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Medical Student

Under the bathroom sink: that's where it all started. Fifteen years ago a sign reading "Amy's Hospital" hung on two pink cabinet doors. As a kid, I spent hours under that sink carefully treating a collection of tattered teddy bears for their various "ailments." With sandwich bags for surgical gloves and a lunch box for a medical bag, I was hooked on a career in medicine from the beginning. Today, I am a medical student at Wake Forest University School of Medicine, and the most common question I get asked is, "So why the heck did you major in STATISTICS?"

Although I have always loved science and medicine, it wasn't until middle school that I discovered my love of math as well. In eighth grade my algebra teacher approached me about attending Mu Alpha Theta math competitions on the weekends. The idea of taking extra math tests for "fun" on Saturdays did not exactly win me over, but I went for it anyway. Mu Alpha Theta ended up being one of my favorite school time experiences: traveling with other students across Florida, I made new friends, gained confidence and learned how to challenge myself in different ways (plus, I learned tons of great card games on those long bus rides!)

In high school, my experiences with Mu Alpha Theta led me to tutor students in subjects ranging from algebra to calculus. I knew so many smart, hard-working students who struggled with math because they assumed they would not be able to understand the material and then panicked on the tests. Working with these students was very rewarding because I helped them to better understand the subject, alleviate their test anxiety, and most importantly, increase their self-confidence.

I graduated from Lake Brantley High School in 1996 and went on to pursue my education at the University of Florida. At that time, despite my growing interest in math, my goal to become a doctor was stronger than ever. I immediately declared a chemistry major because it seemed a more logical route to medical school. But during my sophomore year, after completing all of my premedical requirements (organic chemistry, biology, etc.), I started to miss my math classes and realized that the next two years would be my last chance to continue my mathematical education before medical school. So I decided to major in statistics, knowing that would allow me to apply my mathematical aptitude directly to medical research. Statistics are a vital part of medical research because all experimental findings for drug treatments, surgical treatments, etc., must be tested for their statistical significance so that doctors can determine whether the effects of a particular treatment are positive, negative or make any difference at all. While continuing my studies, I also spent two years doing research for the Vascular Surgery Division of the V.A. Hospital in Gainesville, Florida. My time at the V.A., combined with my education in statistics, formed a rich medical learning experience, including: attending weekly meetings in which new ideas for clinical and laboratory experiments are devised; seeing those experiments implemented; interacting with patients who suffer from the conditions being studied; and finally, analyzing data for trends in the applicable patient population using statistical computer programs such as SAS.

Last year when I began applying to medical schools, the fact that I majored in statistics was always a good conversation point in interviews and made me more unique as an applicant. I graduated from the University of Florida with a B.S. in statistics in the spring of 2000 and will graduate from Wake Forest University School of Medicine in 2004. I hope to pursue a career in dermatology and plan on using my background in statistics all along the way.