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### Standing Tall

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# Standing Tall

BY BONNIE GREEN

In years past, graduation ceremonies at Enfield High School in Enfield, Connecticut, always fell on weekdays. Yet, following a winter with frequent snow days, the graduation ceremony for the class of 2011 was moved to Saturday, June 25. Patrick Knighton, class president and a Seventh-day Adventist, discovered this unlikely date during one of the few remaining senior assemblies of the school year.

Surprised by the news, Patrick spent an entire day turning over the issue in his mind, trying to reconcile the reality of the situation with his personal convictions. Relying on prayer and seeking advice from others, Patrick was provided with opinions from both sides. In the end, Patrick determined he would be compromising his claim to faith in an all-powerful God if he compromised his beliefs. Patrick recalls a statement, made by a youth leader in his church, which had a great influence on his decision to honor God's Sabbath. "He reminded me that God had always been present in my academic career. To leave Him out at the end of it would be a disgrace," he recalled.

Patrick's choice wasn't easy. "The issue over the graduation date was hard enough, but my responsibilities as class president made it all the more difficult." Loyalty to his class and loyalty to God seemed to be two separate qualities, though both desirable. "Finally," says Patrick, "I had to ask myself: Do I honestly believe God will protect me ... and my reputation?"

Patrick wrote a letter to the Board of Education. His letter seized the Board attention, not to mention that of local media outlets. Emphasizing the Enfield High School mission statement, Patrick's letter concluded that he was determined to be the "responsible individual" and "citizen of a global society" of which the school's mission statement spoke. He did not fail to acknowledge his source of strength. "I draw strength from my belief in God; this is why neglecting my obligations to uphold the Sabbath day is inexcusable." Patrick told the Board that he had peace of mind that the decision was in God's hands.



Patrick Knighton

God proved He was with Patrick. Despite some delays in the Board's decision, word came that they would not change the date, due in part to the families who had previously arranged for flights coordinating with June 25 and other contractual agreements that couldn't be changed. Patrick continued trusting that God was in control. The Board eventually determined a separate graduation ceremony could be held for him during one of the rehearsals. Patrick was thankful to God that, in the end, he would be able to uphold his religious beliefs while still carrying out his presidential duties.

As Patrick delivered his presidential address to his peers during his rehearsal graduation ceremony, he captured his gratitude to God in the nature of his speech, challenging his class to seek a "greater purpose, a higher calling."

This experience undoubtedly has left Patrick changed. "You have to seek out God in every situation you come across. You don't know when people are watching," he says. Although his situation could have blocked his faith, Patrick trusted God to see him through. "In the beginning it seemed as though it would be easier to say no, and preferable to simply blend in. But when God calls you and you choose to trust Him, He enables you to move forward in confidence. After all, it's not about you — it's about showing God's glory to the world."

Patrick is now a freshman pre-med/biology major at Andrews University.

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