

Jonathan was cold and tired the Wednesday night I treated him at the UCLA Mobile Clinic in West Hollywood, CA. A middle-aged gentleman, who was homeless and hadn't eaten for days. As we sat on the sidewalk, I got some of his history, and he let me take his vital signs. When I empathized with his difficulties and shared my own story, his posture changed, showing more interest in finding out what motivates me. Thankfully I connected him to resources for obtaining food stamps and General Relief from county social services, potentially putting him on a path of hope to get clean and contributing to society.

During the three years I worked with the Mobile Clinic, I met many homeless people like Jonathan, individuals that came from broken homes where they often only knew one parent or were neglected. I don't know what happened after Jonathan left the clinic, but I have faith in the fact that our meeting, a chance encounter, was a turning point in his life. I have this confidence because my own life was fundamentally changed by a chance encounter at an age when I was almost too young to remember. That meeting put me on a road to well-being and a successful life beyond what my mother could have provided. It has also ensured that my mission in life is certain--to work with the underserved as a primary care physician.

Until the age of four, I lived with my biological mother and two sisters in Berkeley, CA, spending many days and nights on the streets panhandling for money. One day, a young man stopped and offered to buy us pizza, he continued to come back providing groceries, clothing, and other necessities for my family. Later, when my mother was diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia and deemed mentally unstable, my sisters and I were placed in foster care, passing through four foster homes within the year. But by a miraculous chain of events, the caring 24 year old man from the street found us, and we were taken in by his family, the Moeckelmanns.

In my pursuit of a career in medicine I have seen the importance of trust between a doctor and patient. Trusting other people has been a growing process for me. I am guarded by nature due to my upbringing, so I didn't share my background in foster care with many people growing up and into college. This strategy led to isolation and seclusion. I began to realize that in order to make a difference in society that I would need to build honest relationships. I reached out to the UCLA Bruin Guardian Scholars program, which became a new family for me within the larger UCLA community. I was able to comfortably share my story with those who could relate and gain more confidence in my identity. I found that there are a lot of organizations and people in this world that are trustworthy and want to see you succeed.

I applied and was rejected to medical school in 2012 and my confidence took a blow. The dejection that I felt was heavy, forcing me to question my commitment to medicine. I looked into other helping professions, but eventually realized that I am certain the medical field is where my skillset fits. I found the UC Davis School of Medicine Postbaccalaureate program, which, provided me with another diverse family. Within the cohort I shared my story, my goals, and my struggles freely and my confidence flourished. I completed the year with an exceptional 4.0 GPA and the belief that I can succeed academically in medical school when surrounded by a strong support network. I am a unique fit to work with the urban underserved and foster youth because of a fundamental trust that is rooted in our shared experiences. I can build on that

foundation of trust and not only diagnose and treat, but provide friendship and inspiration to those in need.

At each stage of my life I will need to create small families within large communities. I am not designed to go through life's peaks and valleys alone and neither are those who are homeless or in foster care who feel isolated. If I can reach out as a physician, building small families within large cities, where people can trust me and each other, I can have a major impact on the health of the urban underserved.

Life, at its core, is merely a birth certificate and a death certificate. The relationships made with people and the lives you change between those two certificates are what give life meaning. The experiences I've had have given me a unique perspective on the value and fleeting nature of life. I will not settle on being average, I want to be extraordinary. A doctor has the most noble and fulfilling occupation a person can have because of their ability to build countless positive relationships and improve the quality of, or even extend, a person's life. I am no more special than any other applicant, but I am unique in that I have overcome adversity and possess a unique perspective that will benefit others. While my GPA and MCAT scores are not at the top of my class, it is the numerous odds against my success as a former foster youth, which I've surmounted, that I'm most proud of. I believe my experiences will allow me to persevere into and through medical school. This is my life's desire: to obtain the knowledge and skills of a doctor in order to reciprocate all I have been given to the people in my community and beyond.