

By proxy weddings

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Shannon Emerson-Shupe read her vows to Capt. Ash Shupe over Skype, with one webcam in Denver and another in Baghdad.

Digital 'I Do'

Here Skypes the bride...

BY HEIDI EVANS

When Shannon Emerson-Shupe said "I do," she was gazing at her groom's face on a computer monitor beamed 7,000 miles to a Denver church.

She read her vows to Capt. Ash Shupe over Skype, an Internet phone service, with one webcam in Denver and another in Baghdad.

"Our life is not supposed to be normal," Shannon laughed. "We

decided that long ago."

Most military families have stories of sharing big news – Christmas presents unwrapped, first steps taken or baby's teeth lost – over the Internet while a loved one is deployed.

But the Shupes' decision to get married on Skype ranks as one of the most exceptional and dramatic examples of life continuing despite a deployment.

THE PROPOSAL

The night before Ash deployed, he asked Shannon to marry him.

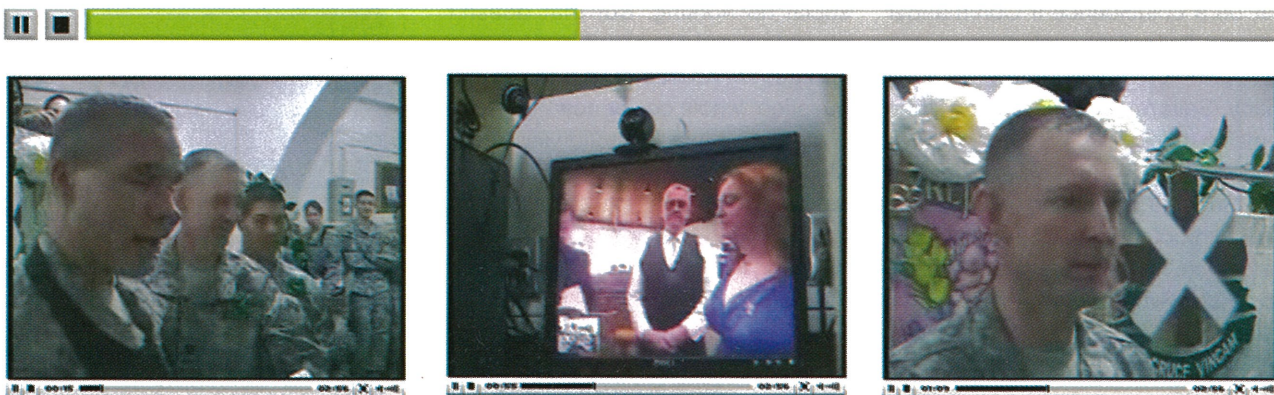
They had dated in person less than four months, after meeting on a blind date at the Seattle Church of Christ. It was spur of the moment, talking about their future over dinner.

But Shannon said she instantly felt comfortable with Ash. She could be herself with him.

And Ash already knew this was the girl he wanted to marry.

WITH THIS LINK, I THEE WED

Check out Shannon and Ash's cyber wedding.



THE ENGAGEMENT

For Shannon, a third-generation military spouse, marrying a military man felt natural.

Her grandmother was an Air Force wife and her mother an Army wife.

"The lifestyle is definitely not foreign to our family," she said.

The couple began marriage preparation classes via e-mail with the help of Army Chaplain Maj. Daniel Middlebrooks, and started planning a traditional wedding when Ash would return.

THE DIAGNOSIS

But in March, the couple received news that would rush their trip to the altar.

Shannon was diagnosed with cancer.

Though she had health insurance, Ash wanted to be sure all the necessary medical procedures would be covered through the military and the couple hoped to marry immediately.

Ash also hoped the marriage would compel the Army to let him return.

LAST-MINUTE PLANS

Although the couple met in Seattle, Ash learned that Colorado allows a by proxy wedding, or a wedding where one party is not physically present and appoints someone else to stand in his place. By proxy weddings also are legal in California, Texas and Montana, and each state has specific regulations, such as residency or military service.

For the Shupes' unique situation,

Elder Chip Roberts of the Denver Church of Christ agreed to officiate the service in Colorado. Ash flew his bride and her father, Verne Emerson, to Denver.

THE DRESS

Shannon had just two days in Colorado to complete paperwork, finish wedding arrangements and buy a dress. All the while she knew in just days she would undergo major surgery to remove her cancer. Unable to find a white dress, Shannon opted for a patriotic blue to complement her red flowers.

THE CEREMONY

On March 31, 2009, Ash's coworkers in Baghdad set the mood by decorating a hospital privacy screen in front of the webcam. His chaplain officiated in Iraq.

Shannon's father walked her down the church aisle, and a friend stood in as her maid-of-honor. The couple exchanged vows over a choppy connection.

"The fact I could see Ash and hear the 'I do's' was great," Shannon said.

THE CELEBRATION

In Iraq, Ash followed the wedding with a party, throwing a bouquet and garter to friends at the Iraqi hospital and feasting on wedding cake.

Shannon celebrated with dinner and returned home to face surgery with her father by her side.

"He knew what I was going

through," said Shannon, whose dad deployed to Okinawa for two years after her parents were married.

THE VOWS

Though they petitioned to have Ash shipped home to help his new bride recover from surgery, their request was denied.

"It was a bummer," Shannon said, "but I really had a very peaceful sense going into the surgery that the cancer was not going to be an issue."

Shannon was right. Her surgery caught her cancer in the earliest stages. Since recovering, she has had few problems.

Weeks after Ash returned from deployment, the couple renewed their vows in person with friends and family at the Seattle Church of Christ, where they first met.



Shannon and Ash renewed their vows when he returned from deployment.

