

**Remarks for OPM Director John Berry  
Memorial Services for Dr. Frank Kameny  
Cannon Caucus Room, Room 345 Cannon  
November 15, 2011  
*As prepared for delivery***

I am reminded today of a few lines from the poem Sometimes, by Sheenagh Pugh [/Shee-nah/]

*Sometimes things don't go, after all,  
from bad to worse.  
Sometimes a man aims high, and all goes well.  
Some men become what they were born for.  
Sometimes our best efforts do not go  
amiss; sometimes we do as we meant to.*

I grew up in the 1960's, certain from a young age that I was gay.

I knew that I was interested in public service. But my hopes were held in check, because I also knew that prospects for gay men in public service were both limited and difficult, filled with fear and public loathing.

Frank Kameny freed us from that fear.

His life cleared the path that I and countless others followed into public service. His unrelenting and unceasing fight for gay rights enabled other Americans to step out of the closet and into the full light of equality. But most importantly, his long battle, and eventual triumphs, show the miracles one man wrought upon the world.

Where generations of gay men and lesbians had borne society's scorn in silence, Frank screwed in his heart, bolted his feet to the floor, and launched a crusade.

It is a story now well known – fired in 1957 for being gay, Frank fought in the courts and in public, arguing forcefully for equality for gay and lesbian Americans. Fifty years ago today, he co-founded the Mattachine Society of Washington DC to campaign for equality. They organized, and publicized, and picketed, carrying signs demanding “equality for homosexuals.” A handful of people with the courage to stand up took on an entire culture and a country that despised them.

And there was Frank, out front with a badge that simply said “spokesman.” And speak he did.

He was not a bashful man. He was a one-man megaphone, trumpeting the truth. He carried a vision of the promised land, and the will to part the sea before him.

As he would say, “I follow every avenue to its end.”

Even among allies, he was more a force of nature than an intimate friend. Frank insisted that picketers had to conform to a dress code, suits and ties for men. Civil rights protesters had to look the part.

Everybody who knew him has a story. It was his way. He knew what he wanted, he wanted it now, and no obstacle was going to stop him, not John Macy, not the Civil Service Commission, not the U.S. Government – nobody.

This was a man who fought his way across Europe in World War II, as he told me, from foxhole to foxhole, came back to the states, earned his PhD in astronomy from Harvard, got a job with the Army Maps Service and then was fired for being gay. Just for being gay.

He appealed, and appealed again, and outstripped even the stamina of the ACLU in his pursuit of justice, all the way to the Supreme Court. Frank, unaided and all but alone, wrote the court brief himself.

The court declined to hear the case.

Many of us would have stopped there. His allies had given up. His case was finished. He lost.

But if Frank ever doubted, he kept it to himself. Amid all the opposition, and the halfway measures, and the outright hatred of his day, Frank stood, steadfast and unwavering.

He was a man who knew, long before any of the rest of us, that the tree of liberty grows but one way – by adding rings.

“I’ve stacked up their arguments,” Frank said, “And I’ve stacked up my arguments. Mine are better. I will win.”

And win he did.

He lived to hear the Civil Service Commission say “We’re going to change government policy to suit you.”

He lived to see sodomy laws erased. Thirty years, one month, four days and eleven hours after Frank stated he would change the laws in DC, the laws were rewritten.

He saw security clearances given to gay men and women.

He saw the Matthew Shepard and James Byrd Jr Hate Crimes Act signed into law.

He saw the repeal of Don’t Ask Don’t Tell.

He lived to see people like me, and Barney [Frank] and Tammy [Baldwin] take positions in the executive, legislative and judicial branches – roles that were impossible even twenty years ago. Roles that only his uncommon courage in the face of injustice enabled.

In 1994, I took a job at the Treasury Department. It required that I access sensitive material, and oversee the Secret Service. People's lives depended on that information.

Two investigators came to my house to interview me and my partner. They were as nervous as we were, because they had never before in their careers interviewed an openly gay man for this level of clearance. For all those years – up until President Clinton issued an executive order in August 1995 – the official policy of the U.S. Government did not allow gay men and women to serve their country in that capacity.

Frank Kameny's tireless activism changed that. Because of Frank, I could serve.

Frank would want us to remember him for one thing above all else, one very specific thing: the phrase "Gay is good."

This seems almost inconsequential today – a slogan that has lost its sting.

Frank succeeded so thoroughly in shaping the world around him that "Gay is good" no longer sounds like "Up is down."

But in 1968, when the slogan was new, you had to be crazy to say something like "Gay is Good."

And Frank was certifiably, textbook crazy, because although it sounds strange today, homosexuality was then defined as a mental disorder and a disease. You weren't gay. You were crazy. You were a criminal. You were a second-class citizen.

This did not sit well with Frank.

Not only was it a personal affront, it was a strategic roadblock. The nascent gay rights movement could hardly succeed, when we were all viewed as crazies.

So Frank took on the whole psychiatric field. He read their research. He went to their conferences. He followed that avenue to its end.

There is a famous photograph of Frank, speaking on a panel before the American Psychiatric Association – you see a version your program. On Frank's right is Barbara Gittings; on his left, there's a man in a rubber mask, a wig, and a rented tuxedo. Dr. John Fryer, the only gay psychiatrist in America willing to testify, was so afraid of reprisal that he could only speak truth from the safety of disguise.

Remember that, the next time you hear how divisive our era is – how pitted we are against each other and progress.

Change is hard. It is easy – too easy – to feel overwhelmed by the magnitude of opposition. Too easy to be intimidated by the steep slope of injustice. To make excuses and to remain silent, when someone must speak.

Yet justice demands we speak.

Ever since the Founding Fathers set down those famous words: “We hold these truths to be self-evident; that all men are created equal,” – justice has been the birthright of every American.

Yet there have always been, and there will always be those who deny these truths.

There were those who deprived Susan B. Anthony of her ballot.

Those who told Rosa Parks to take a back seat.

Who fired Frank Kameny.

But thankfully each of those heroes spoke up. They said America’s promise belongs to everyone. They gave voice to equality.

As we mourn, let us reflect on the fleeting nature of life. Let us consider our own lives. Let us measure our responses to the still, uncomfortable silence of injustice.

Audre Lorde writes that in considering her own mortality:

“priorities and omissions became strongly etched in a merciless light, and what I most regretted were my silences...

What are the words you do not yet have? What do you need to say? What are the tyrannies you swallow day by day and attempt to make your own, until you will sicken and die of them, still in silence?”

Frank broke the silence. He swallowed no tyrannies. He knew he was born equal to any man or woman on Earth or under heaven. He had the temerity and tenacity to persist until all others knew it too.

One person, one persistent person, wrought miracles in his time.

Frank loved to say, “In 1973 the psychiatrists cured us all, *en masse*.” The psychiatry books no longer list homosexuality as a disease.

I say, Frank cured us all.

I had the honor and the pleasure of providing Dr. Frank Kameny with a formal apology on behalf of our government – his government – for the sad and discredited termination of his Federal employment by the US Civil Service Commission, all those years ago.

The apology closed an important circle in his life’s work. I, an openly gay man, now serve in the same position John Macy did when he fired Frank over a half-century ago.

Frank laughed when he told me, “I can imagine John Macy spinning in his grave.”

Frank also received our highest award, the Teddy Roosevelt award, given to those who defend our nation’s merit principle – that in America, you should be judged by one thing only – how well you do the job.

The Smithsonian rightly places Frank’s artifacts in an exhibit titled “Creators of the United States.” It’s where Frank belongs – among the founders and the revolutionaries.

I do not doubt that he now sits at the same eternal table with Jefferson, and Washington, and Lincoln. With Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King, and Susan B. Anthony, and all those who devoted their lives to shaping a more perfect union.

Over the last few years, Frank was a frequent guest at the White House. I came upon him once sitting very comfortably in the red room. Laughing, he told me, “I am starting to feel at home here.” With a sparkle in his eye, he said “So many years ago – standing outside that fence – I never dreamed I’d ever say that.”

Frank spoke so often of how he would want to be remembered when he passed that it seems almost unreal to deliver these words, and know that we will never hear his unmistakable voice in our hallway again, never see him come into a room again, with half his glasses missing. We will never wait through a dull meeting for the crescendo that comes when Frank unloads what’s on his mind.

Frank said it so many times: “I follow every avenue to its end.”

And here we are, today, at the end of Frank’s avenue.

We have lost one of the great champions of truth. His life was long and full, his victories many, and great. He has left his mark upon this world, and its stewardship falls to us now.

The end of Frank’s avenue must not be the end of ours. We must continue on the journey forward. It is up to us to carry on the battles yet unwon, to write history and guard the future, and to mourn this great soul.

Because justice demands no less.

Walt Whitman writes:

*Justice is not settled by legislators and laws—it is in the Soul;  
It cannot be varied by statutes, any more than love, pride, the attraction of gravity, can;  
It is immutable—it does not depend on majorities.*

...

*Before the perfect judge all shall stand back—life and death shall stand back—heaven and hell shall stand back.*

But I know one man who will step forward and go “front to front before God.” One man named Franklin Edward Kameny.

God bless Frank, God bless all who love justice, God bless our President, and God bless the United States of America.

###END###