

After Commencement, a Surprise Proposal

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Saturday's commencement was a time for jubilation for all Tulane graduates, but the day held extra reasons to celebrate for Dana Leviton. Her boyfriend and Tulane alumnus, Joshua Merdes, made a surprise visit to New Orleans to ask for her hand in marriage after the conclusion of commencement exercises on May 17, by proposing in the classroom where they first met.



No longer the “annoying guy” who bugged her during art history class, Joshua Merdes proposes marriage to Dana Leviton on May 17 in the classroom where they met. (Photo by Tricia Travis)

Merdes and Leviton met two years ago in an art history class at Tulane.

Remembering their initial meeting, Dana couldn't help but say first impressions aren't always the best impressions. “He was the annoying guy in class who sat next to me and talked all the time â?¡ and then something just clicked.”

Merdes graduated from Tulane last year and is currently studying at the Naval Nuclear Power School in Charleston, S.C. Leviton was disappointed to hear he would not be able to make the trip to New Orleans last weekend.

Merdes, however, had already started coordinating with Leviton's family to make sure this bride-to-be would be swept off her feet.

Dana's parents, Gary and Lynn Leviton, were happy to get in on the plan and convinced Dana to go back to campus after the commencement ceremony to give a campus tour to her grandmother, who had never been to New Orleans before. After passing by Dana's freshman residence hall and the Lavin-Bernick Center, the family from Germantown, Tenn., slowly found its way to the Woldenberg Art Center.

When her father said there was an interesting art exhibit on display, Dana entered the Stone Auditorium to instead find Joshua waiting for her. Dana was so excited to see him and wondered why he wasn't in Charleston. Completely surprised, Dana said, "It didn't even click when he got down on one knee. It wasn't even until a few minutes later before I really realized what had just happened."

Her mother recalled the excitement in Dana's voice the first time she told her about Joshua. Lynn Leviton knew then that the relationship could be something special.

At the moment, the couple said wedding planning is down the line since they both have further educational goals beyond the bachelor of arts degrees they earned from Tulane's School of Liberal Arts. Merdes will continue his training at the Nuclear Power School, and Leviton hopes to attend law school at either the University of Memphis or the University of South Carolina. Either way, they are happy to know wedding bells await them in the future.