

# The Providence Journal

## Virtual bride, groom together at last

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BY RICHARD C. DUJARDIN

Journal Staff Writer

WARWICK -- He was a bit nervous, a bit excited, as you might expect of any groom waiting to see his bride for the first time.

Except in this case, Richard Everton was not looking down a church aisle, but at the carpeted path next to the security scanners at T.F. Green Airport where arriving passengers pour into the main terminal.

With a dozen red roses in hand, Everton looked to catch the first glimpse of his bride -- the woman whom he married in June but whom he actually hadn't seen in person since she shipped out for war in Iraq in January.

It was the magic of video conferencing -- and a Colorado law that allows for proxy weddings -- that had made it possible for the Army National Guard sergeant and his bride, Staff Sgt. Shadow Evans, to exchange vows even though she was 7,200 miles away in a camp northwest of Baghdad, and he was with her parents and a judge in Durango, Colo.

"It was tough saying, 'I do' into a video camera," he said, noting how happy he was going to be to see his new wife in person for the first time since they were married.

When the 30-year-old staff sergeant with the 118th Medical Battalion of the Massachusetts National Guard arrived at 11:45 Monday night on a US Airways flight from Pittsburgh, she burst into tears when she saw her husband.

They hugged and they kissed, and continued kissing for 10 minutes or more as he lifted her off her feet.

"Give me a hug, too," Richard's mother, Beverly Everton, of North Providence, interjected. "I will, I will," her new daughter-in-law replied as she continued to smooch with her husband.

"You have to understand, this is the first time I've seen my husband. When I left, he was only my fiancé."

Everton's mother had met Shadow one or two times before the couple became engaged. But Everton's sister, Lisa Demedeiros, had not met her sister-in-law until Monday night.

Members of the Massachusetts Army National Guard since 1993, Everton was a correctional officer with the Barnstable County Sheriff's Department, and Staff Sgt. Evans was a nurse's aide when they met each other about 1 1/2 years ago at the National Guard's Camp Edwards on Cape Cod, where they were on a "force protection mission."

At first, they couldn't date because she was his boss, but then she switched shifts so they could see each other. Late last year, when Evans learned her unit was being shipped out, they became engaged.

Their plan was to get married after she returned. But when Everton learned last spring that he, too, would soon be heading for Iraq, they pushed up their plans.

They arranged a proxy wedding, figuring that it would help them be together once they were both in the war-torn country. Everton, an Attleboro native who grew up in Pawtucket, where his father still resides, flew out to California to meet her parents. From there, they drove 13 hours to Durango, where proxy weddings are allowed. Shadow's mother stood in for her daughter.

Meantime, Evans was halfway around the world, working as the sergeant of the guard at Camp Cooke in Iraq, when she learned only hours before the ceremony that the Freedom Calls Foundation could arrange to have her participate in the ceremony via video hookup. Depending on how you look at the calendar, they were married



Journal photo / Glenn Osmundson

**Army National Guard Sgt. Richard Everton and Staff Sgt. Shadow Evans embrace for the first time since they were married in a video conference in June while she was in Iraq. Everton's mother, Beverly Everton, is in the background at Green Airport.**

either on June 11 or June 12, since it was 7 p.m. Friday in Colorado and 5 a.m. Saturday in Iraq when they tied the knot.

Here on temporary leave, Evans, who still has an apartment in Middleboro, Mass., is due to return to Iraq on Oct. 9. Her husband's unit, the 42nd Infantry Division out of Rehoboth, is scheduled to ship out in mid-December.

As it is, they say, there's a good chance that her unit will be in Kuwait, rotating out of Iraq, when his unit will be in Kuwait as well, rotating in. While in Kuwait, they hope that they can arrange to have her transfer into her husband's unit, so she can go back with him into Iraq.

What sort of place is Iraq these days, a reporter asked her at the airport.

"It's hot. It's dusty, and bombs go off around you. Big ones," she said. "But would I go back there? For him, absolutely."

At the airport Monday night, as he held her in his arms, she announced, "this is what I've been waiting for. This is where I wanted to be, forever."

"What do I see in him? Anything anyone could ever see. He's the best guy in the world. I see my father. I see the guy I wanted. I see the guy I didn't want, sometimes. He's the best man. I'm so lucky. I could have been not so lucky, but he wandered along."

After picking up their baggage at the airport, the couple planned to celebrate a belated honeymoon at an undisclosed location.

Then, sometime next year when they return from Iraq, they'll try, in Evans' words, to do the "wedding thing" once again, with a much larger ceremony, perhaps back in Durango, or at the Los Angeles Police Academy, where her father is a police officer.