
March/April 2008

2008

3-2008

Higher calling: Student makes impact through article

Liberty University

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/lj_2008_mar

Recommended Citation

Liberty University, "Higher calling: Student makes impact through article" (2008). *March/April 2008*. 20.
https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/lj_2008_mar/20

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the 2008 at Scholars Crossing. It has been accepted for inclusion in March/April 2008 by an authorized administrator of Scholars Crossing. For more information, please contact scholarlycommunications@liberty.edu.

Higher calling: Student makes impact through article

April 29, 2008 | Jenni Thurman

Kristen Gonzalez, a junior at Liberty University, was recently the subject of a Newsweek “My Turn” article submitted by her older sister, Theresa. In the Feb. 8 article, “A Simple Twist of Faith,” Theresa — who does not share her sister’s Christian beliefs — describes her fears that Kristen would become a “Jesus freak” after attending a private Christian school.

“The fundamentalism of evangelicals seemed so extreme, so exclusive, to me,” she writes.

Theresa said her worries multiplied when Kristen announced her plans to attend LU.

“It became more apparent that I needed to trust her decisions and let her make mistakes, if that was what this indeed was; after all, she had proved me wrong in the past,” she says in the article.

Theresa admitted her misconceptions of evangelical Christians, as she knew Kristen, 20, did not grow up to be judgmental. She concluded in the article: “For her, religion is a personal thing, and I don’t judge (anymore). In fact, I greatly respect her for having such a strong faith in something. I wish I could believe so fervently in anything so abstract. All I can say now is that I believe in her.”

The article’s positive ending came as a surprise to Kristen, who said she had assumed her sister thought worse of Christianity.

“With this article I was glad to see that at least how I am living is making her see that Christianity is not so bad,” Kristen said. “I think that’s the best way I can do it, because she doesn’t respond well to me preaching at her.”

Despite their differences, in the article Theresa described Kristen as “an angel who brought our family closer.”

Kristen said she has made countless efforts to draw sisters Theresa, 35, and Shelly, 34, to Christianity. But she refuses to get discouraged.

“It’s definitely hard because I am immersed in a Christian culture here at Liberty and I want them to be, too. I just have to keep trying,” she said.

Raised in a home where her parents did not emphasize church attendance, Kristen rarely went to church during her childhood in Highland Park, N.J. “My grandmother was very ‘hell and damnation’ Roman Catholic and my mom wasn’t against religion, but she didn’t want to be like my grandmother,” Kristen said.

After her baptism in a Catholic church as an infant, Kristen didn't attend church regularly until one of her mother's bank customers invited her to Christ Community Church. As a result, Kristen asked Jesus to be her personal Savior at the age of 9 and quickly became involved in the church's youth group.

Her mother also accepted Christ after attending the church, which spurred her decision to pull Kristen out of public school and homeschool her. After being homeschooled and attending a Christian school during her elementary and middle school years, Kristen settled at Timothy Christian School in Piscataway, N.J., from eighth grade through high school.

Kristen said most students who graduate from Timothy Christian go on to attend Liberty. After she visited the campus twice with her mother, she knew God wanted her there. While her mother loved the idea of Kristen attending a Christian college, sister Theresa did not share the sentiment.

"When Theresa talked to me about it, she said, 'It might be harder to get a job if you go there.' I told her I wanted to go to Liberty because I thought that was where God wanted me, and she said it was my decision," Kristen said. "She didn't want to blatantly say I shouldn't go there because it's a Christian school."

Despite Theresa's misgivings, Kristen thrived in LU's environment. A Spiritual Life Director in Dorm 3, she expects to graduate in May 2009 with a Studio Art major and a Graphic Design minor.

"I want to illustrate children's books or work for a museum," she said. She plans to pursue a Master's in Art History and become a museum curator or art restorer.

Kristen loves to paint and knit in her free time. A passionate reader and former English major, she lists her favorite authors as Jane Austen, Oscar Wilde and Shakespeare.

Although Kristen describes herself as just an average Liberty student, the Newsweek article rocketed her to a level of superstardom on campus.

"I've been getting tons of emails and people coming up to me saying how great it is that I'm being such a good influence and it's nice to see a Christian that really witnesses," she said.

Kristen has noticed progress since she began witnessing to her sisters. She said Shelly has kept a prayer on her refrigerator door because she found it encouraging. "She thinks Christianity is all well and good, but it's not for her," Kristen said. "I don't think she wants to change her life, but she's definitely not completely against it."

Recently, Kristen and her parents talked in depth with Theresa about Christianity. "She talked about how she believes in God, but the God she believes in wouldn't send people to hell," Kristen said. "That's her biggest problem with Christianity."

Kristen saw that conversation as a huge step in the right direction. "I thought, 'At least she believes in God. That's progress.'"

And although Theresa and Shelly have not accepted Christ, Kristen refuses to give up hope, undeterred by the challenges.

“I have to say that I really do struggle with finding a balance and I should witness to my sister more than I do,” Kristen said. “I don’t want people thinking I’m preaching the gospel all day to my sister. It really is a lot harder than people think, but I’m trying my best.”

Read “A Simple Twist of Faith” online at <http://www.newsweek.com/id/105565>.