

Personal Statement

As a young boy, I experienced the sudden death of my younger brother. Without knowledge and insight into medicine and diseases, I was confused as to why my family and the medical personnel of my hometown could do nothing to save his life. It was this heartbreaking experience that ignited my determination to become a medical doctor in order to one day help people in my community.

Throughout primary and secondary school, my aspiration to become a medical doctor did not wane. Whenever asked about my future career, I always said that I would become a doctor in order to help those who need medical attention, and teach others practices that promote and maintain good health. Discovering that my brother's death could have been easily prevented with a vaccination for measles made me realize the importance of the preventive aspect of medicine.

I graduated from high school in December, 1989 and began my college career at the University of Liberia in 1990, in the Bachelor of Science degree program - a prerequisite for admission to the university's medical school. Unfortunately, the university was forced to close its doors six weeks later because of the rebel incursion into Liberia that had begun the previous year.

With immediate hopes of continuing my education thus shattered, I volunteered my services at the Holy Family Clinic, a medical center in my hometown, in September of 1990. Initially, I performed clerical duties, but later began dispensing drugs to patients as well as translating the medicines' dosages and general information into the Bassa dialect. My vivid interest in medicine earned me access to witness surgical procedures like caesarean sections and herniographies. I later learned how to tend to certain injuries - from abrasions to minor bullet and shrapnel wounds. During this time I also accompanied the doctor on trips to rural areas, which proved extremely risky because of roving bands of armed youths who pillaged and terrorized the country. Yet, those trips were vital since the continuous fighting had made transportation virtually nonexistent and many sick people in the countryside could not travel to the city for medical attention.

In 1993, war eventually forced the clinic to close down. Before this unfortunate closure, I realized that the medical profession was not as easy as I had first envisioned it as a young boy; the attainment of knowledge crucial for patient care was a tedious, painstaking process. Some situations required a lot of patience and composure in order to avoid an altercation. At other times, the profession required a lot of courage to face the complex and painful cases that came into the clinic. However, I am thankful for this hands-on experience in the medical profession.

After leaving the clinic, the fighting forced me, like most of the Liberian population, to wander the countryside in search of safe havens. I often found myself in numerous situations where I was called upon to apply the knowledge and experience acquired during my years at the Holy Family Clinic. But while the sense of being helpful was rewarding, I knew that I was not competent enough as I lacked the skills and

knowledge to assist with many of the cases. And this only reinforced my resolve to become a medical doctor.

With Liberian academic institutes ruined by the fighting, I decided to pursue my education abroad. In 1996, I was awarded a scholarship at the University of the South in Tennessee. This award rekindled my hope of becoming a medical doctor. At Sewanee, as the University of the South is also known, I carefully chose courses that I believed would prepare me for the challenges of medical school. Also at Sewanee, my interests in research were piqued when I worked as an NSF research intern in the Summer of 1999. Our research group studied the effects of temperature on energy production in rainbow trout. I later transferred this research experience to an independent honors project that studied the acclimatization of the eastern red spotted newt to extreme seasonal conditions.

After graduation from Sewanee, I was unable to obtain admission to medical school mainly due to lack of adequate financial means. However, I was admitted to the Interdisciplinary Graduate Program in Biomedical Research Education and Training at Vanderbilt University, Tennessee. I entered the department of Molecular Physiology and Biophysics in 2001. The classes and laboratory work that I have been involved in since then have added a new dimension to my interest in medicine. I now realize that training in biomedical research coupled with medicine provides a very useful experience that can be of immense value to my native country. Not only would I be able to treat sick people and advise them on healthy practices, I would also be able to investigate some of the medical problems peculiar to that part of the world.

My personal encounter with death during my childhood and during the Liberian Civil War, in addition to my exposure to medicine and surgery, has aroused in me a deep interest in surgery. My goal in life, therefore, is to work as a surgeon and a researcher in one of Liberia's rural hospitals, and attempt - in any way possible - to help rebuild the devastated health infrastructure of my country.