

Our decision to use the Charleston Unitarian Universalist Church both for our story and our location was truly about community. The character of Lt. Col. Joan Burton, as a new mother soon to be deployed to Iraq, needed to feel her baby would be watched over by something greater than her immediate family. Beyond the spiritual, she wanted the formal commitment of the child's godparents, of their Army family, and of the greater community, as tangible comfort in case anything should happen to Joan while deployed. No parent feels good about leaving their child, no matter how dedicated they are to serving their country, and my fellow writers and I wanted a way to show this conflict.

Dealing with spirituality on television is challenging. We needed a ceremony that would both feel applicable to our religiously diverse viewing audience, as well as have flexibility in text from the writing side of things; the words in the ceremony needed to apply not only to the dedication, but to each of our five families' own situations at that moment. The same way any good Reverend, such as UU's own Reverend Peter E. Lanzillotta, uses a smaller, personal story to tell a larger truth, we needed the words to be personal to all of our main characters.

The openness of the Unitarian Universalist traditions, allowing the parents to be a large part of writing the christening or dedication ceremony, was just what I, as a writer, needed artistically. For myself, as the godparent to twin girls (now toddlers), I was thrilled to have the chance to write something so personal to me. My mother discovered the openness and inclusiveness of the UU church after I left the nest, and my recollection of attending services with her while home visiting is what made me first think of exploring the Charleston UU for this story. The Seven Principles struck me as being true for the character of Joan and who she is at this time in her life.

The storyline of Joan's search for the right ceremony and environment started in episode 5 of this season, titled "Disengagement", written by Rebecca Dameron. The story line culminates in the ceremony at the end of episode 6, "Family Readiness", which I wrote. All seven of our writers work with our showrunner, Executive Producer Jeff Melvoin, to build the stories on the show and edit each others' scripts. Reverend Peter was a wonderful sounding board and research reference as we built the script.

When doing a television show on location the way Army Wives does, the whole creative team becomes a community. Army Wives is a family, really, within the larger community of Charleston. Even with my fellow writers, post-production, and network staff in Los Angeles, we feel a community connection with the Charleston and the cast and crew. Producing a television show easily requires 250 skilled people on any given day, often 14+ hour work days. You can imagine how a diverse group of people from different faiths and backgrounds absolutely must come together in order to make something we can be proud of -- and we're really proud of Army Wives. We get to tell stories about families and the Army community that aren't seen much on television.

Needless to say, our production crew was impressed not only with the beauty of the Charleston UU church, but with the welcoming and helpful nature of Reverend Peter and the Charleston congregation in the filming process. Many members of the congregation

worked as extras in the big infant dedication scene. It was fantastic! The UU community truly welcomed the Army Wives community. In fact, some in our crew started attending UU services for the first time based on their positive experience working there.

We shot those two episodes at the end of March / beginning April, they aired July 5th and 12th, respectively, and are now available for download from iTunes. Quite a few military families serving overseas, with no other access to Lifetime, follow our show that way and participate in our online community through www.mylifetime.com or on our facebook fan pages. Many of our civilian fans participate that way, too. And we love the positive response to the ceremony we've heard from our American and international online community -- thanks to Lifetime, ABC Studios and The Mark Gordon Company, the Army Wives writers really got to tell the story we wanted to tell. Thanks to the inclusiveness of UU, that story got to reach the hearts of a vast and diverse audience.

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