Access: How to Get on a Submarine Without Joining the Navy.

In case you missed this, in April of 2010, the US Navy formally lifted its policy of prohibiting women from serving on submarines. In 2012, the first 24 women submariners will be reporting for duty~~. and the US will join Australia, Canada, Norway, Spain, and Sweden in the 21~~~~st~~ ~~century~~.

Ten years earlier I was trying to get my self and my camera onto an Ohio Class sub- which was at the time the biggest and baddest: the kind with the nuclear missiles.

I had a question for the Navy: What color is the upholstery? Well, really I had many questions, like: how do you fit 150 sailors into a space the size of a small house with no windows or fresh air and expect to maintain morale for 7, 8, 9 months at a time? Underwater. How do you live inside a weapon of mass destruction? *Gaining access tip: ask a (deceptively) simple question.*

I began in the logical way, namely, of asking everyone I knew if they knew someone in the Navy. Turned out I knew a New Zealander who worked at the Intrepid Museum in New York, who put me in touch with people at Navy Public Affairs. This was pre- facebook, pre-cell phone in every pocket. I wrote letters. And sent them in the mail. *Gaining access tip: You never know whom you might know. Also, spelling counts.*

In my research I had discovered that 1999 was the “Submarine Centennial”, and that all year the Navy would be hosting events to celebrate. Perhaps they would be open to a pitch from an artist wanting to do a project? *Gaining access tip: make your request timely.*

I had been doing projects for a magazine called Nest, one of the best ever magazines about habitat and art, and send them my idea. They loved my pitch and provided me with a letter of support and intent to publish. With an award-winning publication supporting the project, it shifts the emphasis off of me, curious little artist, to said publishing company with budget and circulation, ie. good press. I could say “they” would like to do this, “we” think submarines are fascinating. Really, I’m not the one with the weird obsession. *Gaining access tip: If you are not yet a household name, a publication supporting you will open doors.*

Meanwhile, my big break came in the form of Charles Moskos. Charlie Moskos, described as the nation's "most influential military sociologist" by the [Wall Street Journal](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wall_Street_Journal), was as it turned out, my friend’s dad. He knew some guys at the top, to say the least, and personally delivered my letter. This is where the chain of command comes in very handy, since that guy said, yup, make it so, it was so.

My next task was to bring my portfolio to Washington D.C. and pass muster with the Office of Public Affairs at the Pentagon. This is the office that decides which pictures the public gets to see, they are in effect the censors. Here’s where it got fun. I had a meeting with a CDR Taylor that took place almost entirely in double-speak. His main concern was that the story was not going to be a “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” kind of story, based on seeing an issue of Nest. We all know that gay men read shelter magazines and are “into” design.