

# ENGAGING REICHEN

“Don’t Ask,  
Don’t Tell”—  
but he did

BY J. TRACY HERMANN



Reichen Lehmkuhl has written a book called *Here's What We'll Say: Growing Up, Coming Out and the U.S. Air Force Academy*. The book chronicles in large part his experience in the U.S. Air Force, where the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy forced him and many other service men and women to live their lives in secret.

**R**eichen Lehmkuhl is physically stunning. Standing at approximately six-foot-four-inches in height, with a complexion as smooth as butta, dirty blonde hair and eyes you could swim in, he is arguably one of the prettiest men alive today...at least out of those who live in the public eye. And few could argue that no one has lived in the public psyche of late more than Reichen. His critics—and there are many—say that's exactly how he wants it, that he's little more than a publicity whore. His fans—again, there are many—attest to his passion and talent as a model, actor, writer and activist, and someone deserving of the limelight.

When Reichen first talked to *The BottomLine* in April 2004 while in Palm Springs attending the White Party, he was just months out of winning *The Amazing Race 4* (August 2006) with then partner, Chip Arndt. The reality TV show served as Reichen's foray into stardom and ended up opening a number of doors for the then 28-year-old former Bostonian. At the time of that first interview, he had already appeared in roles on *The Young and the Restless* and *The Drew Carey Show*, as well as small parts in a handful of other programs.

Since that first interview, Reichen has continued his acting, has entered—and reportedly, dissolved—a very public romance with Lance Bass, a singer with the former mega boy band, 'N Sync, and has written a book called *Here's What We'll Say: Growing Up, Coming Out and the U.S. Air Force Academy*. The book chronicles in large part his experience in the U.S. Air Force, where the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy forced him and many other service men and women to live their lives in secret.

We recently caught up again with Reichen here in Palm Springs on a promotional tour to plug the new book, with hooks signings at both Peppertree Bookstore and Dales Lost Highway. Given it was just weeks after his reported breakup with Lance, we were told that questions about

Lance were to be treated on a don't ask, don't tell basis. "I'm not going to go into details about my relationship," Reichen told us. "However, I can tell you we still have a 'relationship.'"

***The BottomLine: Reichen, a lot's happened in your life since you last spoke with The BottomLine—the new book, a very public relationship that's reportedly come and gone, new acting opportunities and a lot of press...what, personally, has had the most impact?***

REICHEN: I have to say the book. It was so important for me to share my experiences at the Air Force Academy and in the service. There is so much hypocrisy there, and so many men and women who are forced to live in shame. One of the hardest things for me to reconcile was the fact that I was completely open with my family and friends but faced the very real possibility of being court martialed and going to jail if I was open with my 'work' colleagues. The don't ask don't tell policy is so contradictory to what the Air Force and all the armed forces stand for ... but they force you to lie in order to serve your country.

***You're very critical in your book of the Clinton-era compromise we know as "Don't Ask, Don't Tell." Do you think the proposed Military Readiness Enhancement Act is the answer? Will it take us closer to ending discrimination in the armed forces?***

We can't cover use the Military Readiness Enhancement Act to cover up the fact that we've been committing this abuse for so many years. The end of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" is going to be exclusive from the Military Readiness Act, and that's when the government finally stands up and admits to what they've done wrong and says we are ending the ban on gays in the military, and we are ending the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy—period. After that's over, we have to answer the abuse we have committed against gay people with our own tax dollars.

**Do you think that in your lifetime openly gay men and women will be able to serve?**

It's going to happen in the next five years, if I have anything to do with it. And it will happen—that's my prediction. But it's not going to happen without the people in this country seeing what the ban on gays in the military is doing to weaken our military fighting force. We

are wasting so much money on training people and then kicking them out because they are gay, and then training people to replace them. It's really fiscally irresponsible.

**Given the degree of abuse you received at the academy—the food deprivation, ridicule and rape—what advice would you give a young**



Reichen told the Bottom Line he and Lance Bass still have a "relationship."




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**person entertaining the idea of attending the academy?**

I didn't write this book out of hatred for the government or the U.S. military or the air force or the academy; I wrote this book to make these things better. But as far as someone who's wanting to attend the academy, if you know that you're gay, don't join because it's clear that they don't want you there.

**You've been very forthcoming of your own struggles with coming out and have even created an Internet radio show called Coming Out with Reichen; it's also rumored that you personally think everyone should come out? What are your real thoughts on this?**

It's absolutely not true. I will speak of my relationship for just a second in saying that coming out had to be his decision. I couldn't be involved with it. And I knew that if I was involved with it, it would build resentment later if it didn't turn out ok. Like bim and everyone else, coming out is a very personal thing. What I really think is that everybody should be able to come out of the closet without any recourse.

**What do you think about the recent outings, or should I say "Lancings" of television personalities TR Knight and Nell Patrick Harris? Do you think that such is to be expected when one is in public eye?**

Yeah, when you're in the public eye, you should expect all kinds of things. You should expect people to find out the name of your dog, [his Australian Shepard mixes are Dingo and Foster] find out where your parents live and expect people to find out that you're gay. Being gay is a big part of someone's life.

**Following TR Knight's outing, he was quoted as saying, "I hope the fact that I'm gay isn't the most interesting part of me." Where does your sexuality fall in importance in your life today?**

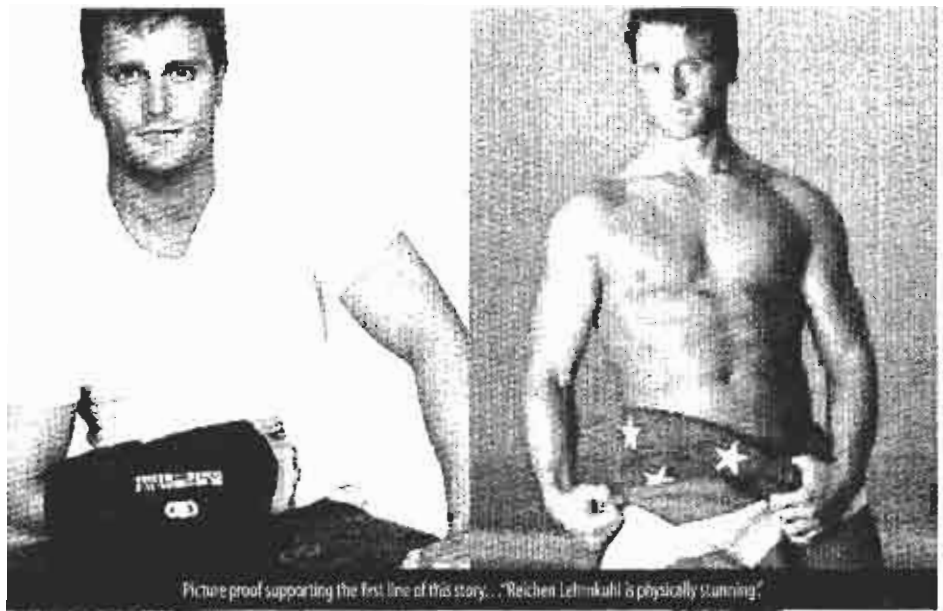
It's more important in the work that I'm doing right now. There are a lot of straight people who are fighting for gay rights right now. It's really great to be gay and fighting for equal rights because it's so close to my heart, as you can imagine. The rest of the role that my sexuality plays in my life, I try to keep as private as I can and that's in my relationship, in the way that my family relates to me and my relationship. My family thinks just as highly of my boyfriend as they do of my brother's girlfriend, and are just as supportive of him as they are of her. Other than that, I really don't think about it that much.

**I visited your blog recently, where you were discussing the rumors. Why do you think there are so many rumors floating around about you?**

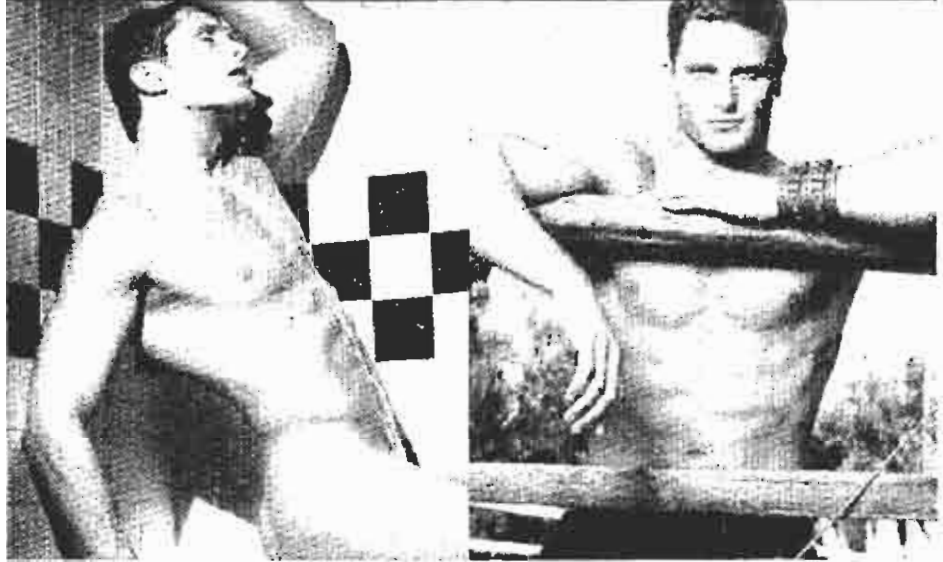
I think that when you put yourself out there in the public for any reason... there are going to be a million different interpretations of what people say. I can't fight that, and, frankly, I just don't worry about that, I just do my thing. I try not to pay any attention to the rumors. When you start doing that and trying to defend yourself against them, it's a real waste of time, and I have better things to do with my time.

**Like speaking with us.**

Reichen: You got it.



Picture proof supporting the first line of this story... Reichen Lehmkuhl is physically stunning.



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