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A Defining Experience

A RECENT GRADUATE REFLECTS ON HER UNORTHODOX YET ALL-ENCOMPASSING FURMAN EDUCATION — AND THE PEOPLE WHO HELPED MAKE IT HAPPEN.

By Anna King

“At Furman, an education is not complete until students have become involved in learning outside the classroom, as well as within.”

— Barron’s *Best Buys in College Education*

One person in particular was responsible for my decision to attend Furman.

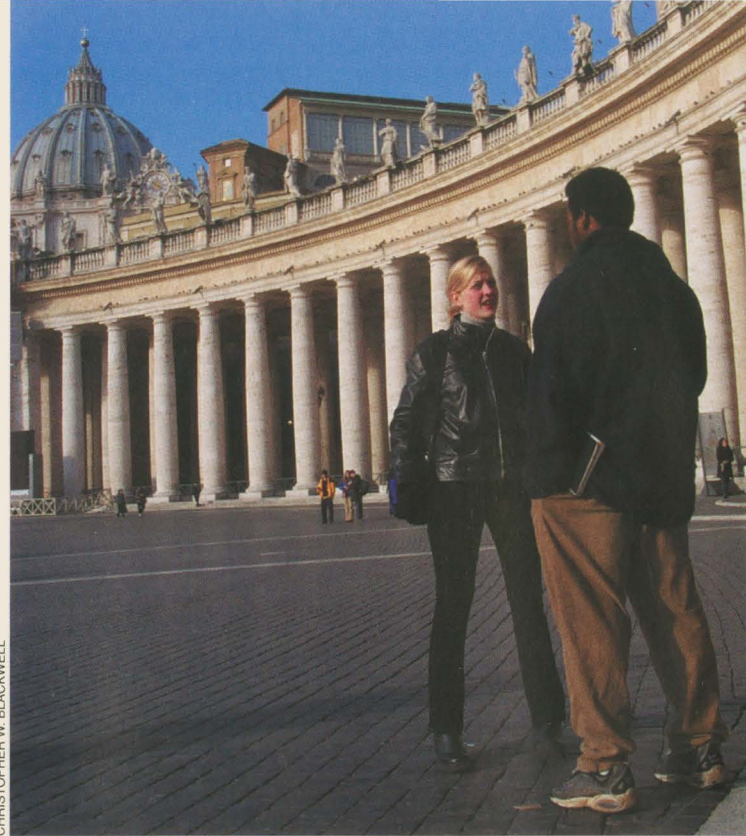
I was planning to attend another South Carolina school before visiting Furman during spring break of my senior year (1998), but it took only a visit to one psychology class, taught by a certain professor with a famous last name, for me to change my mind. Later, on the first day of general psychology, this frightened, befuddled freshman knew that she was in the right place when the same professor remembered my name and hometown and asked about my brother.

I opted for a lush, landscaped campus, but what I found at Furman was much more than a beautiful setting. I discovered the people.

Once I was settled at Furman, the best decision I made was to major in political science (thanks anyway, Gil Einstein) and to take full advantage of the engaged learning opportunities Furman has to offer. The Christian A. Johnson Center for Engaged Learning and its cohort of Dean Charles Brock and professors Glen Halva-Neubauer and Judy Bainbridge were instrumental in helping me coordinate a mishmash of internships and travel-study programs that spanned the globe. My journeys may appear random and disjointed — I worked for a criminal defense lawyer, a senator, a Canadian cabinet minister, an international law firm and a landmine clearance organization — but upon closer inspection, a unifying thread weaves them together.

A Rotary International scholarship enabled me to study at the International Summer School in Oslo, Norway, after my sophomore year, and sharpened the focus of my college studies and activities. The following winter term, I traveled with a group of Furman students and professors to Mediterranean countries, where we studied ancient civilizations.

In many ways, though, the summer after my junior year was



CHRISTOPHER W. BLACKWELL

fundamental in shaping my future goals. The innovative mind of Glen Halva-Neubauer and a generous grant from the Bowater Corporation helped me arrange to spend five weeks working with Canada’s Secretary of State to Africa and Latin America — the Hon. David Kilgour.

Kilgour is not your typical politician. He has served Canadians for 22 years, not by promoting himself but by putting his constituents first. He personally ensured that letters and phone calls were answered ahead of speeches, conferences or other concerns, and his staff members strongly reflected his commitment to public service.

One specific circumstance comes to mind. A Latin American refugee arrived in Canada in the middle of winter. Her meager belongings had been stolen; she had no place to stay and spoke no English. Kilgour and his chief of staff heard of the woman’s plight and exhausted all resources to help. The chief of staff went so far as to invite the woman to live in his home with his family — where she still resides. Such examples helped renew my faith in politicians and their ability to make a difference in people’s lives.

When my internship in Canada ended, I returned to my home state of Georgia for the rest of the summer, thanks to the Herman N. Hipp internship program and one special guy. Randy Eaddy, a Furman trustee and alumnus (Class of ’76) extraordinaire, routinely opens the doors of his Atlanta firm, Kilpatrick Stockton, to Furman students. Mr. “E” often had papers piled high on his desk, but he always made time to discuss interesting cases or to reminisce fondly about his alma mater. He also introduced me to Debbie Segal.

Debbie is the first full-time pro bono counsel hired by a Georgia law firm. According to *Atlanta Magazine* (March 2002), which featured an article about Debbie, “Last year, the dollar value of legal services provided to pro bono clients at Kilpatrick Stockton was an impressive \$3.7 million. That translates into just under 18,000 hours of work.” I spent the majority of my internship learning from Debbie.

A remarkable role model and mentor, she asked me to work

with a team of associates on a project called the “Pigford Cases.” For years, the U.S. Department of Agriculture had been discriminating against African-American farmers in the South by denying them loans. A lawyer in Washington, D.C., decided to do something about it, and eventually so many farmers filed lawsuits that the lawyer’s firm could no longer handle the caseload.

Debbie agreed to coordinate a group to facilitate the appeals process for farmers working toward settlements of \$50,000 and more. Twenty-five attorneys took time to travel to the small town of Douglas, in southeastern Georgia, and help nearly 50 farmers appeal their cases — for free. Afterward, Debbie and I spent hours combing through courthouse files, finding crucial evidence to support our cases. *Very Erin Brockovich*; very powerful in demonstrating how versatile a law degree can be.

Debbie is a quintessential example of an intern-turned-attorney. Her career choice hinged on a college internship with Legal Aid, where she realized that she could do so much more with a law degree under her belt. And, like David Kilgour, she exemplifies someone who does not have to be there for others, but chooses to be.

During winter term 2002, with the help of a Herman N. Hipp internship and a John I. Smith scholarship, I was fortunate to travel to England as an intern with Adopt-A-Minefield, which works to publicize the global landmine crisis. The London-based charity raises funds for mine clearance in six countries. During my internship we were able to help families in Afghanistan, Cambodia and Mozambique return safely to their homes and livelihoods.

Much to my parents’ relief, I was not digging landmines out of the ground. Instead, I helped coordinate fund-raising events, including a sponsorship with the London Marathon and a black-tie gala that raised almost \$100,000 in one evening. (It costs roughly \$2 to clear one square foot of mine-infested land.) In addition, I worked on a redesign of Adopt-A-Minefield’s Web site (www.landmines.org.uk), developed promotional materials, and helped create a PowerPoint presentation to use in classrooms and corporate settings.

My work with Adopt-A-Minefield helped me narrow the scope of my aspirations. Besides gaining valuable experience, I realized that London is where I want to pursue my graduate studies. Next fall, I will enroll in the London School of Economics to undertake a master’s degree in international relations.

Believe it or not, despite all my time overseas, I actually did take courses at Furman — courses that broadened my understanding of both national and international politics. Whether it was Michael Bressler’s class on international relations or Don Gordon’s seminar on African democratization, my coursework related directly to my internships. I was honored when, during my senior year, Gordon asked me to be his teaching assistant and to help coordinate Furman’s “Women and Politics” series. The first and only female Canadian prime minister, Kim Campbell, was our inaugural speaker, and Madeleine Albright, the former Secretary of State, headlined the spring series. Meeting such impressive women inspired me to strive to shatter a glass ceiling of my own someday.

For now, I’m using my one-year grace period before graduate school to save money and to spend time with my family and friends

in Columbus, Ga. I’m enjoying other kinds of engaged learning opportunities by waiting tables and working in an outdoors store as its first female fly-fishing salesperson (OK, so I’m breaking barriers on a small scale). Columbus is the antithesis of London, but I’m having fun and slowing down a couple of paces before I rev up again for the London School of Economics.

When my graduation day arrived June 1, my brother seemed astonished. Teasingly he questioned, “How did you make it in only four years when you spent most of your college career away from your college?” My friends shared similar sentiments. They often joked that my major was study abroad, and it’s true that my Furman experience was unorthodox. It was, however, a prime example of what an all-encompassing Furman education offers and of how it extends out from the classroom and into the world.

Sir Isaac Newton once wrote to a friend, “If I have seen further, it is by standing on the shoulders of Giants.” I certainly feel the same is true in my life. The so-called “engaged learning experience” is real, not just flashy buzzwords that Furman touts on its Web site.

Furman engaged my aspirations and allowed me to transform internships and international trips into meaningful life goals. However, more than reflecting on the cathedrals I visited, the banquets I attended and the dignitaries I met, I will most poignantly remember the people who influenced me in so many ways and who provided the means to make my ventures possible.

My professors, friends and mentors have shown me what kind of person I want to become. Their commitment to improving the quality of others’ lives is remarkable — and contagious. Countless times, I witnessed their compassion, enthusiasm and dedication. I hope to emulate these qualities.

I am forever grateful for those who so profoundly impacted my time at Furman and beyond. Those people — my “Giants” — will continue to inspire and fuel my passions. ●

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MICHAEL WODZICKI

Anna King’s travels during her Furman days took her all over the world. Opposite: With Shelvis Smith ’02 in St. Peter’s Square in Rome during a winter term 2001 study abroad trip to the Mediterranean. Above: Anna gets a warm greeting from Jean Chretien, the Canadian prime minister, during a party in June, 2001. Secret service agents hover in the background.