

# From the 'burbs to Burton

How God used my first year to refine me

Chad Bayse '02

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After a tearful 22-mile journey from my suburban home in Apple Valley, Minnesota, to Carleton's new-student orientation, I stoically checked into my room. Barely had I oriented myself to my new surroundings when a bright-eyed, round-spectacled New Englander walked into the room as if he had lived there for a year or more. "Hi, my name is John," he said, "but my friends call me 'Skip.'" (These were not his real name and nickname.)

"Skip?" I pondered this statement, not understanding the nickname.

"I gave myself the nickname earlier this month," Skip proudly exclaimed.

Skip was already settled in. He had chosen a desk for himself and which bed he would sleep on. No matter, I preferred the bottom bunk anyway. Skip explained that he had arrived two weeks before for some orientation before orientation.

Skip was out to redefine himself. I attempted to have a spiritual conversation the first week, but Skip made it clear he had no desire to talk about Christianity or anything spiritual. He disclosed that his mother was a pastor at an Episcopal church in rural New England. Skip had no interest in theology. He did have an interest, however, in the girl next door. Several mornings after my arrival, I awoke to Skip and

the girl next door on the futon I had so dutifully sought out and purchased from a garage sale that summer. Sensing my befuddlement and moral disdain, Skip distanced himself from me.

I was an anomaly at Carleton. On my new student survey, I requested a "quiet" floor. I also requested the all men's floor (there was only one, and it is no longer designated as such). As a Christian, I had trepidations about Carleton, when compared with ostensibly conservative Bethel College in St. Paul, or even the Norwegian Lutheran St. Olaf. But after talking with a Carleton student from my hometown Methodist church who was then a sophomore, I was assured that Carleton students, while generally liberal in their outlook, were tolerant and accepting of all ideas, beliefs and opinions, including those that are conservative or Christian. What's more, the school was top tier in *U.S. News and World Report* rankings and had offered the best financial aid package. In fact, I felt honored to have been accepted in the first place. Good enough, I thought. Why not be challenged by a true liberal arts education?

I discovered my first weekend that I was not on the men's floor, nor was I on the "quiet" floor. In fact, I saw a keg for the first time in my life being hoisted on the broad shoulder of a

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6-foot-2 football player. While I stayed in my room that Friday night, I later saw the spillage of that very keg on the floor of the co-ed bathroom across the hall. Yes, not only was the floor co-ed but two of the four bathrooms were, too. Of course, I had the option of walking roughly 50 yards through a co-ed dormitory with a towel strapped around my waist. But that did not strike me as more discreet than using the nearby bathroom. The spillage (vomit) on the floor lasted two days until it was cleaned the next Monday morning. Welcome to First Burton.

I became something of a novelty. I had found a bumper sticker that stated, "Abortion turns a womb into a tomb," which I adhered to the wall above my desk. Perhaps I was just in an activist mood. Or perhaps I was rebelling against what I saw. When word got out, others would come to my floor just to peek in and see if there was really a student who had the audacity to put that on his wall.

I checked out a Bible study on campus, hoping it would offer a place of refuge from the cultural clash. It turned out that the group was more interested in "exploring" Christianity than embracing it. I did eventually find a Bible study that embraced Christianity. The group, *Sola Scriptura*, started

with two students, facilitated by Pastor Gary Gilbertson, and then in my time by Gary Hvass, another local pastor. One thing each of us had in common was a disbelief at the lack of Christian community on campus at the time; another was that we held a high view of Scripture. We met weekly, mostly trying to rehabilitate ourselves from the onslaught against our faith and the general lack of concern for spirituality on campus.

There was no escaping it. I still felt displaced. So out of sync did I feel that I escaped the first moment I could. I left on the only first-year study-abroad program spring term, for Pau, France (the program has since been discontinued). France was no paradise. It rains in Southern France during the springtime—something about the ocean air colliding with the high altitude of the Pyrenees Mountains, and the natural ebbs and flows of spring lead to a torrent the likes of which I had never experienced. The rain did have one benefit. It caused me to think rather than escape. Did I really want to return to Carleton the next fall? What would I major in? Where would I go for my next study abroad? How would I change the spiritual apathy on campus? What was God calling me to do?

I did return to Carleton that next

fall, washed of any false expectations. At least I knew what I was up against and how I would be perceived. This gave me freedom to define myself and my endeavors. The remainder of my time at Carleton was on my terms. I would go on to lead a conservative political movement on campus through the Carleton Conservative Union. I used the knowledge of organizing and funding student organizations to help start Christian groups on campus, including the Areopagus Forum, a group dedicated to bringing Christian speakers to campus.

Student groups come and go. But I learned that God wants us constantly to be reminded that we are sojourners on earth and that our true home is in Heaven. My first year at Carleton was also a foreshadowing of the displacement I have felt at times since.

I have learned that God allows us to feel displaced so that we turn to Him for placement. I am grateful for the experience and will always look in wonder at how God used it to prepare me for the challenges that lay ahead. ♦



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