

# Two couples find love while studying abroad

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You can expect many new experiences while studying abroad. But falling in love?

For two Wichita State students studying abroad in Wiener Neustadt, Austria, this experience became a reality.

WSU alum Jason Forbes met Petra—now Petra Forbes—at a party in the basement of the student dorms his first month in Austria.

“I actually met her through a friend of mine who was at Wichita State,” Jason said. “He was an Austrian guy, and I got to know him before I went to Austria. He was introducing me to all of his friends at a party, and Petra was one of them.”

Petra made enough of a lasting impression on Jason that he sent her an e-mail after their first encounter.

“What was really cute was that after I met him the first time, he wrote me an e-mail in German,” Petra said. “It was not necessarily good German, but it was so cute because he really tried and you could tell he really put a lot of effort into it.”

Jason and Petra continued to see each other for the duration of Jason’s one-year

shot.”

WSU student Nicole Grogan and Austrian student Thomas Herndlbauer share a similar love story.

“We met on a trip to Prague arranged by the school,” Herndlbauer said.

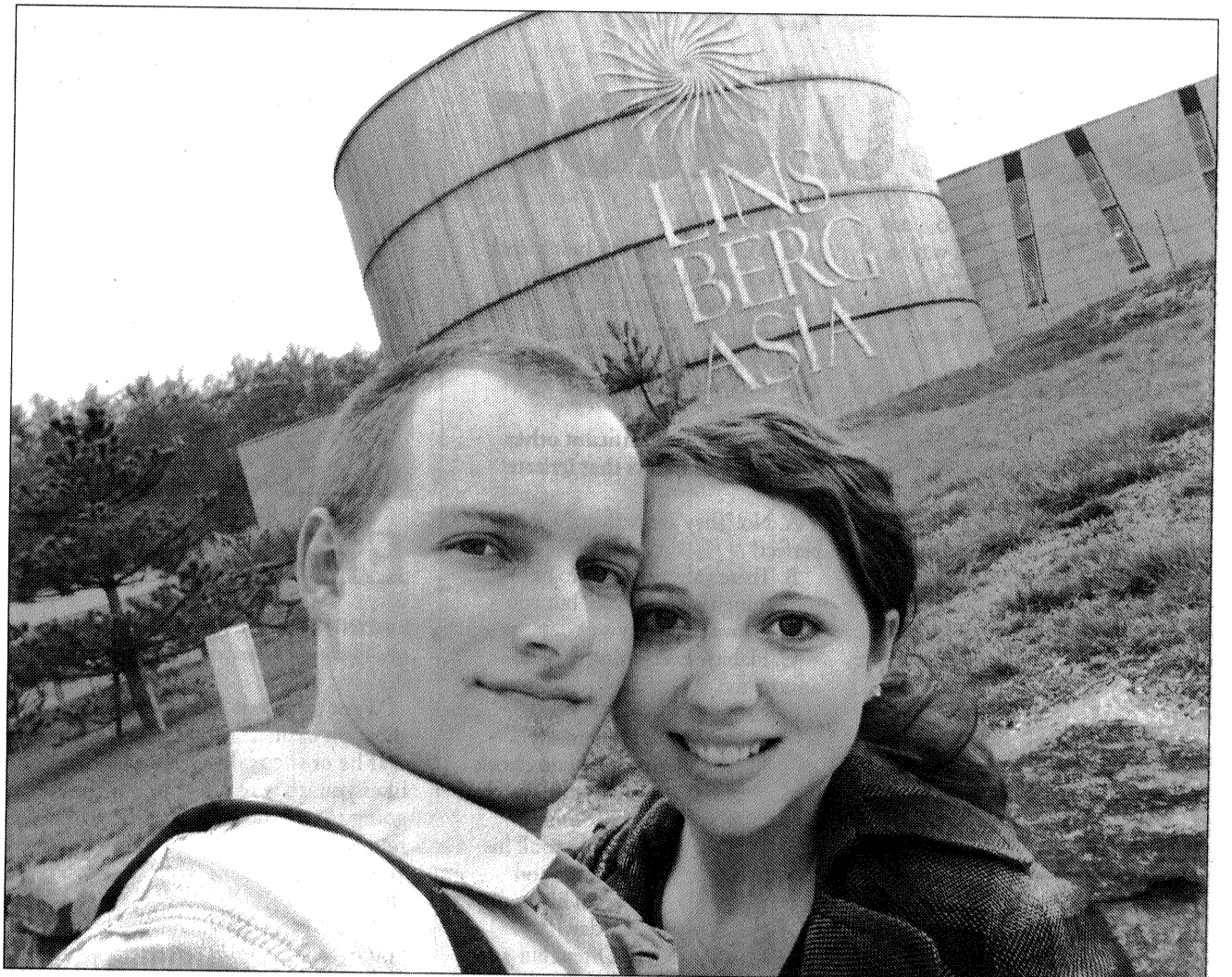
Grogan and Herndlbauer ended up sitting next to each other at dinner before going out in Prague one night.

For Grogan, intercultural relationships are nothing new.

“My mom is from Colombia, and my dad is from the U.S.,” she said. “They met when my dad was in the military. I have had my passport since I was a baby when I started moving around the world, so I guess I’ve just been comfortable being around people from other cultures and different countries speaking different languages.”

While Grogan is accustomed to an international environment, she admits there are still issues that arise in intercultural relationships. The first, she said, is the language barrier.

“I would say one of the biggest cultural differences is one that we laugh about now. In Austria and German-speaking countries in general, the way people



Courtesy photo

Austrian student Thomas Herndlbauer and Wichita State student Nicole Grogan met while on a trip to Prague arranged by the school.

annoying because of how friendly we are,” Grogan said. “It can seem kind of fake that everyone is always

them, so he really learned what the Austrian culture is all about—how we do things and how people really live,” Petra said.

Jason was exposed to a different language and different values with regard to energy conservation.

“Petra’s parents speak a dialect all the time, but it’s more of a baby talk with me. They get this face with really big eyes and try to dumb it down a little bit,” he said.

“In Austria, water is a lot more expensive, so when I was taking a long shower, her parents got upset.”

Petra met Jason’s parents when she came to visit Jason the summer after his first year in Austria.

After completing his bachelor’s degree, Jason decided to return to Wiener Neustadt for a master’s.

“You’ve got to have qualities and special skill sets to what they’d be looking for in anyone in the European Union, so I decided to just do my master’s there, and I got an internship through the school,” Jason said. “That gave us another two years to think about what we were going to do, and we just ended up getting married.”

Jason took Petra to Paris and proposed under the Eiffel Tower on Valentine’s Day last year.

However, he didn’t ask Petra’s dad for her hand in marriage.

“I never felt like I was the kind of guy who would ask her dad,” Jason said. “Afterwards, she said it

wasn’t something people do in Austria, so I’m glad I didn’t, because he probably would have been confused.”

The couple exchanged vows in an Austrian castle and now resides in New Jersey.

While Grogan and Herndlbauer are still across the sea from each other, they make an effort to visit. They plan to travel to New York to spend spring break together.

This summer, Grogan plans to move to Austria.

“I think the one thing that makes it easier is

knowing it’s not always going to be long distance. I think it would be almost impossible to be long distance if you never saw the end point,” Grogan said. “It’s kind of scary to think I’ll be moving across the world.”

Over the duration of their relationships, both couples have endured long periods of time—up to five months—apart from each other.

“That was the hardest part—the airport goodbye,” Herndlbauer said.

Thanks to Skype and a strong commitment to communicating, both couples have made it work.

“I think we’ve just made it a really important part of our lives,”

Grogan said. “We’ve decided we’re in this, and we’re putting the time and effort into it. I

think you have to be completely in it or it doesn’t work, so we make the effort to talk every day, whether it’s Skype, e-mail or text messages. I’ve heard that before about being in a long-distance relationship. Every day, there should be some kind of communication.”

For both couples, having each other has been worth it all.

“I just have to remember I am not doing it alone. If I did it all by myself, it would be very hard,” Petra said. “I have Jason, and I’m not alone. I’m not alone on weekends, and I have someone who can help me out.”

Petra said living outside

her home country hasn’t been as hard as she initially thought. Her family and friends plan to visit.

Herndlbauer, meanwhile, is eagerly awaiting Grogan’s arrival in Austria.

“I have Nicole, and that’s all I need,” Herndlbauer said.

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NICOLE GROGAN, WICHITA STATE STUDENT

stay in Austria.

“We took it for what it was and didn’t think too much about it at the beginning,” Petra said. “We still had an entire year ahead of us. When it came closer to the end of his exchange, we were like, ‘What are we going to do now? Is it worth investing in a long-distance relationship?’ But since we had an entire year of being together, we just gave it a

speaking and look is very rough. Sometimes, people look very angry,” Grogan said. “As an American, I absorb visually how people are looking and think, what’s wrong, why are people so angry? And Thomas says, no, nothing’s wrong, they’re not angry. That’s just how they look.”

However, there’s always another side to the coin.

“Sometimes, Thomas thinks Americans can be

smiling. If we’re at a restaurant and the waitress keeps coming over and asking if everything is OK, he gets annoyed.”

While cultural misunderstandings are inevitable, learning from each other more than makes up for it.

“When two different cultures are together, it’s so enriching for everyone involved. He met my family and spent a lot of time with

