

ASIAN AMERICAN APOSTATE

Losing Religion and Finding Myself
at an Evangelical University



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This book is memoir. It reflects the author's present recollections and information gathering of experiences over time. Most of the names of individuals or institutions and their characteristics have been changed, some events have been compressed, and some dialogue has been recreated.

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Contents

Foreword	xi
Preface	xv
1. Red Flags	1
2. Training Jedis in a Sith Academy	19
3. The Asian Awakens	37
4. The Personal Is Political, But So Is Faith	57
5. The Alt-Right Infancy	83
6. There Really Are Angels	107
7. Jesus Saves, But So Does Art	131
8. A Brief Revolution	155
9. The Straight Agenda	175
10. It's Their House (But It's Our World)	201
Epilogue	227
Acknowledgments	231
About the Author	233

1

Red Flags

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA SAN DIEGO, 1990

A group calling themselves the Church of Christ (previously known as the Boston Church of Christ)² was a cult that had been kicked off several college campuses nationwide in the late 1980s and early 1990s because of the damage it did to students. Their members started out inviting students to Bible studies that emphasized “discipleship.” This discipleship would turn ugly as they demanded more and more of the student. If he or she tried to end the discipleship, the poor student would be subjected to harassment at all hours, intimidation, and guilt trips. Once they had you, they used brainwashing to force you to cut all ties with friends, family, and environment, forcing the poor victim to give all money and possessions to the church and move to another part of the country to continue discipleship. The president of my wife’s sorority at UC San Diego got mixed up with this group, and her parents famously had her abducted and taken to be deprogrammed

2. Not to be confused with the International Churches of Christ.

ASIAN AMERICAN APOSTATE

by a psychiatrist. She returned a few months later, humbled and weak, telling people she could not eat at certain times of day or return to any of the routines she was programmed with, or else she could fall back under the spell.

At one point, the cult turned its sights on us InterVarsity Christian Fellowship folks, whom they considered heretics. Since I was the worship leader, they took to plopping down at my table in the student center while I was eating lunch to engage in discussion about Christian topics. I was well-read in pseudo-apologetics, having immersed myself in C.S. Lewis and Josh McDowell, so they were easy enough to fend off, but they were persistent, finding me all over campus and demanding I talk to them. At one point two Church of Christ members jumped out from behind some bushes near my on-campus apartment and began asking questions about worship. I was tired. I was tired of them. I had happily kicked their asses, theologically speaking, for weeks. And here they were, still coming at me. I said the only thing that came to mind, and at the time I felt bad for it.

“Just fuck off!”

It worked. They stared at me, mouths agape with nothing to come back with. I justified my profanity by thinking “God” had used it for “good.”

THE *PLAYBOY* BUSINESS

I first stepped onto the EVU campus for a job interview in fall 1998. As I walked down what I would later learn to be the Mascot Walk at the center of the main campus, groups of White students, mostly women, said hi to me. As someone who had attended a big state school, UC San Diego, I was immediately suspicious of this behavior. I asked one of the weirdly friendly groups where the administration building was, and they enthusiastically pointed me in the right direction. After I thanked

RED FLAGS

them, one of the women said, “Blessings on your day!” I mumbled something like, “Um . . . you too.”

I was disoriented for sure. I hadn’t been in such a uniformly White space since I was a kid in elementary school, and I was not used to random strangers making eye contact, much less excitedly saying hi or extending blessings. When I walked the campus of UC San Diego ten years earlier, no one said hi to me who didn’t already know me. The way regular, nonsociopathic people behave.

I walked into the provost’s office armed with one semester’s experience teaching at a community college, a minor literary award for a novel I wrote in grad school, and a lifetime mastery of evangelical Christian lingo. The provost was a friendly older White guy who seemed to like me. Early in our conversation, he lowered his voice and leaned toward me. “You’ve no doubt heard about the *Playboy* business.”

I sat stunned. Did this administrator at a Christian school just refer to *Playboy* the magazine? I had been prepping my brain to speak evangelicalese, and I thought I was ready for anything, but a reference to *Playboy*? It felt like a trap.

Perhaps taking my silent bewilderment as consternation, he got flustered and said it was all overblown. Something about the student not being enrolled any more. He hoped I wouldn’t hold it against the school or have any misgivings about working there. I would later learn from students that a former student had been nude in a college pictorial. The fact that she had attended a Christian school was what had made it “news.” The internet was still in its prepubescent stages, so news like this didn’t travel far and wide like it would have today.

I finally found my voice and told him I wasn’t bothered by whatever he was talking about, and I wasn’t lying. He let out a deep breath. “Oh, that’s good then,” he said as he sat back and straightened his glasses. He told me some other would-be applicants were appalled by the story, but I told him I didn’t think it reflected on the school at all.

ASIAN AMERICAN APOSTATE

He was smiling as he handed me some paperwork to take to the English department. I had the administration's blessing to be considered for an adjunct position by the chair of the department. As you'll come to find out, though, the words *EVU administration* and *blessing* would not be associated again for me for the next fifteen years.

The chair of the English department was another older White man. He too was friendly and seemed to be excited at my being a part of his department. He explained how the class I was teaching, Freshman Writing Seminar, was taught and handed me some thick binders with information about department policies. From this I took it to mean that I was in. Yay.

I walked back up the Mascot Walk as a new member of the Evangelical University faculty. As I took in the campus, I said hi to students passing by because, goddamnit, I was local now. Despite feeling the thrill of landing a job, a part of me actually didn't want to be teaching here. I had looked down on friends who went to Christian schools when I was younger. To me, it was a form of hiding from the real world. The *real* Christians, in my young mind, ventured out to *real* places that needed redeeming or something. There was also a small but growing doubt in my gut that had started in college. Christianity was losing its sheen for me, and had been for the past ten years. For years I enjoyed sliding down the slippery slope of deconstructing the conservative views of faith and life from my childhood while leaning toward more progressive forms of Christianity, but that faith was weakening.

I still believed in Jesus and salvation in 1998. Beyond that, everything was a little fuzzy. Unlike most Christians, I was not satisfied with C.S. Lewis's book *The Problem of Pain*, in which he attempts to explain why there is suffering in the world. The short answer: because of sin. Sure, God feels bad for it. Sure, it sucks. Bad things happen to good people, and if a Christian is honest, it's often God causing the bad things. Ask a fellow named Lot. Or Jesus. The fact that there are "reasons" for them to suffer greatly does not help if you are the one

RED FLAGS

suffering or dying completely unaware of the reasons. Did Jesus know he was dying so Donald Trump could invoke his name to become president over two thousand years later? I guess that's another book, but other questions remained. Why do we turn to the Bible for science when there basically was no science when it was written? Why doesn't Jesus say anything about LGBTQIA issues if it's such a big deal? If women aren't supposed to sit quietly in submission as Paul wrote, how the hell are we supposed to know which rules to follow in the Bible? And if music is so damn important to Christians, why does most of their music suck so much?

I basically committed to the idea that I would challenge the conservative students to consider these questions and help them grow their faith. I would quickly learn that students don't come to places like EVU to be challenged in the sense that their *views* are challenged. They come to be challenged to be more "on fire" or "in love with Jesus." And no, my idea of challenging and theirs was not a good mix. I have fifteen years of scars as evidence.

The excitement of being hired to teach at EVU countered any doubts and questions for the time being. It felt like a sign from God that I was on the right path. Hi, students of Evangelical University. I'm your new English instructor. May God have mercy on your souls. Pass the whiskey. And the weed. Please.

THE MAGIC OF "FUCK"

I was given two sections of Freshman Writing Seminar (FWS) to teach in the spring of 1999. I was teaching at two other community colleges at the time, so I had a full slate of classes. Only the lowly adjunct is happy to teach five or six composition classes, with all the prep and grading involved.

At one of the community colleges, I developed what I thought was a novel way to teach parts of speech. American high school students

ASIAN AMERICAN APOSTATE

rarely have a grasp of how sentences work, and teaching the basic building blocks was my way of introducing writing and grammar. But it proved excruciatingly difficult to teach students those damn building blocks. During an attempt to teach parts of speech, a student blurted out, “English is fucked.” I joked that he had just used an adjective to describe the English language. The student seemed surprised that I wasn’t chastising him for using “bad” language at first, and then said, “Oh, I get it.” I don’t know if he actually got it, but the exchange gave me an idea.

I wrote several sentences on the antiquated chalkboard, each with “fuck,” “fucking,” or “fucked,” and each employed as a different part of speech. “I don’t give a fuck,” used it as a noun. “That’s fucking crazy,” used it as an adverb. I don’t remember the exact sentence I used to show a verb, but I remember erasing it quickly, lest someone walk in and see something like, “Go fuck yourself,” on the board.

The “fuck” lesson worked like magic. Students told me they had never understood modifiers before. I couldn’t make “fuck” work for prepositions, but it worked pretty well for the rest. I told the students that no one outside of a lame composition class was ever going to ask them what a preposition was anyway.³ The normal students in community college classrooms delighted in having a professor write *fuck* so many times on a board. Entertaining and effective. A teacher’s wet dream. Fuck yeah. (Exclamation.)

Despite growing up being taught that “bad words” were, well, bad, I had decided in college that such language was just using words in different contexts. Words were just words. Some were appropriate for given situations. Others might not be.

At EVU, almost everyone subscribed to the “bad word” point of view and not the different-contexts one. And *fuck* is about the worst

3. Can any grammarians confirm that saying “Go the fuck to sleep” uses “fuck” as a preposition?

RED FLAGS

word in existence to evangelicals outside of *liberal*. And despite a lengthy discussion to explain my view that language is a tool and words are just words, the students at EVU in 1998 did not appreciate the pedagogy behind my parts-of-speech lesson. I was, in a word, fucked (adjective).

In what would become, on average, a twice-yearly occurrence, I was asked to come to the office of my chairperson to answer to student complaints. Several students in each of the two sections and a parent or two had called the school to report profanity in an EVU classroom. My chairperson chuckled as he asked to hear my explanation. I appreciated that he didn't just assume I had cussed a blue streak and wrote random profanity all over the board. That would come later. After I explained the lesson to him, he laughed and nodded. He thought it was a creative way to teach parts of speech, but he told me it couldn't be done at EVU. I apologized to my classes and that was that. Fucking lame (adverb). Unlike back at UCSD, the word *fuck* would not prove useful to improving my life.

I know now that I was naive to try and use that lesson at EVU, but my perspective was not just about using a "bad" word. It was a worldview that prioritized what is actually important over what might be assumed to be important. To me, words mattered, but only to the degree of their effectiveness. *Fuck* could be overused or used to compensate for a deficient vocabulary, but it could also be just the right word. Outside of evangelical spaces, of course. It will also factor heavily in the end of my story. We call that foreshadowing.

THE CULT RETURNS

Most of my students were great. They may not have agreed with me on most issues, but they were willing to listen and learn, and they showed respect to me as a professor. I would not have made it for as long as I did without them. At any school there are challenging students, but

ASIAN AMERICAN APOSTATE

EVU attracts all types of Christians, including some with extremely racist, sexist, or anti-LGBTQIA views. It must be pointed out, and I will do so for each example, that while these individuals caused me a significant amount of stress, anger, rage, and pain, I was generally able to make peace with them. And if any of them are reading this, I am writing this book as a testament to both them and me for being able to overcome such vast differences in worldview.

It was rare to have any Black students at EVU, but when I did, I always checked in with them to make sure they were okay amid all this racism. Grace was a Black student who understood how shitty EVU culture was. When returning to her dorm with her White friends, the notoriously racist White campus safety officers would stop her and demand she show her ID. They never asked the White students for their IDs. This happened most days for the first few weeks of her freshman year. She complained about White students always asking her if she was there on a sports scholarship or because of affirmative action; and as a prof at that time I knew that you only needed a C average and lots of money to attend EVU, so that question was especially galling. I leaned on Grace for support whenever race issues came up, enjoying rare moments of not having to be the one to bring up racism in evangelical culture. We often talked after class, joking about the clueless White kids, some of whom admitted that we were the first Black and Asian people they had ever gotten to know. One kid even admitted he had never talked to a Black or Asian person before . . . in his whole life.

About halfway into the semester, I began the first part of my lessons on argumentation. I wrote a few suggested discussion topics on the board and asked if the students had any topics they had been thinking about. Coming up with topics was practice in developing thesis statements, which are assertions to be supported with an academic paper.

Someone brought up worship and worship styles, bringing up the point that there were Christians who didn't like the EVU style of worship with its loud guitars and drums. Grace chimed in, saying she

RED FLAGS

couldn't understand how people could worship at the school's chapel. It should be noted that the worship music and worship team were almost universally beloved at EVU. They had adapted the new trends of having polished musicians audition to be on the worship team and had attractive, male leaders. Grace raised her hand and told us EVU worship went against God.

Grace's comment confused everyone and made my spider senses start tingling the same way they did when confronted by the Church of Christ nut jobs. She started quoting scripture about worship, but none of the verses said anything about guitars and drums. Someone asked what church she went to, and Grace seemed to be expecting the question. "I go to the one true church of Christ," she said confidently, if casually. It was like she was saying, "Oh, you know, I go to Calvary Chapel."⁴ Except she didn't go to fucking (adjective) Calvary Chapel. She went to the fucking "one true church." Someone asked what kind of church it was. Grace laughed, condescendingly, and repeated, "It's the one true church." The students looked confused. I felt my heart pounding. My favorite student of the first few weeks was a member of the goddamn Church of Christ. My mind raced back to my college days feuding with that church, and I made plans to alert the school that the students were in danger of being lured into a cult. And then Grace added that we who worshipped in places like EVU chapel were going to hell. *Hell*. As if that weren't weird enough, she seemed happy when she said it.

I don't think most of the class ever got their minds around the fact that one of their classmates had just said they were going to hell, or if they did, it did not fully dawn on them that their egregious sin was not homosexuality, tattoos, or liberalism. They were being sentenced to hell for one of the very foundations of evangelical Christianity: contemporary worship.

4. Basically the McDonald's of evangelical churches with branches all over America.

ASIAN AMERICAN APOSTATE

In my mind, I was convinced that the best way to deal with these people was to come hard and come strong. I said to the class (and I know this because it was documented in a legal threat to the school), “Well, I guess I’ll see you all in hell.”

I spent a few minutes assuring the students that singing worship songs would not send them to hell, but I didn’t directly address Grace. She sat looking stunned and saddened. I was stunned and saddened that I had to shoot her down like that. After class she stormed out of the room instead of chatting like she had every day before. She sat silently in class for the next couple of days.

Standing next to the door to his office, my department chair was waiting for me a few days after the incident. He invited me into his office for the second time in a year and a half, but this time he seemed genuinely worried.

He sat at his desk looking down at an official-looking trifold letter printed on official-looking stationary. He then handed me the letter and asked for my side of the story.

The letter was from the pastor of a local Church of Christ who was also the father of Grace. He detailed, word for word, some of what I had said in class before going on to say that unless amends were made, he would bring some kind of harassment lawsuit against the university. He did note that I was his daughter’s favorite professor and that she was particularly grieved by the whole incident.

I told my side of the story, including my previous dealings with the church. My chairperson was clearly sympathetic but also keenly aware of the precarious position he was in. His instincts were to support me, but a lawsuit against the school could be serious trouble for everyone.

To make things better, I volunteered to take one for the team by submitting to the terms of the letter and apologizing to Grace and to the entire class. The next class session, I started out by apologizing for what I had said. I knew what was at stake, so even though I was not

RED FLAGS

sorry at all for defending my students and their salvation status, I apologized to the class for my unprofessional conduct. I covered all the bases. Grace's father wrote another letter later in the week indicating he was satisfied with the outcome. No lawsuit. You're welcome, EVU.

The lack of response of the rest of the class was epic. As I apologized for being so insensitive and mean, they just stared blankly at me. Allowing for the fact that it was obviously unsettling to see their English professor apologizing so wholeheartedly, they said nothing. I asked if anyone had questions or comments. Nothing. I never figured out whether they were just not fazed by the whole incident, or if they just couldn't comprehend what had gone down.

Grace, herself, acted as if nothing had happened after that day. She talked during and after class about everything, including the rampant racism at the school. She defended many of my critiques of Christian culture and gave overwhelming support to my view that the campus climate was overtly hostile toward ethnic minorities. She even took another class with me the next year. And when Facebook went active on campus, she friended me. Go figure. A couple of years later, she amazed me, yet again, with her violently erratic worldview when she informed me that she was entering a city swimsuit competition and asked me to pray for her to win. Given our past conflict with contemporary worship as a contentious issue, I timidly asked her what her church might think about entering a swimsuit competition. She wasn't sure, but she was convinced God wanted her to do this. If I hadn't already arrived at a point where I stopped trying to understand this person, I'm pretty sure I did then. Perhaps for the best, I never saw her again after that day.

Outside of nearly getting the school sued, those first couple of years at EVU were surprisingly great experiences. Many of the full-time professors, including the chair, mentored me. By 2001, I was teaching the maximum number of units an adjunct could teach, three classes in

the fall and two in the spring. I was able to stop teaching at one of the other community colleges, cutting my weekly drive time significantly. Things were looking good. The full-timers told me to consider getting my PhD so I could join full-time. Some even had their educations paid for by EVU, and they encouraged me to inquire about that.

Every administrator I asked about this said they knew nothing about such a program.

TEACHING WRITING?

When people talk about good writing, I'd be willing to bet they cannot tell you exactly what they mean. They might mention a famous writer or the infamous White and Strunk text *The Elements of Style* as a reference. But what exactly good writing is? Hmm . . . If you went to college and took a composition class, there is a 74 percent chance that your professor or instructor had no idea what he or she was doing (*Scott's Educated Guess*, 2022). There is also a 63 percent chance that those same professors thought they knew what they were doing (*Pulled from Scott's Ass*, 2022). If you just noted that the previous sentences were not correctly annotated by APA, MLA, or Chicago style guides, you are probably part of the problem. Or you got an A in English Composition 101.

It was the pursuit of figuring out how to define, teach, and assess “good writing” that contributed greatly to my deconstruction from faith. For me, communicating clearly and artfully a person's ideas and points of view was the most important component to writing well. But if a person's point of view was that of an evangelical Christian, that person might never be a “good writer” in my class. Because an evangelical Christian likely has a deplorable and indefensible point of view, logically and ethically. It can be subjective, yes, but can a piece of writing be given an A if it is arguing for the validity of the Ku Klux Klan or that science is a ruse of Satan? Not in my class. Pretty sure you can do that in a lot of other classes at EVU, though.

RED FLAGS

This brings up the other part of the teaching equation: assessment. Teaching writing should correspond with assessing the writing. Stay with me here. An assignment that asks a student to write something should be accompanied by a class that equips the student to satisfy the outcomes and objectives of the assignment. And then, after a lengthy process of drafts, revisions, and editing, that writing must be measured against the parameters of the assignment. It should be clear to the student at every step of the process both what is being asked of the student and where the writing stands.

Okay. You now understand the basics of teaching writing according to me. Like all the Freshman Writing Seminar classes, assignments were based around the texts we chose for our classes. After going through the various kinds of college papers, the focus of the second half of my class was on argumentation. After one paper where they wrote an argument on an assigned topic, I then let the students choose from a broad list of topics. I also let them come up with their own topics that would need my approval. It was always fascinating when students disregarded my veto of their topics and went ahead with their papers, armed with assurance that Jesus was on their side.

I quickly discovered that an evangelical student has a harder time learning “good writing” than a camel trying to get through the eye of a needle. Even if we subscribe to one of the modern interpretations that the “eye of a needle” is a metaphor for the narrow gate of a walled city, and a camel laden with bags atop its hump must have its cargo painstakingly unloaded and reloaded to pass through, the metaphor still works. Evangelical students had to shed their evangelical biases, assumptions, and shitty worldviews to “write good.” At least in my class they had to. I later learned that a lot of adjuncts teaching Freshman Writing Seminar were just having students write trite Christian messages and regurgitations of Christian writings. These were usually professors from the School of Business.

ASIAN AMERICAN APOSTATE

So even if a student figured out where nouns and verbs go in order to form a sentence, that student was still a camel with bags piled high trying to enter through a very small gate. Now, tell that student to write a thesis statement, the defining idea of every piece of college writing, and you might get statements like, “America’s problems are all a result of taking prayer out of schools in the sixties,” or, “In this paper I will prove that President Obama is, in fact, a Nazi.” No matter how grammatical, how eloquent, how artful the words following thesis statements like that, I could not assess them as anything but deficient. Even when I considered myself a fellow Christian, there was no fucking (adverb) way pathetic ideas like those, and many others worse than they, could be considered “good writing.” (Yes, “they” is the correct pronoun. Look it up if you must.)

To their credit, some diehard conservatives refused to heed my notes on their drafts and just turned in final papers with the same shitty arguments. Sometimes they would be accompanied with a note imploring me to prayerfully consider the godly truths in their papers. I did not need prayer to see the obvious. Those papers never received anything higher than a D. I still needed them to write good things on evaluations, so it was rare for me to give Fs. If I didn’t need them to fill out the evaluations, I would have failed about a third of my students. No joke.

One of the students who tried the “prayer in schools” topic even confronted me in a moment of sheer self-owning delusion. She slammed her D-minus paper down and proclaimed that this same paper had received an A in her honors English class . . . in high school. Christian high school, obviously. Somehow, in her mind, she was going over my head by invoking the more godly assessment of her high school teacher. She was definitely going over my pay grade, but goddamn, kid. You just admitted that you didn’t write this paper for my class. I told her the paper then deserved an F for plagiarism, but that she could keep the D-minus. When she realized what she had just admitted to, she was fine with the grade. I had pointed out early in her writing process that “bad

RED FLAGS

things,” like slavery, wars, famines, diseases, and natural disasters, actually happened prior to the 1960s when prayer in schools became an issue. That this fact negated the whole argument couldn’t sway her thinking, but a self-admission to plagiarism did. Self-preservation always trumps deeply held evangelical convictions. The 2016 election of Donald Trump proves that pretty well.

THERE’S SOMETHING HAPPENING HERE

After a few years of teaching Freshman Writing Seminar, my own faith was fading. These students were Christians just like I was. Except they were nothing like me. Nor were their parents, many of whom wrote to me to express their dismay in my teaching and grading. Again, most of the students enjoyed my class and the discussions we had to prepare for their papers. On student evaluations of my teaching, many wrote praise, saying I’d helped them become more thoughtful about their Christian faith.

But as the 2000 presidential election came and went, I started to see a dividing line between me and the students. Most students had little interest in politics, often claiming their faith came first and foremost and being Republican came second. Many conservative students willingly, if begrudgingly, pointed out that Jesus would likely be considered a “liberal” if he were alive at the time. But it was the intractable students who kept me awake at night. Nothing seemed to penetrate their assumptions about the world. These students hyperbolically claimed that racism was no longer an issue because of Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross or Martin Luther King, Jr.’s civil rights work. They cited Rush Limbaugh as a scholarly source on research papers. And they simply could not or would not ever show an ounce of sympathy for the suffering in the world or in others around them. God’s plan, for them, was a safe, middle-class existence, which needed vigilant defense against everything from the “gay agenda” to the “godless liberals” of the world.

ASIAN AMERICAN APOSTATE

Most of my students were still innocently saying hi to random strangers on the Mascot Walk. But despite how some students were at first somewhat apolitical, the culture was shifting toward a more radical right point of view. And my own faith was shifting toward the “godless liberals.”

I’M THE TOKEN ASIAN

For all the enjoyment I got out of teaching at EVU in those early years, I was keenly aware of the fact that being Japanese American presented significant challenges I had to work to overcome. If I wanted to connect with my students, I had to overcome the lazy assumptions they had about Asian American men. I had to reach out to them to find common ground. Granted, every good educator should reach out to students to find connection, but I had to overcome a lot of racist baggage to make this connection happen. Students often expressed surprise that I didn’t have an accent. You’re not hearing an accent now, right? Right?

For my whole life, I had a tendency to fade into the background or fringes of any room filled with White people. I think I told myself I was being “humble” or “observant” before finding my role or my lane in the setting. Coming to EVU made me realize that my invisibility was only partly my choice. White people were actually just ignoring me. Actually, all non-Asian people were ignoring me, and I decided I would help them recognize me. At the ripe age of thirty, I had experiences and knowledge that I knew could contribute to the culture of EVU, and by golly, I was going to make those contributions. What I didn’t know was that by doing so, I would be labeled a “troublemaker.” White assumptions about Asian American men are a hell of a drug. Apparently, an Asian American man stepping up to lead or teach is a scary thing for many non-Asians.

On the other hand, let me say here that I recognize my privilege as a male professor that my female colleagues did not and still do not

RED FLAGS

have in evangelical spaces. I never had a student present me with Bible verses about why I shouldn't be allowed to teach men. Many of my women colleagues did. I never got accused of being gay because I pushed back against patriarchal views; yes, evangelicals make that connection. I never got called into the dean's office to answer questions about my relationship status or my views on having children. Many women colleagues did. I don't mean to downplay my experiences, but I never had to deal with misogyny against my very person. But I did fight against it.

It's never easy to find connection to a classroom full of students. Even a straight, cisgender White man has to find ways to connect. Ironically, even with every possible form of privilege evangelical culture bestows upon White men, there were a lot of dudes who were terrible at teaching, and students crucified them on sites like RateMyProfessors.com. It was the alpha male professors who exuded a godly Big Dick Energy (BDE) that students tended to respect and love. Even if you were terrible at teaching, BDE gave some men a lot of grace because students assumed they knew what they were talking about. Perhaps ironically, BDE is basically what popular pastors exude.

As an Asian American man, I couldn't assume any positive assumptions about me. I had so much more to overcome to become a professor students trusted, enjoyed learning from, and connected with.

And I fucking did it (adverb).

And there were days I wish I fucking hadn't.

The more I worked to overcome the racist assumptions of my White students, the more I started to question my own instincts to win White people over by any means necessary—because doing so meant both catering to White supremacy and diminishing my own voice. And the more I recognized my instincts, the more I started to unpack just how fucked up (adjective) many White people were.

I didn't plan to stay for more than a year or two at EVU, hoping to find a permanent spot at one of the local community colleges, but I

ASIAN AMERICAN APOSTATE

found myself drawn to the students who reminded me so much of myself at their age. They had real questions as they struggled to reconcile the unreconcilable values of evangelical Christianity and the modern world. In my still-Christian mind, I recognized that living this life of evangelical faith made it tough to be a positive force in the real world, where people actually lived. But through God/Jesus/the Holy Spirit, we could strive for it, and that, to me, was the “good fight.”

I quickly established myself as a good professor of Freshman Writing Seminar, and the department gave me more classes, until I was at the maximum allowed. As a progressive Christian, I figured I could make the world a better place by helping these students navigate the complexities of life as Christians, I could correct their shitty views of Asian American people, and I could head off the progress made by the relatively new rise of the angry, fearful conservatives on Fox News or *The Rush Limbaugh Show*.

I got good reviews from the paying customers on the official professor evaluations, even with all the gentle pushing and prodding of students to find their humanity. “Mr. Okamoto really challenged us to think and know what believe as Christians in this class,” wrote one student. “Professor Okamoto is a really awesome teacher. He doesn’t just teach us, he does so much more than that. He is funny and made me think of a lot this year about different ideas and viewpoints,” wrote another.

Knowing what we know in 2022, I almost wish I could go back to the year 2000 and tell that thirty-year-old kid to run. But that would deprive you of hearing this story. Spoiler: it’s a happy ending. Eventually.

About the Author

R. Scott Okamoto is a fourth-generation Japanese American who lives in Pasadena, California, with his wife, Geri, and whichever kids haven't left the nest. He has an MA in creative writing from the University of San Francisco, and he taught university-level English for fifteen years. He enjoys fly fishing (and mostly fishes with the flies he ties), playing guitar, and cooking. He is the creator and voice of the *Chapel Probation* podcast. For more writing and videos of Scott speaking, and for photos related to the stories in this book, visit rscottokamoto.com.