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## Underpaid the piggy bank

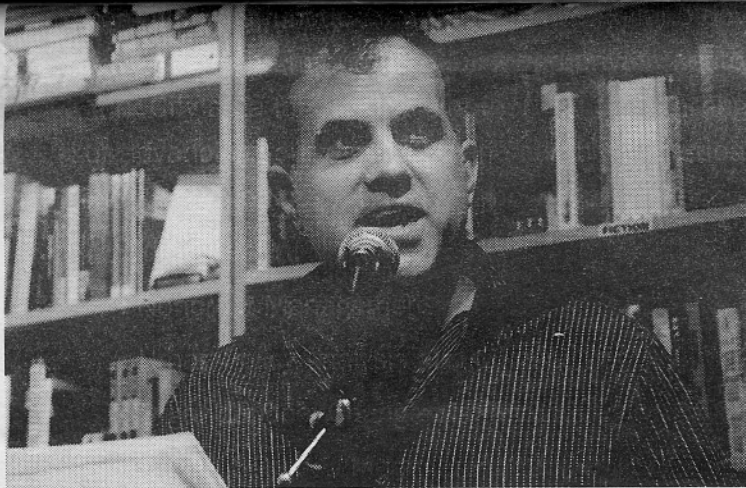
It's "casual encounters" and "adult services" sections, which provide an anonymous and seemingly safe atmosphere to meet clients, while at the same time sensitizing sex work to the mainstream.

Trish continues to use Craigslist for "foot parties," where she makes hundreds of dollars in one evening to let strangers rub and massage her feet. Other online opportunities include: doing housework au-natural and going to a movie and using a client as a treat. The work is bizarre, but the money is big—and quick.

Sophie also had a lot of experience working off of Craigslist before she got her job at the magazine, but warns it's a lot less safe. "You're always taking a risk. It's like at the dungeon, if I felt I needed to scream, there would be a bunch of women running through that door to get that job," she says. "But independent work, I don't recommend it."

Nikki warns that although online work can be much safer than Craigslist, it's certainly not safe for everyone: "If you're not completely open as far as sexuality goes, if you can't handle people putting things inserted into their bodies, if you can't handle seeing anything, don't get into this kind of work." For those who are sexually unimpeded, however, it means that the high-paying positions of covertly fulfilling someone's deep-seeded fetishes will always be in high demand.

Names and places have been changed to protect identities



Rich Merritt reads from "Code of Conduct"

KATE HANSELMAN

## Gay Marine Asks, Tells

BY JORDAN KATZ

"Six years ago, I attempted suicide and that was the big changing point," Rich Merritt tells me over coffee. Merritt is the author of two books: his memoir *Secrets of a Gay Marine Porn Star* and the novel *Code of Conduct*. He began writing *Code of Conduct* 15 years ago, but set it aside to attend law school at USC. "I suffered [from] depression throughout my life. It was untreated because I grew up in the South, where you didn't suffer from depression, you just got over it."

After being released from a 72-hour hold at a psychiatric center in Anaheim, California, he began writing his memoir. Born in Greenville, South Carolina, Merritt was raised by fundamentalist Christian parents. He attended the ultra conservative Bob Jones Schools from elementary through two years into college. In his teen years, Merritt hid his homosexuality by convincing himself that he was straight. "I did this mind game," Merritt said, "where I said I've been taught that homosexuals

are deviants and perverts. I am not a deviant or a pervert, therefore these feelings I'm having for my really hot best friend must be normal." Despite being gay, Merritt was expelled from Bob Jones University for dancing with a girl. To distract himself he overachieved. He became a general's aide, commanding officer and served in combat. Merritt also worked at the top litigation firm in the US, Jones Day. "You don't think about things because you don't want to deal with it. From a psychological perspective, if you don't deal with stuff, eventually it deals with you," he said.

When Merritt was stationed in San Diego, he noticed ads in the newspaper asking for "male models." He got the job, aware of the connotations. Over the next four months, Merritt was in eight gay pornos. When Merritt's then boyfriend asked him to stop doing porn, he obliged.

While still serving in the military he began writing a column for the *Navy Times* and wrote an article stating that the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy should be repealed. His article attracted the *New York*

*Times Magazine*. He appeared anonymously on the cover as R. "It was kind of that make-or-break point. The thing is that I knew I had done the porn and at this point, I was like 'If they ever find out I could go to jail' so, I needed to get out. As an officer, you just submit your resignation and that's what I did," he said. Merritt was released honorably six weeks later.

Catching the attention of a freelance reporter for *The Advocate*, the writer wanted to expose Merritt's identity in the end of the year issue. He agreed. Soon afterwards, it was revealed Merritt had done porn. Merritt refused to comment. The article was still entitled, "The Marine Who Did Gay Porn."

The pressure of leading a semi-closeted, semi-outed life became too intense to handle. Merritt began to use drugs and even attempted suicide.

His new book, *Code of Conduct*, focuses on the first years of the Clinton administration in which Clinton faced opposition concerning a proposal allowing gays to serve openly in the military. Thusly, Clinton created the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell Policy." The story focuses on gay marines at Camp Pendleton, California (where Merritt served) and the turmoil they faced.

Merritt believes that the United States, unlike the UK and Israel, is archaic in regards to homosexuals serving openly in the military. "If we let gays in the Marine Corps, is there suddenly going to be a gay pride parade going through the front gate at Camp Pendleton? Gay people have been in the military since it began."

Merritt is currently on a book tour and hopes to write a book about a fundamentalist Christian college, as well as a sequel to *Code of Conduct*. While Merritt may have stopped touting his title *Gay Marine Porn Star*, the scandal and intrigue of his identity will never fade.