

It's often said that the hardest job in the military is the one you do every day—being a military spouse. Loving a soldier and being part of this big beautiful family we call the military is the adventure of a lifetime, but we all know it brings challenges: it can be frustrating, lonely and downright infuriating having Uncle Sam as the third person in your marriage!

But military spouses handle the challenges of this life with equal parts grit and grace. In seeking nominations for the 2010 Military Spouse of the Year, we saw hundreds of examples of exemplary women—and a few men—who live this life and love it. Narrowing the field to our finalists and ultimately to the winner was no easy job.

We got to know spouses who made the ultimate sacrifice, losing their husbands to war. We virtually met a soldier's husband who teaches dance. You nominated mothers and child-free spouses, officer's wives and enlisted soldiers' spouses. Some families were dually active. Every nominee shared a commitment to patriotism and family life.

The 2010 Military Spouse of the Year

The winner of the 2010 Military Spouse of the Year is Lori Bell. Lori, 34, was nominated by her husband, Lt. Colonel Kenyon Bell of the Air Force. The pair make their home at Elmendorf Air Force Base in Alaska with their two young children.

Lori herself served in the Air Force for ten years, in logistics. She deployed twice and met her husband Kenyon at Andrews Air Force Base in Washington, D.C. In her current role as stay-at-home mother and spouse of a soldier, she's developed a network of online resources for spouses to connect and share information, the National Association of Military Moms and Spouses, www.nammas.org. The site lets spouses connect and build relationships and support each other. A lifelong singer, Lori loves to sing in church.

"What can we carry to another spouse to help her?" Lori asks. "Look what we've gone through—how can we help each other? I would love to encourage spouses to connect more, relate more, share more and don't be so afraid of repercussions for sharing."

Lori herself has handled hard times with aplomb: she recently lost her father to cancer. She returned to her home in South Carolina to be with her family, and worked hard to nurture her long-distance relationship with Kenyon—while pregnant with their child. She stayed positive, says Kenyon.

“It’s like a unique club we get to belong to,” she says of being a military spouse. “Have fun, look forward to every challenge. We live a blessed life. It’s a blessing to be able to serve our country. Appreciate everything.”

As the 2010 MSOY, Lori will be writing a monthly column in the pages of *Military Spouse* magazine, where you can follow along with her family’s adventure and interact with her directly. We think she’s a sterling example of the traits we all share as military spouses. We’re honored to have her as the 2010 Military Spouse of the Year.

The Inside Scoop on Lori

Who better to give us the scoop on our 2010 Military Spouse of the Year but her husband, the charming and debonair Kenyon? We caught up with him in the midst of a TDY to get the goods on Lori. (He tried to think of an embarrassing story, but couldn’t. Don’t say we didn’t try.)

“I nominated Lori because of her servant’s heart. She’s a hard worker, at everything she does,” he tells us. “We’ll sit down and do calendar reviews and I’ll look at her like...okay, you’re really thinking about doing all this?” And she does. “It makes me a better person in being around her and seeing her do what she considers to be the right thing,” he says.

The transition from active duty soldier to spouse and stay-at-home mom was challenging for Lori, Kenyon says. “When you PCS into a job, you’re thrust into a support system,” he says. She had to learn to discover that support system for the new job of spouse and parent.

And that’s how NAMMAS came to be. “She figured if she’s dealing with these issues, others probably are too.”

Things that make you say “AWW!”

As it turns out, Lori married an old-school romantic.

Kenyon and Lori are both from small towns in South Carolina. They didn’t know each other as kids, but they grew up thirty miles apart. They finally met at Andrews, when Kenyon’s squadron commander told him there was another South Carolinian he ought to meet. They started hanging out with the same friendship circle—and then, more and more, without all the friends around!

Finally, they both got orders to Japan—she to Kadena Air Base on Okinawa, and he to Yokota Air Base. He invited her to Yokota for Thanksgiving with a surprise in mind.

They were at dinner in the home of Kenyon’s friends—no one Lori knew. And he disappeared! As she looked around the room full of strangers wondering where he’d gone, Kenyon was in another

room changing into a tuxedo and cueing up Luther Vandross singing "If This World Were Mine." He presented her with a globe and told her he wanted to give her the world.

He'd already spoken to her father, who'd approved his asking. In fact, they asked Kenyon to videotape the proposal, and they taped congratulations for her to see after he popped the big question.

She said yes. Good call, Lori!