

Transcripts are generated by the speech recognition software Descript. An Uncuffed staff member corrects proper nouns and speaker names. The transcript may contain errors. For the authoritative and original version, please listen to the audio version if you can. Available in podcast players and on www.weareuncuffed.org.

You're Invited To An Uncuffed Wedding

Published October 11, 2022

[00:00:00] K A L W.

[00:00:08] **Greg:** What's up everybody, and welcome back to another episode of Uncuffed. I'm Greg Eskridge, and of course, I'm coming from the San Quentin side of the program. Down in the studio today. Got some smiling faces with me today, so go ahead and introduce yourself.

It's me, Thanh Tran.

[00:00:25] **Edmond:** Edmond Richardson, how y'all doing?

[00:00:28] **Greg:** Edmond Richardson. Mm. Thanh, we got something special for the people today, man.

[00:00:34] **Thanh:** So real, real special.

[00:00:36] **Greg:** Today is the day before Edmond's wedding day.

[00:00:43] **Edmond:** Yes, sir.

[00:00:44] **Thanh:** Oh, wee.

[00:00:45] **Greg:** And, and Edmond, I'm, I'm so happy, bro. I'm so happy for you, man, because I could look at you. I could, I could. Thanh, can't you just see the look at him, man, Don't he?

He looks like a husband.

[00:00:56] **Thanh:** He does.

[00:00:57] **Greg:** Doesn't he look like a husband? He has. Why's that man? Yeah.

[00:00:59] **Thanh:** You have a husband-y look man. You look like you just been waiting to get wifed down.

[00:01:07] **Edmond:** I really want tomorrow to go. To go perfect. I think I'm more nervous meeting her mom for the first time.

[00:01:16] **Greg:** Ooh, wow. Mama. My first.

[00:01:18] **Edmond:** So those, those first impressions is everything. And I know I'm gonna do well when reading the vows, the, like, the whole ceremony. But it's like, what's that first conversation gonna be like with her mom?

Is she gonna like me?

[00:01:30] **Thanh:** What you think? So what, what. So what, what part do you feel insecure about? For lack of a better word. Like what do you think the mom might not like about you?

[00:01:42] **Edmond:** I mean, the fact that I'm in prison.

[00:01:45] **Thanh:** That's the truth.

[00:01:46] **Edmond:** And her daughter chose me out of every man in the world to marry.

[00:01:51] **Thanh:** Wow.

[00:01:51] **Greg:** Wow.

[00:01:52] **Edmond:** I can only imagine what her mother, mother is going through right now. You know what I'm saying? Like, Hey mom, I'm about to get married. Probably excited. Like to who? This guy that's in prison.

[00:02:09] **Greg:** Ey, it's funny, but that's, that's literally what it is, bro.

[00:02:13] **Thanh:** It is.

[00:02:14] **Greg:** Is I'm not about to go marry my high school sweetheart.

[00:02:19] **Edmond:** Right?

[00:02:19] **Greg:** I'm not about to marry a, a doctor or lawyer or this pillar of the community.

I'm marrying someone who committed a crime and who is incarcerated.

[00:02:32] **Thanh:** Wow.

[00:02:33] **Greg:** Not only incarcerated, but serving a long time.

[00:02:37] **Edmond:** Right.

[00:02:38] **Thanh:** A life sentence.

[00:02:39] **Greg:** A life sentence, man.

Wow. So Edmond, so I have a question. I have a question.

[00:02:46] **Edmond:** Go ahead, man.

[00:02:47] **Thanh:** It's the day before your wedding. What are you doing to prepare for this wedding?

[00:02:51] **Greg:** Yeah, but Edmond looks sharp, man.

[00:02:53] **Edmond:** So I'm waiting. So I got my clothes ironed. I'm so prepared. Like I'm so prepared. I'm so ready. For this moment. There's just one last thing that I have to do, and that's something that you suggested to me yesterday, was adding a paragraph just about who she is and what she means to me and the impact that she's had on my life.

[00:03:19] **Thanh:** In your vows.

[00:03:21] **Edmond:** In my vows.

[00:03:22] **Thanh:** Absolutely. I, I've been seeing, you've been practicing your vows for like, more than a week now. And it is bananas to me, just watching you. Like just, I've just been seeing you just head down, focused, typing, retyping, and finally, yes, and I'm like, bruh. You've been working on this thing for like a week, bruh.

Let me, let me, lemme get a bar of these vows, man.

[00:03:45] **Edmond:** Right, right, right, right.

[00:03:45] **Thanh:** Let me get a bar. This thing, man. Like, he seems so intense. Yeah. I said, man, I gotta get a sample, man. I don't care if I'm the best man. I'm gonna hear it the day of. And then you read it for me. And I swear to God I teared up bro. I felt like I was getting married.

I felt like you was gonna try to propose to me or something. I was like, man, this is too good man. This is fire. And it was crazy. Just being incarcerated and having this big moment, like all the things you do to prepare and all the things you can't do to prepare, you know?

[00:04:17] **Greg:** Yeah. So, Thanh, is this so you the best man? Is this your first best man? Being the first, first time being the best man?

[00:04:24] **Thanh:** You know, some weird, That's a good question, cuz I've been the best man at two weddings since I've been incarcerated.

[00:04:32] **Greg:** Oh, okay.

[00:04:33] **Thanh:** I wanna say this too. Like their marriages are successful still.

[00:04:36] **Edmond:** Right.

[00:04:37] **Thanh:** Everybody has their ups and downs. Like they have gone home, and went home to their wives, and they're like living an amazing life, man.

So I got good juju as a best man. I'm just saying, Edmond

[00:04:48] **Edmond:** it's hard to be incarcerated and tell someone that you love them.

[00:04:54] **Thanh:** Mm.

[00:04:55] **Edmond:** And have them genuinely believe it. I do feel limited because of my incarceration. There are things that...

I genuinely can't give her, but what I can do...

is let her know that I'm working towards my freedom, so I am able to give her the world. I had a conversation with my sister yesterday, and she got on me about, well, she didn't really get on me, but she was like, Why did I have to find out through Facebook that you was getting married? Hmm. And I told her the last time you seen me was 12 years ago. And then she responded like, I understand why you're getting married, Edmond, but I don't understand why she's marrying you.

[00:05:58] **Greg:** Hmm.

[00:06:00] **Edmond:** So I also, I also believe that my sister has this, this image of me still being 20 years old. Still immature, still selfish. But my sister hasn't met the man that I evolved into.

[00:06:17] **Thanh:** Mm.

[00:06:18] **Greg:** And it, it, it does take, like... there has to be something special about someone who is incarcerated and can still reach out into the world and find love.

Love, like there are a lot of things that, that, that just cannot get inside of a prison, right? But love seems to be one of those things that can get through any crevice, through get through any barbed wire, any security fence, assault rifle, it doesn't matter. Love will truly find its way, man.

I know what it feels like, that day of feels like, man. I know what the day of feels like, man. When I got married. The day before my wedding, man, I was like, man. I'm getting married, man. I, I mean, I was excited and nervous. Cuz I was like, man, what is she changes her mind on the way up here? You're beautiful. You can have any man out here in this world, but you chose to marry some dude in prison.

Like, what the hell is wrong with you?

[00:07:47] **Edmond:** My fiance asked me a couple weeks ago, how do you know I'm the one?

[00:07:52] **Thanh:** Mm.

[00:07:54] **Edmond:** And I really sat there and just thought about it. And I didn't have no profound answer. But I, it was like a feeling, like I just, I just know. I just know. And she was not content with that answer.

[00:08:11] **Greg:** Yeah. Yeah. You know what I'm saying? I'm not, I'm, I'm not content that man.

Hell no. Hey, I just know.

[00:08:17] **Edmond:** So.

[00:08:17] **Greg:** They stopped saying that 50 years ago.

[00:08:21] **Edmond:** But it is, it's like something that I can't put into words. Like when I look at you, I know that I wanna spend the rest of my life with you. When you are ready to make a commitment, you just know.

[00:08:37] **Thanh:** During my 10 and a half years incarcerated, I've been more familiar with heartbreak than with love in here. Right. So to hear you're getting married... for me, it brings up all this joy for you. But when I reflect on myself and my experiences with relationships since I've been incarcerated, like I get kind of scared, like, how do you deal with that? Like, don't, do you even feel even a little bit afraid that like what Greg talked about, like.

That she might eventually just say, I can't do this no more, that, oh, I don't wanna be your wife anymore, or I can't ride this bid with you anymore. Like, do these feelings come up for you? Because I know they came up for me. And, and it was a root of a lot of, a lot of my heartbreak.

[00:09:30] **Edmond:** No, that's, that's a good question.

I think for me... kind of like you, I just had relationships, breakups, heartbreaks. There was a point where, like, I just gave up on love completely.

[00:09:47] **Thanh:** Mm.

[00:09:48] **Edmond:** I don't wanna do this. It's not for me. Like what's the point of me, like, even trying to nurture and cultivate a relationship in prison, I know that it's gonna, I know that it's gonna fall. It's gonna fall apart.

But with this relationship, I think. I think I really just wanna say it's something that we built together over time, and it hasn't always been peaches and cream. Like we've had our moments where those thoughts came up. Like, I don't have the energy, I do not have the time to put into this relationship. Go through just the daily stresses of being in a relationship.

However, being able to communicate my needs... especially in relationships, it's hard for me to like open up and express how I feel, and like be vulnerable with a woman. I feel like it's easier for me to do that with a man than with a woman, because I always feel like there's gonna be some type of judgment.

And I'm gonna be viewed as being weak.

[00:11:00] **Thanh:** Mm.

[00:11:02] **Greg:** Mm-hmm.

[00:11:02] **Edmond:** So when. And I, I never got that from her. Every time that I was vulnerable and told her my needs and communicated what I was going through, regardless of what it was. Like, she held that space for me.

[00:11:14] **Greg:** Wow.

[00:11:15] **Edmond:** Vice versa. I was able to hold that space for her. I was, I was able to recognize that I'm not perfect.

She's not perfect. Can we agree to step into this relationship and be fearless to grow together regardless the outcome.

[00:11:37] **Greg:** Huh.

[00:11:38] **Edmond:** And that's what we've been doing since day one, man.

[00:11:41] **Thanh:** That's beautiful.

[00:11:41] **Edmond:** And we've built like a strong foundation that I feel is unbreakable.

[00:11:50] **Greg:** Man.

[00:11:52] **Thanh:** That's beautiful. I, I've never heard it put that way.

So just hearing you say that, I just, it really moves my soul, man. Cuz. That stuff that I always dreamed about, man, my relationship looking like, just like what you have right now. I love that. I just wanna say... tomorrow's your big day. But I just wanna say for the record, I feel like she the lucky one cause she get to have my dog at me.

Yeah, I'm just saying, you know, all shout outs to Avelina. She's an incredible woman. But Edmond, you are an incredible human being, and she is blessed.

[00:12:28] **Greg:** Yeah.

[00:12:29] **Thanh:** She is blessed to have an amazing man like you.

[00:12:42] **Greg:** Wow. Wedding day, man. Do you, so do you have any jitters?

Nervous right now? I haven't ate nothing. I haven't drank no coffee, but I'm shaking like a motor bike.

We're just now leaving the studio. Me, Edmond and Thanh, we going up there to the, to the visiting room. You looking good. You shining like new money. I see you got your Stacey Adams on.

[00:13:12] **Edmond:** Yes, sir. You know what I'm saying? How to, gotta dress to impress.

[00:13:17] **Greg:** Edmond, so how did you sleep last night?

[00:13:21] **Edmond:** Stayed up late last night going over my vows.

Went to sleep about 11, 11 30. Got up early in the morning, just with this day on my mind. But I slept. I feel energized, I feel, I feel rested. Feel at peace.

[00:13:44] **Greg:** Well, Edmond, we're in the courtyard right now and we're about 30 feet away from the visiting room, man.

[00:13:57] **Edmond:** Literally 30 feet away, man. So I'm ready. Regardless of the anxiety, I'm just gonna use that as positive energy to get me through this, man. And I got y'all with me, so I know everything's gonna be good.

[00:14:10] **Greg:** You got me nervous. I'm nervous. I'm nervous for you.

[00:14:13] **Edmond:** Why you nervous?

[00:14:15] **Greg:** And I'm nervous because you nervous. I'm nervous because this is a big day.

I know this is a, this is a huge moment, man.

[00:14:21] **Edmond:** Yeah.

[00:14:21] **Greg:** This your last chance to turn around.

[00:14:26] **Edmond:** What's that called? Runaway... Runaway groom. That's not gonna happen today.

[00:14:33] **Greg:** Yeah. So we have some, so we have to contact the, the officer right here so he can come and...

So he can come and let us in.

We are entering the visiting room. Let me grab, let me get me, go ahead.

[00:14:57] **Edmond:** Hey, what's up? Okay.

[00:15:01] **Greg:** All right. We are now inside of the visiting room. So, let's see where we gonna... why is it so dark in here?

Hold up, hold up, hold up. Let's pause for a second. The visiting room is not normally this dark. So let me explain to you how it truly is on the weekend. Walking into the visiting room here at San Quentin, the first thing you're gonna see is a bunch of people walking around, little children running around.

I mean, this place is packed. On the far other end of the visiting room, there's a vending machine area where people go in and buy their popcorn and their chicken wings and their soda pops and water, and right across from the visiting room, from the vending machine area is the kids' room. They're children's games, children's books.

You have mothers and fathers and grandfathers, just family. It's just a really great family scene. It's lot. It's super loud cuz you gotta, mind you, there are nearly 200 people in there, so imagine 200 people trying to have conversations amongst these cells, right? The last area I wanna tell you about, is the mural that's painted on the wall.

I mean, the mural is like super cool. It's like a waterfall. A lot of bright different colors, a lot of blues and greens. And so this is where all the families come to take pictures with their loved ones. But also, this is where you go and stand when you get married. In fact, at that same location, the front of this mirror, this Iraq got married back in 2014.

So the process of getting married, It's definitely not easy inside of prison.

First of all, you have to find someone willing to marry you. You fill out about 10 sheets of paper, send it to your spouse, and then your spouse sends it back to a wedding coordinator. And her job is to coordinate all the marriages here in San Quentin Prison. And then you have to find a wedding date. And you can get married anytime you want, as long as it's on a Friday morning.

Now when a person gets married, they can usually bring in approximately five people who are actually approved on their visiting list to come in and witness the wedding. Now, when it comes down to the ceremony, there's actually someone here to officiate it. And they're gonna have a binder. And within this binder you're gonna have options of the ceremony you may want.

So you can say you want a Christian wedding, whatever it is you want, he's gonna turn to that page and the ceremony is gonna begin.

So now we're waiting on Avelina, the bride who's bringing her mom with her. And about 30 minutes later here she comes dressed in all white with the magical smile all over her face. And now Edmond and Avelina, they hold hands, they stand in front of the waterfall mural. The officiant opens his binder. And the wedding begin.

[00:18:25] **Officiant:** They have asked that we gather today, so you might share with them the special moment as they join lives together in marriage. Marriage is the partnership born from the

deep love bond of two people who've decided to build their lives together. A family is a collective working together to create and build life. Carry for one another, find it a way to prosper together.

All done with love, truth, and trust. We are here, there to today then to witness the bonding of Avelina and Edmond. Start with the vows here.

[00:19:09] **Avelina:** Edmond Warren Richardson. My intelligent, my driven, my most favorite person. You make love feel so effortless. There's nothing that could make me happier than standing before you today, knowing that I get to become your wife, because I know the commitment you place on marriage, and I know that today you're choosing me for life.

Your love has taught me unbelievable resilience. Your love has shown me that no matter what unimaginable injustice life throws at us. Though we will be okay. Your love has shown me we can withstand the ups and the downs together. Your passion, your determination, and your commitment have kept us together, and my goal has always been just to keep up with you, so I would never have to be without you again.

I promise to protect you and make sure every single day, you know your life matters. Because it does. I'll stand with you in this fight and whatever comes next. I promise to always watch Saturday Night Live with you, and, and even to laugh when I don't understand the jokes. And I wrote all of this and realized I'm not even sure these are vows.

Sometimes I'll be scared, and sometimes I'll be brave, but I'll always be there.

[00:20:16] **Officiant:** Edmond, your turn.

[00:20:22] **Edmond:** Avelina. You asked me, how do you know I'm the one. I responded, it is not a feeling. It is not something that I could put into words, but it's a deep seated knowing. A knowing that I believe is divine in nature. That came from a prayer answer. I was at a point in my life where I had given up. Lost hope in my future and love, and meaningful relationships.

It. It was one sleepless night. Me alone with my thoughts, pleading with God for someone like you: a outspoken, smart, and beautiful woman who is full of life. Someone who knows her faults and is willing to face them. I see you. All of you. I vow to be your safe space in times of need. You are the love of my life.

You are my best friend. And I love you so much.

[00:21:24] **Officiant:** You will now seal your promises to each other by the giving and receiving of the rings. Avelina, repeat after me. Edmond.

[00:21:31] **Avelina:** Edmond.

[00:21:32] **Officiant:** I do. I with this ring. I joined my life with yours.

[00:21:35] **Avelina:** With this ring, I joined my life with yours.

[00:21:38] **Officiant:** Edmond, repeat after me. Evelyn. With this ring, I joined my life with yours.

[00:21:43] **Edmond:** Avelina. With this ring, I joined my life with yours

[00:21:51] **Officiant:** By the power invested in me by the state of California, I now pronounce you husband and wife. I now ask you to seal the promises you have made with each other this day with a kiss.

[00:22:21] **Greg:** Your daughter just got married. Telling me. Tell, talk about that.

[00:22:25] **Avelina's mom:** I didn't expect it to be this emotional, but it was beautiful. Very untraditional, but beautiful. I think Edmond brings the calm to her storm, so as long as Edmond can be that peace, she will, she will be there for him and they can survive.

Yeah. Love. Love definitely finds its way.

[00:22:58] **Greg:** I see, I see you're emotional, mom. I mean, what, what is, what is, what is bringing, what is bringing those emotions to you?

[00:23:08] **Avelina's mom:** Just the fact of, what Edmond's going through. Yeah. Cuz we leave, but he has to stay.

[00:23:20] **Avelina:** My name's Avelina Richardson, now . And I got married to Edmond, who's a part of this podcast today.

The, When Edmond and I first started corresponding, I think I was like, this man is crazy because he, one of his first letters, he was like, when I'm released, you can meet me at the gate, and we can get married that day. Thanks. And I was, who is this person who. He was just like, really straightforward, and I think I was like, really surprised and confused at how somebody thought that we were gonna get married. And now we are married , but.

I think when we first started corresponding, I told him. He sent me like a visiting form, and I was like, oh, I'm not gonna visit you, actually. Because I spent a lot of time visiting my dad and my brother, and I know like, what having the, like, the weight of a life sentence means. And then when we started becoming like romantically involved, I think I thought a lot about what I was taking on because being with somebody who's incarcerated is heavy, and I wanted to make sure that I was able to hold what it meant, and be like supportive of Edmond, and also still sustain who I am out here.

We had started talking about getting married in 2021. I knew that it was gonna happen during visiting, but I didn't know anything about when. One day, I went to go buy something out of the vending machines, and he started like walking towards me at the vending machines. And I was like, oh my God, what are you doing?

Like, cuz there's like an out of bounds line. And he just kept walking towards me. And then he like, got on one knee and proposed to me. Yeah, I had no idea. And it was really special

because I've always told Edmond that I wanted to be proposed to like, in private. And there's really not a way to do that in the visiting room. But he made it like as private and as special, and like, a moment between just us.

He did that as much as he could, and it was really special and sweet.

My ring, Edmond picked out with one of my best friends. Yeah. And then the ring I gave Edmond, I have another brother who passed away. And it was his ring. And I think he would have really loved Edmond. And it felt really special to be able to give my brother's ring to him because I know that my brother would've loved Edmond a lot.

He, Edmond was like, when we started corresponding, one time, he was like, so have you Googled me? And I was like, no, why would I do that? Then he told me that he had a life sentence after that, and I think his like earliest eligible parole date was like, 2034. And that's still what it is. It's still pretty far away.

I, I think I had to work through that on my own, but I accepted it. I think when you imagine your wedding, when you're really young, you don't imagine it in a place like this. But, I think that I still feel, like really in love and really happy, and I feel like, this overwhelming like, sense of just like comfort because I know I just like, made the decision with my person, and if you know who Edmond is, then you know Edmond deserves to be free. And yeah, I know that he will be

[00:27:09] **Greg:** So Edmond, the last time we walked up this hill, walked up that door. You were getting ready to get married. Now. We're on our way out and you are a married man. How do you feel?

[00:27:30] **Edmond:** I feel amazing right now. I just know that I made the right choice. She made the right choice, and we stepped into this, this adventure together.

And we're gonna see it all the way out to the end. So yeah, I'm a, I'm in good spirits right now. I'm feeling good. We're walking down the hill. We see beautiful skies. It's just a beautiful day, man.

[00:27:55] **Greg:** Yeah. Normally in the traditional wedding, you know, the, the, the, the bride and the groom, they go off together, right off into the sunset.

How does it feel? You know, you're coming back into this institution, and your wife is leaving the institution. Leaving you, instead of you guys leaving together. How does that feel?

[00:28:19] **Edmond:** Sad. Because from beginning to end, the whole ceremony was about 20 minutes. They gave us some extra time so we can do some interviews and get some photos. And then you, then you're just pushed out the door.

[00:28:41] **Greg:** So you have plans when you get out to have a, to have an official wedding with the big, the big ceremony and all that type of stuff?

[00:28:49] **Edmond:** Yes, sir. Most definitely. I, I just a, just... ever since I was a little kid, I always wanted to get married. I want, I want to have that fairy tale wedding.

[00:29:01] **Greg:** I hear the geese. The geese is singing the song for you, wedding song for you.

[00:29:11] **Edmond:** He's like...

[00:29:14] **Greg:** As soon as he sees you, he got the barking. My boy. My boy just got married. All right, now we back in the, back in the media center again. Walking through the news room, getting ready to go around the corner.

[00:29:30] **x:** Tell me lies. Tell me sweet little lies.

[00:29:33] **Greg:** We got Jesse cattin off.

[00:29:35] **x:** Congratulations. Woo. You a man there, boy! Love you God. It's Edmond.

[00:29:47] **Edmond:** Great, man. Great. I had a good ass time. Her, her wedding vows really touched me. It was good to meet her mom. I'm kind of, it was kind of fast, too. I didn't really get to sit there and enjoy the moment like I wanted.

But overall, what I got was enough just because love was in the room. So I'm happy, I'm excited. I feel like a, like Jesse said, when I walked in, I feel like a brand new man. They pouring rice on me right now, y'all.

[00:30:23] **x:** Love you, Edmond!.

[00:30:24] **Edmond:** It's already cooked, so it doesn't count.

[00:30:27] **x:** It's pre-cooked, fool.. We wanted to throw soggy rice on you.

[00:30:34] **Greg:** The Uncuffed crew at San Quentin Prison is Tommy Shakur Ross, Edmond Richardson, Thanh Tran, and me, Greg Eskridge. Thanks to the team at KALW Public Radio: Ninna Gaensler-Debs, Angela Johnston, Sonia Paul, James Rowlands, Andrew Stelzer, Ben Trefny, Eli Wirtschafter, and our sound designer, Eric Maserati "E" Abercrombie. Our theme music is by David Jassy, the Swedish phenom.

And thanks to the staff at San Quentin Prison who make this possible: Mr. Skylar Brown, Ms. Madeline Tenney, and Lieutenant Sam Robinson, who approved this episode. We fact checked everything to the best of our ability. Uncuffed gets support from the California Arts Council and the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation.

And a special thanks to Avelina and Carla for being a part of this episode. And Edmond and Avelina, Uncuffed wishes you all the happiness in your marriage. Thanks for listening.