

One good deed leads to another: fortuitous encounter leads to several happy endings



Kevin Esch embraces Latonya Young at her commencement ceremony at Georgia State University's Clarkston campus in December 2019. Esch paid a \$693 student debt for Young. The two met a year earlier when Young was a Uber driver and Esch was one of her passengers. CONTRIBUTED.

By [Ty Tagami](#)

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Sometimes good deeds boomerang.

That's what happened to Latonya Young and Kevin Esch, a pair of Atlantans whose unusual story of goodwill struck a chord last month after it was [published in The Atlanta Journal-Constitution](#). The story circled back to them Wednesday with a big surprise.

Young, a single mother who styles hair for a living and drives an Uber on the side, had put off her college dreams.

She had been plugging along at Georgia State University, until financial adversity, amplified exponentially by a car crash injury, waylaid her. She fell behind on college payments, and couldn't return until she caught up on the debt.

That's when she happened upon Esch, when he hailed an Uber to get from Mercedes-Benz Stadium to his home at the time, in Virginia-Highland.

He was going through a divorce and having a bad day, and Young, who seems sunny by nature, cheered him up. He learned about her life trials, and felt so moved that he gave her a \$150 tip.

It didn't end there. Soon after, he paid off her \$700 debt to GSU, asking only that she repay him by earning her degree.

She went on to earn her associate's degree, driven by a sense of obligation, and he attended her graduation ceremony last month.

That would have been that, except Young didn't want it to end there. She felt so indebted and thankful to Esch that she wanted to see him praised. So she contacted the AJC to tell her story; it was [published on Dec. 10](#).

It turns out, that was only the beginning: over the ensuing month, their story traveled around the world, appearing in hundreds of publications and broadcasts, [according to GSU](#).

It came full circle Wednesday when [Ellen DeGeneres featured the pair](#), ending her episode with an exclamation point: Esch was awarded a free trip to anywhere on the planet, and Young was given a personal invitation from her idol Drew Brees to watch the Saints play in New Orleans.

Oh, and DeGeneres deadpanned the next bit: show sponsor Cheerios was going to give Young \$25,000.

Esch, clapping and beaming, seemed as happy about that as she was.

Young will be putting the money to use: she's already enrolled in the Andrew Young School of Policy Studies where she plans to earn a bachelor's degree in criminal justice.

About the Author



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Ty Tagami is a staff writer for The Atlanta Journal-Constitution. Since joining the newspaper in 2002, he has written about everything from hurricanes to homelessness. He has deep experience covering local government and education, and can often be found under the Gold Dome when lawmakers meet or in a school somewhere in the state.