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FALL 2010

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Jack of All Trades

As the first deaf student accepted into the University of Manitoba's School of Medicine last year, 24-year old Megan Jack reflects back on her first year of medical studies as a year of adjustment.

"It was definitely a big change from the undergrad program. A lot more information and a lot of studying," explains Megan "I think I pretty much felt the same as the other students."

One specific challenge for Megan was in using a stethoscope, specially designed with a visual output that allowed her to read a patient's heart rate. "I didn't always trust what I was seeing," says Megan.

In addition to new courses, instructors and a new campus, another change included new scheduling blocks which helped keep her motivated and allowed her to discover her true interests.

"I guess it's helpful to have different blocks, cause once one is over you can move on to something else," explains Megan. "There were other ones (blocks) I liked dealing with like cardiology and respiratory that really interested me."

Megan's effort and dedication to her studies have brought her to the school of medicine, but she took the advice offered to her at the White Coat ceremony last fall and thanked those who have supported her in her achievements. She extended thanks to her mentors, including her first teacher, Tracey Avery.

"It really fills you up! I'm incredibly proud of her and the community around her," exclaims Tracey.



Tracey Avery (left) with Megan Jack at the 2010 CCC grad.

Tracey Avery is the senior teacher of the deaf with the Society for Manitobans with Disabilities' (SMD) Communication Centre for Children (CCC) and has been teaching for 22 years. It's been many years since Tracey worked with Megan as a child, but she can still recall her time there at the centre.

"I remember her to be a very quiet girl, who was very bright, intelligent and she had an incredibly supportive family," reflects Tracey.

The CCC provides comprehensive, individually designed programs for children under six who have sensory-neural, permanent conductive or unilateral hearing loss. Their team enables children to participate in the community by identifying their needs.

"We look at all the needs of the child and the whole family, that includes developmental, auditory, social development and integration needs," explains Tracey.

Megan remembers very little from her time at the CCC, but still stays connected as she attended the CCC's 2010 graduation in May.

Expectations for her second year of medicine include more challenges and a lot more studying, but with one year under her belt and a strong interest in practicing family or rural medicine, it's clear that Megan is ready for the challenges that lay ahead.



A Silent Celebration Turns 20!

Many teachers encourage their students to learn a language by speaking with others, but some agree that the best way to learn is to keep quiet.

The week of July 5-9 marked the 20th summer of the American Sign Language (ASL) Immersion Program. With its “no talking in class” policy, some may expect a very long week. However, your eyes soon become the best learning tools and the collaborative energy turns the days into a fun gathering among friends.

The ASL Immersion program brings ASL instructors and students together in an engaging and positive classroom environment that seeks to provide an understanding of cultural differences. Coordinated by the Society for Manitobans with Disabilities (SMD) in partnership with the City of Winnipeg and the Manitoba School for the Deaf (MSD), the week-long program is open to anyone wishing to learn ASL or improve their skills.

“It inspires me to see hearing people learning our deaf people’s language and culture,” states Rita Bomak.

Rita and Sandy both equally share the work of coordinating the ASL Immersion program and the two have kept the summer program going strong since its start in 1991. Instruction is now delivered in seven levels of ASL compared to only three when they started. It’s the feedback they receive from the students which allows them to tailor the learning experience.

“We have new classes so people don’t get bored, so that we can challenge those who keep returning, to keep it fresh,” states Sandy.

“It is a celebration of culture and language..”

The change in topics is just one of the many reasons why the students come back year after year. A feeling of celebration is felt among those who return each summer as well as those taking it in for the first time.

As the manager of SMD’s Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services, Erwin Maguire experienced the energetic atmosphere of the ASL Immersion Program for the first time since joining SMD earlier this year.

“It is a celebration of culture and language, like a Folklorama pavilion,” states Erwin, “It’s a really great week!”

The program sees students at all levels of their ASL development registering for the classes.



20th Anniversary of the American Sign Language (ASL) Immersion Program.
Class of 2010

“Signs evolve and change over time so you have to stay on top of the language,” says Terry Leslie, an education consultant for Deaf and Hard of Hearing students. He’s seen certain signs change over the 19 years he’s attended the program.

There has been a national and international interest in the ASL Immersion program and MSD provides accommodation for the out-of-town students, some of whom travel from various cities and regions in Canada and parts of the U.S. to attend.

“We don’t have professional ASL teachers back home so we learn ASL from books,” explain Kimberly and Jody. The two ASL interpreters have been travelling down from Nunavut for the past few years to attend and appreciate the advantages of learning in silence.

“Through the ASL Immersion program, we’re able to learn ASL by watching others and also learn about the deaf culture. It’s good to watch ASL teachers and practice with other class members.”

Each year, the ASL Immersion Program concludes with a graduation ceremony to commemorate the accomplishments that each student has achieved. It is the commitment from everyone involved that has inspired the program to flourish over the years.

Dually Committed

The traditional church or the beachside with a sunset background have acted as the perfect setting for the weddings of many couples, but if you're looking for a novel way to celebrate that special day, you may want to take a note from the "Drop Zone couple."

Claude Labossiere and Miranda Dorno decided to literally take the plunge by having their wedding ceremony at the Easter Seals™ Drop Zone event, where they took a 17-storey drop after reciting their wedding nuptials.

"We'd always been thinking of doing something different and never really wanted a traditional ceremony or reception," says Miranda.

Claude first heard about the one-of-a-kind Easter Seals™ Drop Zone event a few years ago while watching the news and took an interest.

In support of SMD Foundation/Easter Seals™ Manitoba, participants challenged themselves by rappelling 200-feet down the side of the RBC Building. Each participant generated a minimum of \$1,500 in pledges to help support vital programs and services for children, youth and adults with disabilities.

"For me it was both the challenge and at the same time a great cause."

This year Claude made the decision to participate and after attending a Drop Zone information session, he proposed the unconventional wedding idea to Miranda.

"The idea of taking a leap, that was the lightbulb moment," says Claude.

After saying "I do," their first challenge as newlyweds would follow just two hours later when they took the first step over the edge.

"I was a bit nervous once they were rigging me up, but once I was on the edge and harnessed up, it was a lot of fun," says Claude.

Their team, appropriately named "Dually Committed," had combined their dream of a fun and informal wedding thanks to the Drop Zone, but it was the objective behind the event that made it the perfect fit with the couple.

"We believe it's important to support local and international charities," says Miranda.

All proceeds from Drop Zone stay here in Manitoba to help people with disabilities. For Claude and Miranda, they requested pledges from family and friends be donated to SMD Foundation/Easter Seals™ Manitoba in lieu of wedding gifts which allowed them to meet their fundraising goals.

"For me it was both the challenge and at the same time a great cause. If it wasn't for the cause I wouldn't have invested the time and effort," says Claude.



Claude and Miranda say "I do" for SMD Foundation/Easter Seals™ Manitoba.

From start to finish, the spirit of Drop Zone could be seen throughout Claude and Miranda's big day. Their relaxed wedding attire was both fun and comfortable for their rappels.

For Miranda, the challenge was in keeping her nerves down. Not because of the wedding, but because of her fear of heights.

"I wouldn't say I've conquered my fears, but you can't let these things intimidate you," says Miranda.

The 2010 Easter Seals™ Drop Zone event was a success in many ways raising over \$137,000, having a record 86 courageous participants and hosting the first wedding ceremony, a great achievement team "Dually Committed" can cherish year after year.

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Large or small, your donation to SMD helps children, youth and adults with disabilities in Manitoba gain independence and contribute their gifts as active members of our community. And that's a gift to us all. To find out more about how you can give, now or as part of your estate planning process, call us today at (204) 975-3108.



Crystal Peters
2010-2011 Adult Ambassador



We all have ability to give.



Allison Onslow
2010-2011 Youth Ambassador