

PERSONAL STATEMENT WORKSHOP SAMPLE #2

Entering Rwanda, I tried to relax by focusing on the small brown huts that dotted the fertile countryside. It was no use. Pulling up to the base of the campsite, all the comments I had heard back home came rushing back. They laughed, "We'd hate to lose you this young." One woman unknowingly stoked the flames of my fear, mentioning how gorillas could absentmindedly rip trees out of the ground. With all the thoughts racing through my mind, never did I consider that this hike would provide a major revelation regarding my pursuit of medicine.

At the base of the mountain, the guide mandated 'Don't make eye contact' and "Give them space," tips necessary for a successful trip. And then the trek up the mountain began.

Ascending, the beautiful landscape fell beneath us, and eventually, amid dense foliage, we entered the gorillas' territory. Once I passed through greenery, a silverback towered over me, his frame demanding deference. Heeding the guide's words, I looked to the ground, but despite my submissive gesture, he was intent on sending a message. He charged, fangs bared. We held still, and about a step away, he stopped and breathed heavily, seeing we were not a threat. Trembling, I continued.

We entered a clearing where twenty gorillas lounged. I found myself rooted. Mesmerized, I saw a young male loping towards me, and remembering my training, I froze, eyes on the silverback who was focused on his family member moving towards me. As the young gorilla reached me, he looked up—and punched me in the thigh. Then, he walked away. I let out heavy breaths, trying to calm myself. The guide simply giggled and told us it was time to go. I smiled and shakily followed her. Walking down the mountain, I reflected on the significance of these last two hours. Ascending, I had been filled with anxiety as I evaluated the situation's serious nature and I had prepared by diligently listening to the guide. However, no amount of preparation could have prepared me for the gorilla's approach; it required that I recognize a potential issue and deftly adapt. Amid the adrenaline I also felt a feeling of vague familiarity as I left. Combing through my memory it dawned on me that my gorilla experience paralleled my first encounter with illness; as I reminisced about a close friend's hardship, I had a realization.

Tim was diagnosed on a June Monday. At fourteen, I didn't know about viral meningitis except that it meant we couldn't carpool. And I surely didn't realize that my friend's immune system was busy fighting a virus in his brain, so when my mom said that he might be different when we visited, I was mostly unfazed. That all changed when I heard the virus had progressed, and Tim lost most of his reading ability. I was shaken; reading seemed so simple that its loss had to be a sign of true danger. Most of all, I was afraid I wouldn't be able to communicate with him, and that was not an option. We would not concede to his illness.

I began preparing myself for his possible conditions. Having heard that Hallmark calligraphy was difficult for him to read, I began making my own cards by writing childrens' jokes of varying complexity in large and simple handwriting on separate papers. I resolved that Tim would read the card himself, a minor victory over the virus assaulting his autonomy. However, for success, I would bring multiple cards, and assess, based off his state, which one to give him to read.

I entered the hospital and internally celebrated when I saw his eyes light up seeing he recognized me. Tim looked healthy in his oversized white gown, but his voice trembled as our stories and laughs filled the room. Every word appeared to require serious focus, but in spite of his physical illness, Tim's spirit had not faltered. And eventually, knowing I had to leave, I

handed him one of the cards. He took it, brow furrowed, and in the corner, I saw his mother stiffen. His words lurched out.

“If anyone needs an ark, I happen to Noah guy”

We dissolved into laughter at the corny gag as his mother wiped a tear from her eye. I hugged Tim and said goodbye. He would fully recover.

The start of a light Rwandan rain shook me from my flashback, but in that moment, I realized I had recognized something profound. I saw, in each experience, a shared method for handling such serious situations confidently. Visiting Tim, my goal was to offer back some autonomy and to do so I had to enter ready and react appropriately to his state, or the situation could backfire. Not until my gorilla experience did I see that the equation for success in both delicate experiences was the same—and that the same equation is employed by capable physicians as they recognize that each patient is worth time, the time spent preparing and in the effort of treating. And because the force driving me to medicine has always been more nebulous than a single moment, I lack one event after which I decided to practice medicine. I can, however, detail instances where I felt a profound calling, a vocation, to the profession. My hike unearthed an epiphany in one of those moments, a friend’s brush with illness. Never did I expect that my Rwandan adventure would provide insight on my interaction with Tim and show me a blueprint that I hope to use in my future as a physician.