

Charity Witmer finds love — as well as loss — in war

Twin sister's death in Iraq sets backdrop for joy of marrying comrade

By **SCOTT WILLIAMS**
swilliams@journalsentinel.com

New Berlin — Devastated by immeasurable loss, Charity Witmer walked into a crowded Elmbrook Church on April 14 and publicly said goodbye to her twin sister killed in the Iraq war.

It was the darkest moment in Charity's young life.

Soon, the 20-year-old New Berlin woman will return to Elmbrook Church and nervously stand before another gathering of onlookers. But this time it will be one of her brightest moments — her wed-

ding.

Still recovering from a tragedy that foisted her shattered family into a national spotlight, Witmer is slowly reclaiming her life, with new confidence, new dreams and new reason to hope for the future.

She has accepted a marriage proposal from Anthony Verre, a colleague in her Wisconsin National Guard outfit. The couple plan an August wedding before the same pastor who led the April memorial service for Charity's sister, Michelle Witmer.

"It's a mixed bag of emotions," Charity said of her decision to get married in a building with such painful memories.

"It's kind of symbolic," she said. "It's like a new beginning."

The Rev. Scott Arbeiter, who will conduct the wedding, said he is



Michelle Witmer (left) was shot to death April 9 in Iraq while on patrol with her National Guard unit, the 32nd Military Police Company of Milwaukee.

thrilled for the chance to help Charity and her family celebrate a happy occasion for a change.

"It's a great joy," he said.

That Charity's new life was born out of the same war zone that devastated her old life is a touch of symmetry not lost on her parents, John and Lori Witmer.

John Witmer recalled getting an excited phone call at work from Charity announcing that Verre had just proposed over the phone

from Iraq.

"I'm very happy that she found him and that they found each other," John Witmer said, although he added that the absence of Charity's twin sister will make the wedding ceremony somewhat bittersweet.

"There will always be an empty spot," he said. "For as long as we go on, there will always be that spot."

Death a first for state

Michelle Witmer was shot to death April 9 in Iraq while on patrol with her National Guard unit, the 32nd Military Police Company of Milwaukee. She became the first Wisconsin Guard member killed in action since World War II, and the first female Wisconsin Guard

Please see **WITMER, 2B**



WITMER FAMILY PHOTO

Charity Witmer and Anthony Verre met in the Wisconsin National Guard and plan to marry in August. "It's a mixed bag of emotions," Charity said.