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Couple sets up 'adventure scholarship'

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Travelling the globe has been part of Deborah Grant's career, and now she and her fiancé, Srdjan Tanjga, want to make sure young people can enjoy similar adventures.

Former Brandonite Deborah Grant, right, and her fiancé, Srdjan Tanjga, stand in front of the Saint Sava cathedral in Belgrade, Serbia. The couple has established a fund from which two scholarships to study a new language abroad will be allocated annually to deserving students — one in Brandon and the other in Belgrade. (Submitted photo)

The couple has established a fund from which two Deborah and Srdjan Adventure Scholarships to study a new language abroad will be allocated annually to deserving students — one in Brandon and the other in Belgrade.

After graduating from Queen's University, Grant, a former Brandon resident, worked in locales like Hong Kong, London and New York, where she currently lives.

It was two years ago, while in London, that she met Tanjga at a friend's birthday party.

A former resident of Belgrade, he was studying at the Harvard Business School and was in England for a summer internship. They soon began a long-distance relationship.

"We've had the most jet-set courtship you can ever imagine. Soon after we met, Srdjan went back to school in Boston and I was still in London. So we met in Madrid for a weekend, then I went to Boston, then he came to London, then we went to Dubai together," said Grant, who explained that because she had to fly for work, Tanjga would meet up with her in these exotic destinations.

Tanjga, who has been speaking English since the age of four, travelled to the United States to finish high school at an exclusive private school in Massachusetts — thanks to a benefactor.

Afterwards, he went to Harvard on a full scholarship for both his undergraduate and graduate studies.

"And for me, I got emotional support from my family," said Grant, who is the daughter of Cordell Grant and local choral conductor Elizabeth Grant.

After deciding to transfer from Brandon University as a music major to the bachelor of commerce program at Queen's, she took advantage of exchange programs.

"That was a great way for me to see more of the world. My first experience — I went to Hong Kong and studied there for a whole year," she said.

After their engagement, Grant, a strategy consultant for a large international firm, and Tanjga, an investment analyst, decided to take a different approach to the wedding gift registry.

"We started thinking about the things that we share and thoughts and experiences that are really relevant to us and we thought also of our story, which is a pretty improbable one if you think about it — a girl from Manitoba meets a guy from Serbia in London, they traipse all over the world and they decide to get engaged," said Tanjga. "Although we come from very different places, there are many similarities."

They're both grateful for the opportunities they each have had and for the careers they now have.

"And something that we have in common is a love of experiences rather than material possessions and we're fortunate that we have what we really need," said Grant.

"That's how the 'Deborah and Srdjan Adventure Scholarship' came to be," said Tanjga, explaining that he and Grant wish to pave the road for students in each of their hometowns to have opportunities they might not be able to have otherwise. "If we choose wisely, maybe they can use those opportunities first for some personal growth and fun, new experiences, but also searching for future growth and adventure."

Grant and Tanjga have committed to building this fund on an ongoing basis in order to make the scholarships available every year.

"As part of our wedding, people can donate toward that (fund) and if the broader community wanted to donate as well, then that money would go toward funding, each summer, for one high school student from Brandon and one high school student from Belgrade being able to have a foreign language experience abroad," said Grant.

Tanjga explains that the wedding, which will be held in May 2009, is just a starting point for this fund and the couple will continue to make the scholarships available in perpetuity.

"It's something we want to get started now," he said. "We just want to bring an element of joy and excitement and adventure to two kids every year. As long as we know that we've made a difference in (the recipients') lives, that's really all that we hope for."

Applications from Brandon high school students will be accepted in the fall.

To contribute to or for more information about the Deborah and Srdjan Adventure Scholarship, visit dsadventurescholarship.com.

Instructions for Students

Each summer, one student from Serbia will be sponsored by the Deborah and Srdjan Adventure Scholarship to attend summer school of English in the United States or Canada, and one student from Canada will be sponsored to attend summer school of a language other than English, preferably in Asia.

The students will apply for the scholarship from September through November, with the final decision about the recipient being announced in January. Following the award, the winning student will choose from a selection the summer program that they would want to attend and enroll in that program.

The scholarship will cover all expenses – travel, room and board, tuition, and reasonable out-of-pocket expenses.

The requirements are:

Academic excellence: Transcript from most recent academic year (i.e., for summer 2009 applicants, transcript from 2007/08 academic year)

Extracurricular interests: Sports, music, leadership roles, etc.

One essay, 500 words in length (NOT MORE), written in English, on the following topic: "What makes you different, unique, fun and exciting?"

Application submissions will be accepted from Sept. 15, 2008, until Nov. 14, 2008. Winner will be notified by Jan. 15, 2008.

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