hasn't found the right girl.' There will be that because that seems to be how we still think," Humphrey-Keever explains. "I don't see that as going away immediately. I think it's a process."

As evidenced by recent headlines involving at least one enlisted soldier coming out via YouTube, the urge to free the burden of hidden sexual orientation among the ranks is strong. Humphrey-Keever, noting that most servicemembers are likely aware of a peer's



Sharon Murtagh speaks at the DADT Repeal Celebration



KBOO's Out Loud broadcasts from the DADT Repeal event