



## Manitoba?

### David Square

Why would a sophisticated young doctor who plays the piano and is an award-winning figure skater not only choose to practise in rural Manitoba but also plan to stay there? “A lot of friends think I’m crazy,” admits Dr. Daphne Schmidt, “but I love this province and I plan to devote my life to rural medicine.”

By today’s standards, Schmidt’s decision to forsake the urban lifestyle for small-town Manitoba seems passing strange. In fact, most physicians produced by the University of Manitoba leave the province as soon as the ink dries on their medical degrees. Schmidt says statistics from the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Manitoba indicate that only 24 Manitoba-educated graduates registered with the licensing body in 1997/98. The university produces about 70 new doctors a year.

“I guess I’m in a minority,” says Schmidt, who was raised in Souris, Man., near the Saskatchewan border and has always identified with small-town life.

Schmidt, 28, says she was fortunate to meet a soul mate in her husband Grant, another anachronism who prefers bucolic bliss to the urban rat race. “The first time I met Grant I knew he was the guy for me because he grew up in Langenburg, Sask., and wanted to return to his country roots,” says Schmidt, who graduated from the University of Manitoba in 1995.

They married in 1997 after she completed her residency and then moved to Beausejour, about 50 km northeast of Winnipeg, where she set up her family practice.

“We considered several small towns in Manitoba,” says Schmidt, “but Beausejour was our number-one choice because of the friendly people, the services and its proximity to Winnipeg, where Grant still has a business. He’s reluctant to give up his city customers just yet.”

Schmidt says her colleagues at the Beausejour Professional Centre made her feel at home. A fee-for-service physician, she was concerned that she wouldn’t have enough patients to keep busy. She needn’t have worried. After 18 months, her practice is bulging with patients ranging from infants to octogenarians. Indeed, she now worries

that her patients are waiting too long for an appointment. “I want to offer the best medical care possible, and I don’t want people to wait.”

Schmidt, who expects her first child this spring, found another family practitioner to cover her 6-month leave-of-absence. But coping with an infant and running a busy rural medical practice promises to be a challenge for Schmidt and her husband, who has an upholstery- and carpet-cleaning business. Aside from regular office duties, she says local doctors

are expected to provide on-call services at the Beausejour Hospital, which serves from 15 000 to 19 000 patients a year.

“During the summer I can be on call 1 rotation in 3 because of staff holidays and an influx of patients from cottage areas,” she says. An acceptable on-call rotation, as recommended by the Society of Rural Physicians of Canada, is 1 in 5. Moreover, she says doctors can be called away from their daytime office duties to handle a hospital emergency.

“There is no such thing as regular office hours for a rural doctor,” says Schmidt. “When I’m called to the hospital during office hours my patients have to await my return. Some days I work into the evening to catch up.”

Long hours aside, she has discovered that a rural medical practice can be fun. “One of my patients went into labour prematurely. I thought she was going to give birth in the ambulance on the way to Winnipeg, but somehow

she made it to the hospital, where I had the thrill of delivering a healthy child.”

When she has time, Schmidt attends local events such as the Beausejour Figure Skating Club’s annual ice review and the Agassiz Music Festival. An accomplished musician and figure skater herself, she has a degree from Brandon University’s School of Music and a silver medal from a free-skating competition held during a provincial championship.

Schmidt says she will remain committed to her practice because the love of rural life runs in her blood. Her family members, with the exception of a brother in Morden, still live in Souris. “If I were to leave Beausejour, it would be to practise in another small town in Manitoba,” she says. “I’ll never work in the city.”



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**Dr. Daphne Schmidt: skating around the difficulties**