

Footwork and balance are critical in martial arts for a solid foundation on defense and for a successful attack. I learned this competing on the regional and state level in Tae Kwon Do (TKD) tournaments: the athletes that were bigger and stronger who lacked balance quickly fell apart in the ring. My father started my training and also taught me the importance of hard work, discipline, and concentration in my sport and in my life. He worked every day of the week at two different jobs, and the lessons that I've learned from his example have been priceless. While I'm no longer fighting competitively, I've applied these principles throughout my life and in my early medical career. My foundation has been my wife, family, and close friends. They have given me support when I've been too busy to be with them and have also been a welcome diversion. I've spent many weekends visiting Kimberly and working on our new house, renovating it. My parents keep me grounded and remind me of my culture. In my time at UVA I have seen that the most successful physicians were compassionate and dedicated to their patients, but they also had great balance in their lives. I believe that in this respect I compare with them.

I love the discipline and the commitment of sports; it's a lot like surgery. When I was training for TKD in high school, I often practiced alone and had to push myself to train while balancing a part time job life guarding and my active involvement with the Key Club, young republicans, and internship on the Hill with Senator John Warner. The demands pushed me to succeed, and I took second in the State championship in fighting and forms. I also received an invitation to practice at Colorado Springs and to compete on the national level. At William and Mary, I continued my TKD and also walked onto the varsity track team. This was a challenging time for me as I had to balance the rigors of a varsity sport, TKD, fraternity pledging, and my position as treasurer of Alpha Lambda Delta, a freshman honor society. Additionally, I participated intensely in intramural sports, winning IM football and weight lifting several years in a row. As my undergraduate career progressed, I focused more on my scholastics and remaining active in my fraternity as the philanthropy chairman. While athletics had formerly been my priority, it was now my form of meditation.

My interest in academics and research was nurtured during my 2 years before medical school, working in Dr. Antony Rosen's lab at Hopkins. Studying the biochemical mechanisms of apoptosis and its effect on inflammation and immunity in systemic lupus erythematosus, rheumatoid arthritis, and scleroderma gave me insight into the power and elegance of research. This sparked my interest in academic medicine. I read medical journals constantly, and I feel that learning how to read critically was the most important skill that I developed there. While working in the lab along with medical students and PhD's, I realized the importance of collaborative learning. Our policy in the lab was, "do one, see one, teach one," and because Dr. Rosen and I started the lab together I often taught the methodology of our system to the graduate and medical students. This sparked my interest in teaching. I took a graduate Biochemistry and Cell biology course to improve my understanding of the science, and this further fueled my desire to learn. By the end of my time there, I had been recognized in two papers and co-authored another, and I left with a passion to learn, the confidence to succeed, and the support of a good friend and mentor. I am returning in the winter to continue my research.

As a co-coordinator of the HIV/AIDS youth outreach program, I had the opportunity to speak to high school students about the temptation and dangers of unprotected sex. Connecting with the young adults and teaching them was the most satisfying experience of my pre-clinical years. During the third year, I discovered that I enjoyed talking to patients and learning about their lives and their illnesses. I learned the power of a kind word and a patient ear in the treatment of sick patients. I saw this on my surgical rotation and this reminded me of the reason that I went to medical school, compassion. It was this quality that drove me to work even harder for my patients.

I am looking forward to training in an academic general surgery program for several reasons. General surgery integrates commitment, physical ability, and medicine in a patient care environment that is both intense and extremely rewarding. The discipline also fosters teaching and mentorship. Furthermore, the importance of research in the assessment of surgical decision making and in innovating surgical technique appeals to me. I am optimistic that I will be able to contribute to a surgical training program in patient care, teaching, and research.