



NOVEMBER DISPATCHES

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SWAN PARTICIPATES IN VETERANS DAY 2010



Veterans Day week was an incredibly busy time for SWAN. From panels to charity events to marching with four cause specific banners in the New York City Veterans Day parade, SWAN definitely made its presence felt this Veterans Day.

The charity swim, sponsored by Coney Island Brighton Beach

Open Water Swimmers ([CIBBOWS](#)), was an amazing, intense, high energy event. This swim was listed as the coldest on the international open water swim calendar! Over 50 swimmers ultimately ran into the freezing water at Coney Island, most without wetsuits, to swim 1, 2 or 3.1 miles. Hot soup, Mylar blankets and parkas awaited the swimmers when they returned as well as beer and prizes once everyone was warmed up. Anu Bhagwati, SWAN's executive director and one of 6 veterans who participated in the swim said, "I swam in honor of my old First Sergeant, Raymond Mackey, who lost both his legs recently in Afghanistan. A hardened grunt, he always did the right thing for his Marines, even when it meant bucking the system."

Among the Vets that participated in the swim was Eric Guendner, a Marine Staff Sergeant who made the drive from North Carolina. Eric was seriously wounded in Afghanistan and is expecting a medical discharge from the military this year. Anu recounts: "He said that [the] race was probably the most challenging race he's done. He had a blast, was thoroughly inspired, and wants to bring his whole family next year. He's going to tell all of his tough guy special forces

buddies that they need to come out next year.” SWAN would like to thank everyone involved, especially CIBBOWS for generously hosting and organizing the event.

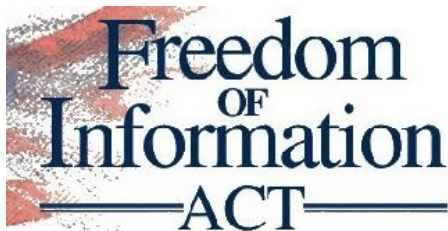
SWAN's first experience at the New York City Veteran's Day was eye opening and inspiring. After meeting for coffee and donuts, SWAN's contingent of veterans and family members marched proudly with our four striking banners. We had a banner for our organization, a banner in recognition of survivors of Military Sexual Trauma, a gorgeous banner in support of LGBT



servicemembers, and a beautiful banner in memory and recognition of [LaVena Johnson](#) co-designed by her father. Reactions from the parade watchers were mixed, but we were excited to find out that we appeared on NBC with our banners clearly displayed. We are so proud of the women who marched with us, especially survivors of sexual trauma, violence and discrimination in the military.

As our Community Development Director Kalima Desuze pointed out, it is essential to encourage more women veterans to march with women's contingents like SWAN. "We want to remind the world that women are at war, too, and to show servicewomen and women veterans around the globe that they are not forgotten." After the parade, the wonderful masseurs of Equinox Spa in Brooklyn donated chair massages to our women veterans in appreciation of their service.

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT UPDATE



Last month, we told you that SWAN was partnering with the Veterans Legal Services Clinic at Yale Law School and the ACLU to submit Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests to the Department of Defense and Veterans Administration. We hope to gain access to records that will give us a fuller picture

of Military Sexual Trauma (MST) and its impact on women in the Armed Forces. Some of the departments we contacted have replied asking for more time and others have not replied at all. Our next step is to take these departments to court to have a judge rule that the information requested must be handed over. This move is going to attract a storm of media coverage and bring to light obstacles and issues faced by servicewomen in a very bold way. Stay tuned for updates about this process from our policy team!

SWAN STAFF PROFILE - Greg Jacob, Policy Director

Before joining SWAN, Greg spent the past five years as a successful senior manager in a New York-based Fortune 10 company. Prior to his corporate work, he spent ten years in the US Marine Corps. He entered the service as a Private, and left as a Captain. As a "Mustang," he spent his entire career in the infantry



community where he held leadership billets ranging from fire team leader to company commander. Greg's numerous deployments with the Marines and as part of Joint Special Operations Command have taken him to every continent except Antarctica. He has been in Harm's Way several times and has received numerous decorations, including the Combat Action Ribbon. After being assigned to an integrated training battalion, Greg learned firsthand the discriminatory treatment and sexual trauma experienced by servicewomen. Greg attended the University of Kentucky and left with a Bachelor of Arts in Journalism. A solid researcher and prolific writer, he has worked at newspapers, as a copywriter on Madison Avenue, and written for magazines, websites and blogs. Greg is a member of the Miniconjou Lakota tribe.



WOMEN VETERANS PROFILE - April Fitzsimmons



April Fitzsimmons, Air Force veteran, playwright and star of the highly successful one woman show "The Need to Know," was instrumental in the founding of SWAN through a healing retreat in 2007 where women veterans came together to write about and discuss their experiences. She now works as an actor, writer, teacher, and student and is a member of the Actor's Gang, a theatre company directed by Tim Robbins. She teaches creative writing and other forms of artistic expression to veterans, developing curriculum that we at SWAN hope to help her teach to other writing teachers and providers. April teaches at [New Directions](#), a shelter for homeless women veterans, the

West Los Angeles VA Medical Center, and through the [United States Veterans Artist Alliance](#). Says April of her work: "I have noticed that when Veterans share their own stories the benefits are doubled. The Veteran feels an increased awareness of their creative power and the community learns about the Veterans and their experiences first-hand. I've also noticed that Veterans not only want to tell the stories of their military experiences but that they have a trove of creativity and stories just waiting to be unleashed when their creativity is reinvigorated." Check out April's website and blog at www.aprilfitzsimmons.org where you can also sign up for her classes if you live in her area.

EDITOR'S NOTE: In this new feature, SWAN will be reporting on women veterans who are making a difference. If you know of one that deserves recognition, please send us a note at info@servicewomen.org.

SWAN IN THE NEWS

["Sexism and Racism Lurk in Don't Ask, Don't Tell Enforcement,"](#) WNYC blog

["2010 Petra Fellow Anuradha Bhagwati,"](#) The Petra Foundation Channel

["The Service Women's Action Network calls Dan Choi out for his misogyny,"](#) Feministing



["Coney Swim Raises Money for Veterans, Military Families,"](#) Brooklyn Daily Eagle

["MILITARY SECRETS: Lifting the Camouflage Off Don't Ask, Don't Tell,"](#)

LA Gay & Lesbian Center, Panel Discussion, Jules Sohn – panelist



["A salute to the women of military science,"](#) *Under the Microscope* , The Feminist Press

["Time to Stop Making Nice to Military,"](#) Laura Flanders Speakeasy, AlterNet

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