

The following true story appeared in the Edmonton Journal recently and illustrates what can happen to a cross-border couple who failed to get proper immigration advice.

Edmonton bride to miss wedding due to U.S. visa rules

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EDMONTON - For Christine Tyrrell, Tuesday was supposed to be the beginning of her "new life."

The 30-year-old was to fly from Edmonton to Houston, where she was to marry her Texan fiance on Sept. 20. As Tyrrell excitedly approached the customs gate at Edmonton International Airport, her only worry was her satin wedding dress might be too big for a carry-on.

The customs officer had no problem with Tyrrell's dress but he wouldn't let her board her plane. Nearly six hours later, Tyrrell found herself driving home to Beaumont instead of flying towards the altar.

"I was supposed to have a fiance visa," she said. "Because I didn't have the paperwork or what not, it was recommended that they withdraw my application to enter the States."

Tyrrell's fiance Joe Marks had already consulted with U.S. immigration officials however, and they advised him not to get a fiance visa. He said he was given two options: either get a fiance visa or marry in the U.S. and then deal with the paperwork later.

At least two officials recommended the latter option, Marks said.

"They said that would be the easiest way to do it because we'd be circumventing the fiance visa," Marks said. "They said it would be no problem. Obviously, we were under the impression that we were doing the right thing."

The couple should have consulted with a lawyer just to be safe, said a spokesman with the U.S. Department of State.

"It's always good to consult with a professional," said Steve Royster with U.S. consular affairs. "I would want the assurance to know that I had talked to a professional that was looking out for my interests."

Royster said couples like Marks and Tyrrell face two legal avenues: obtain a fiance visa or marry outside of the U.S. and then petition for an immigrant visa for the non-U.S. citizen.

For Tyrrell, it's now too late to get a fiancée visa in time for her Sept. 20th wedding. The couple is canceling the ceremony and will lose around \$7,000 in wedding deposits and expenses.

Marks complained to his local immigration office on Tuesday and they told him he was probably misinformed. They also said the whole mishap could have been avoided if Tyrrell simply hadn't admitted to why she was entering the States.

For Tyrrell, this option didn't even occur to her.

"I didn't feel that I needed to lie, you know? I was excited, I wanted everyone to know," she said. "We'll still get married but it's a big damper... apparently love is not all you need."

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