

The Romance of Unification According to Jan Pearson and Inja Angelino

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Jan Pearson and Inja Angelino

What is romance? According to the *Merriam Webster Dictionary*, romance is “to carry on a love affair with a person, place or thing.” However, to Jan Pearson and Inja Angelino, a young Unificationist couple, romance on this Valentine’s Day has a different definition. According to them, romance comes when you “serve and create special moments with the person you love.” Jan, 22, and Inja, 21, are a unique couple in the sense that their marriage is arranged. In modern American society, this is an option that is not often discussed. However, Jan and Inja feel certain of success, because of their strong faith, commitment, and compassion towards each other.

Originally from Rosemount, Minnesota, Jan is currently living in New Jersey and studying at Bergen Community College. Inja grew up in Clifton and is now studying nutrition at Montclair State University. The two come from very different parts of the United States and did not know each other until they graduated from high school. “We first met on Special Task Force (STF, now known as Generation Peace Academy), a character leadership program for youth, but we never talked to each other. I didn’t consider her as a potential spouse at all, because we just never talked,” said Jan to the UC Newsletter.

Arranged marriages in the Unification Church are not spur-of-the-moment decisions, or based on blind emotion. Because faith and parents are involved, it is a very sincere, deliberate process. “Going through the marriage Blessing was on both our minds, and it was something we prayed and prepared for a lot before we met,” said Jan, who added: “I wanted to work on myself, develop myself before pulling someone else into my life.” Both couples wanted this marriage to be centered on a purpose higher than themselves. “I wanted to set good conditions that God could work through and show Him that I was serious, I wasn’t doing it to just find a guy,” said Inja.

This whole process wasn’t just between two people: they chose to include their own parents as well as God in establishing a marriage. “My parents and I had talked a lot about the matching process, and about finding a spouse. I decided early on that I wanted my parents to choose who I was going to marry. I trust my parents, and I trusted that they would pick someone compatible for me,” stated Jan. “It was difficult on my parents because I was the first child that was going through this matching process. When they asked me to suggest compatible girls, I gave them a list of any girl I could possibly see myself marrying. But I told them, ‘Please decide for me. I don’t want to have any other input. I trust your decision’. Inja was on that list,” added Jan, with a smile.

Inja continued her story: “After I finished one year of STF, I went home and started college. I knew I wanted my parents to be involved in my matching process, but it was difficult to bring it up to them initially. Most of the initiation was from Jan and his parents and then my parents brought up how Jan’s parents had called them.” Inja went on to say, “From that point on, we decided to go on several dates to get to know each other...after both our families prayed about it a lot, Jan and I met for a dinner date, and I knew he wanted to say something, but he seemed really nervous! So, I ended up bringing up the awkward topic. I asked him if what he felt about being engaged to me.” Jan interjected, “after she brought it up, we were both so relieved! How was I supposed to ask her to marry me? We barely knew each other!” They both laughed. “Anyway, it turned out that we were both comfortable with the idea of being married to one another.”

“Our second Anniversary of our engagement is coming upon Feb. 21, 2012, and we are planning to attend Rev. Sun Myung Moon’s Blessing ceremony in New York City this March. Before being married, I really wanted a sincere, pure relationship. Now that I have one, I see how our relationship is different from our friends that are not Unificationists” said Inja. Jan added, “I see how Inja and I have the ability to deeply understand each other. We didn’t go too far too quickly, so we found more mature ways to work out our differences. We don’t accuse or get defensive when we go through struggles.”

When asked what their Valentine’s Day plans were, Jan said “I was secretly planning to take Inja out for a fancy sushi dinner, but you soiled my plans!” Inja told us, “As a Unificationist, I never dated before Jan, so I didn’t care much about Valentine’s Day before. Now that I have someone to share it with, it doesn’t seem like that terrible of a holiday anymore!”

Robert Epstein, former editor-in-chief of Psychology Today, has written extensively on the benefits of arranged marriages around the world. Epstein has written: “I think we can learn from successful arranged marriages. We can use our heads a little bit more, looking beyond the physical characteristics, and then we can develop skills and an awareness that can help in sustaining and deepening love over time.” With that understanding, the U.S. culture of marriages can inherit practices in arranged marriages and apply it.

Jan and Inja are a new breed of countercultural youth who chose to be in a committed relationship and let love follow. They are setting the example of selfless and responsible love through openness, honesty, and vulnerability. It is clear to them that in two years, since committing to each other, love has grown. They are looking forward to the next step, marriage affirmation ceremony, with hope and joy. “More than anything,” Jan said, “we desire that beautiful family, that happy, loving and successful family. I want my kids to grow up in a family that is whole and together. And I know that because of our decision to commit, they will get that. I grew up with parents who also had an arranged marriage. I’m so grateful they had such a strong commitment to each other and to their children. So now it’s our turn.”