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A FRIEND, INDEED

For nearly 90 years, Kennedy T. Friend Scholarship has helped students attend Yale, University of Paris

By Mark Higgs

With student-debt figures higher than ever and studies showing that the cost of college has increased more than 150 percent over the past two decades, even the best-prepared families might worry about paying for college. But a significant source of student aid exists for Allegheny County attorneys – thanks to a friend they’ve never met.

Kennedy T. Friend, a distinguished member of the Allegheny County bar, died in 1929. Upon his death, his will established a scholarship fund to pay for education at Yale University or the University of Paris, France. Children of Allegheny County attorneys who choose to attend Yale or Paris are eligible to apply for the scholarship.

To be eligible, attorneys need not be members of the ACBA but must have their principal office in Allegheny County. When their children apply to Yale or Paris, they also must apply for the Kennedy T. Friend Scholarship. When grants are awarded, neither financial need nor academic ability is considered; all that matters is that the student is accepted and remains a student at Yale or Paris.

Richard McCoy learned about the scholarship when his daughter, Cody, was being recruited for track at Yale.

“KTF is kind of an unbelievable thing,” McCoy said. “We would have found a way to pay for stuff, but the KTF scholarship changed our lives. This guy (Friend) changed our lives. Now, we can retire and not be a burden. And our kids don’t have debt.”

The parents of KTF recipients and the students all agree that the financial impact is positively life changing.

“The burden this takes off the young people, this really changes that,” McCoy said. “If you’re eligible for KTF and can get into Yale, I don’t see how you could go for anything else. It opens doors for students who don’t know the door is there. It’s one of a kind.”

All majors welcome

One important fact about the scholarship is that, although a parent must be an attorney, scholarship recipients are free to engage in whatever studies they wish. Cody – the first of three McCoy siblings to receive the scholarship – majored in biology.

“We’re really fortunate to have this chance. Kennedy T. Friend is really unique and rare, and there aren’t many

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– Yale sophomore Ada Griffin

scholarships out there like it,” Cody said. “I feel very grateful for the opportunity.”

Once Cody knew about the scholarship, two of her siblings realized what a great opportunity it presented.

“It was really amazing. A transformative time, both personally and professionally,” said Tom McCoy, who added that he probably would not have gone to Yale to study linguistics without KTF.

Yale is by no means cheap, and the scholarship enabled Cody and Tom to graduate sans student-loan debt – a recurring theme with KTF scholars.

Tory McCoy had been planning to apply to Yale because of the strength of its paleontology program, but she was worried about the cost. Although KTF erased those worries, the scholarship’s financial impact went beyond mere tuition.

“KTF allowed me to focus on my research while at Yale, which is important for someone planning a career in academia. I attended Yale University as a graduate student, and all of the graduate students receive a base stipend, which they can supplement by doing extra teaching,” said Tory, who – thanks to the scholarship – didn’t need to do extra teaching.

“I could instead spend that time on research and develop a strong publication record, which in turn allowed me to get a competitive postdoctoral position after graduating from Yale with my PhD,” she said. “I would have attended Yale without the KTF, but then I might not have been able to advance my career so effectively.”

Ada Griffin is a Yale sophomore who is majoring in art history with pre-med aspirations. The daughter of ACBA member Elisa Long, she, too, has benefited from Friend’s enduring legacy.

Ada said that before learning what she would receive from the scholarship, paying for college was the biggest source of stress in her life.

“Being granted the full cost of my tuition last year had an incredible impact,” she said. “It meant that I was able to focus completely on my classes without the constant threat of student loans looming overhead. It also meant that my family has more resources available for my siblings and their educational futures.”

Ada recalled her freshman year experience with a mix of emotions.

“At times it was lonely, it was incredible, it was challenging and it was beautiful,” she said. “I fell in love with a field of study that I feel lucky to imagine pursuing for the next three years. With the freedom granted to me by the KTF Scholarship, I felt an enormous weight lifted from my chest, and I was able to experience everything my first year had to offer without financial pressure.”

Family impact

Elisa Long learned of the scholarship from a colleague. She and her husband recognized the value in the scholarship and what it could do for their family.

“It meant that my husband and I could continue our employment in the public sector doing work we believe is very important, while not compromising Ada’s educational opportunities,” said Elisa, an assistant federal public defender.

Another ACBA member, Rhonda Wasserman, said two of her three sons received the scholarship to attend Yale – and it helped prevent some significant financial hassles.

“We had been saving money for three children for college. We planned to borrow against the equity of our home,” she said.

Thanks to the scholarship fund, her sons graduated with no debt.

Wasserman recommends that anyone interested in the scholarship apply early before they’re officially accepted.

“Aim high. This resource is available. This scholarship is really significant, and it could save them significant amounts of debt.”

Reaching across the ages

So, everyone agrees: the Kennedy T. Friend Scholarship changes lives and eases the financial burden of college. Scholarship recipients and their parents, alike, shared their sentiments and gratitude, and offered encouragement to anyone who might benefit from this rare opportunity.

“We’re profoundly grateful to the family who endowed the scholarship,” Wasserman said.

Griffin said those who’ve never considered Yale have nothing to lose and a lot to gain.

“I would encourage any other eligible students to apply to these schools, she said. “This chance to receive generous financial support while in college is too good of an opportunity to reject without even trying.”

And McCoy? He’s simply in awe of Friend’s legacy.

“This is a guy who lived 80 years ago. He’s reaching his hand across the ages to change lives,” said Richard McCoy as he considered how Friend is able to better the lives of people nearly a century later.

“I wish I had that ability. It makes you want to reach out and help people.” ■

How to apply

Scholarship applications should be submitted at the same time as an admission application is made to Yale or the University of Paris. For a scholarship application and other information, see ACBF.org/Kennedy-Scholarship-Fund.

Scholarship amounts

So, how much is awarded in scholarship money? The answer varies from year to year, and is determined by the trustees of the fund. The value of the basic grant has been as much as \$66,900 in recent years.