



Caleb washes his feet before afternoon prayer on April 15. Caleb is a Shi'a Muslim, while the majority of Columbia's Muslims are Sunni. Because of this, he prefers to pray at home instead of at the mosque.

long and full life.”

His father's answer wasn't good enough. Life had to be about more.

“We may have left it so open that he needed something that was not nebulous and hard to pin down,” Robert says. Caleb's mother is not surprised about his conversion — Islam came along when he needed it, she says. Whether it's a phase — like his skateboarding or heavy metal days — remains to be seen.

Caleb went to high school at Hickman after the Carters moved to Columbia in 1996. Growing up in a politically liberal household, he always felt a sense of guilt for being white, and this fueled his interest in black history and culture. Caleb first heard about Islam while reading the biography of an African-American legend, Malcolm X — a book he hid between the covers of whatever was read in class. Malcolm X was a man who came from nothing but went on to become a symbol of his era. “I wanted to see what religion he was from,” Caleb says. “It definitely made me think of Islam.”

Christianity and Judaism didn't offer a complete guide to life, he says. There were things that didn't make sense — such as punishing all women because of Eve, or reading about Moses' armies obeying God's word and slaughtering villages.

Caleb liked Islam because the Quran advocated equality between men and women and violence in self-defense, and because it made logical sense to him.

“The idea of God coming to Earth as a human being, or having a son is illogical,” he says. “The Quran asks, how can God have a son when he has no partner?”

Muslims see the Quran and the stories of the life of the prophet Muhammad as a guide to everyday life, which Caleb longed



Caleb puts socks and shoes on his older brother Darwin before taking an afternoon walk. While his parents are at work, Caleb helps take care of Darwin, who has severe Down syndrome and autism.

for. He hoped his religious quest would provide meaning and a relief from his teenage angst. He suffered from depression. In his junior year, his insecurities and fear of public speaking began to dominate him. In 2002, Caleb, then 17, went on medication. Soon after, he was contemplating suicide.

He stopped taking antidepressants and decided to solve the problem himself. “I just realized after being on it a while that this is not a way to deal with my problems. I needed to find the answers in me, not in drugs.”

In 2002, shortly after quitting pills cold turkey, Caleb met his first girlfriend.

“It lasted about three weeks, but I was young, I was impressionable, and she left me in a really bad way,” Caleb says. “I wanted to make it the ideal ‘I love you, you love me’ kind of thing. I was just get-

ting ahead of myself — I had watched too many movies.”

Later he fell in love with another girl, but she wasn't interested. His failures added to his need for structure and discipline. “My own experiences didn't get me anywhere,” Caleb says. “By worshipping God, He will help you help others and serve the community. Ultimately, by turning to God, He'll show you the right path, and it's easier to avoid chaos.”

In the summer of 2004, Caleb converted to Islam.

Caleb slouches in a mustard leather couch, places the gray metal tip of the hookah tube between his lips and starts sucking. The flavored tobacco tastes like a medley of sugary dried fruit. The water bubbles in the pipe that >>>