

Homage to parents, country

Phoenix Latina is proud to be a soldier and a Chicana

By Lupita Garcia

The possibility of being sent to Iraq is constantly on my mind.

In 1999, I signed up for active duty service and spent three years in the Army. After my discharge, I decided to join the National Guard. I made the decision to join the Guard because most of my friends were being deployed to the war in Iraq. Since then, a family member and several friends have gone to fight in Iraq.

As a National Guard soldier, I am a rarity: a Latina and a Chicana. Add to that the fact that I'm barely five-feet tall and you might be surprised to know that I'm a soldier.

To be honest, the Guard doesn't appeal to most Chicanas. Being one of the few makes it hard at times to relate to my fellow soldiers, mainly because our cultural upbringing and views on life are so different.

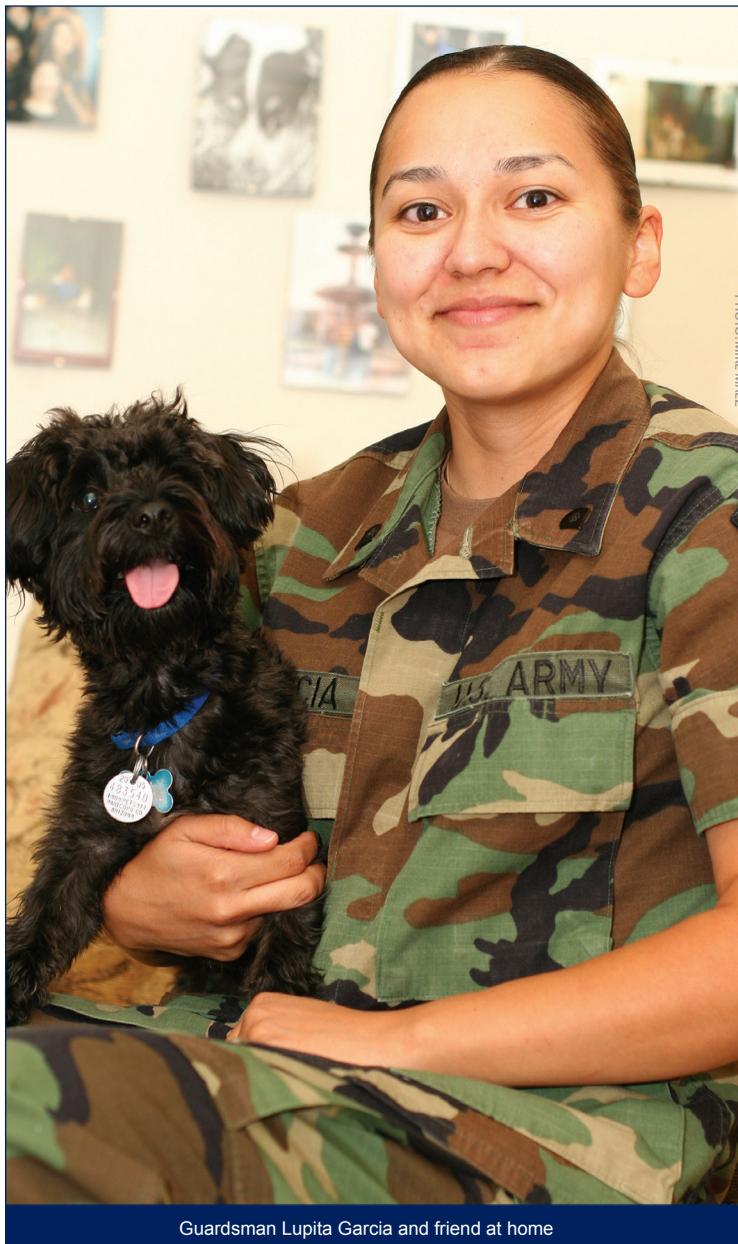
The areas where we usually find common ground has to do with discussing the reasons why we joined: shared training experiences, and stories of the places we've been stationed.

In the military, I find that issues of race and ethnicity are usually the last thing on my mind. It makes sense. You really want to look at your fellow soldier as a soldier first. In other words, whether he or she can do the job, and especially whether the soldier is trustworthy. The country is depending on us, so we have to depend on each other.

These days, when I first meet the soldiers I'm going to be working with the first thing on my mind is the whether I can trust them. It's the first thing on my mind because war is on my mind. You cannot fight a war with people you do not trust.

The idea that at any moment I can receive a phone call telling me that I'm being deployed is a scary thought; but it is a reality that I've always pondered since the day I enlisted in 1999.

I am confident enough with the people that are in my unit that it does not seem as scary. I feel that once you sign on that dotted line you owe



Guardsman Lupita Garcia and friend at home

your country that service and going to war is the reality.

I've matured a lot as a person and learned so much from so many people since joining the military. It was a big deal for me to join. I am a Chicana and the youngest member of my family. My mother was totally against the idea of having a daughter in the military. She could not imagine how a nice young lady would want to put herself through that when she doesn't have to. She was also afraid that I was not going to return to college, but rather stay in the military and travel.

My father, on the other hand, was very supportive. The experience has helped us grow closer. Perhaps it's because he served in Mexico's military as a young man. I think it made him happy that at least one of his kids was willing to join.

Until I decided to enlist, joining the Army was the last thing on anyone's mind in my family. I was already in college when I joined and no one could believe that I wanted to walk away from my education for a couple of years to do this "military thing."

But the idea of joining the military was something I felt I owed to a country that has given me so much in my life.

My parents migrated from Mexico to the United States in search of a better life. They met here and decided to have children and settle in California

because they were convinced that they would be able to live the American Dream and enjoy all of the opportunities that it offers.

For me, those dreams are coming true. I have been able to complete my college education with the help of the military.

I serve my country for one simple reason: So that others can have the same opportunities my family has enjoyed.

It's my way of saluting my country. **LP**