

Conversations on Jesuit Higher Education

Volume 49 *Jesuit Higher Education in a Global Context*

Article 11

February 2016

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Recommended Citation

da Silva, Pablo (2016) "Great Steps Forward Through Education: The Dream Fulfilled: From Undocumented to Med Student," *Conversations on Jesuit Higher Education*: Vol. 49, Article 11.
Available at: <http://epublications.marquette.edu/conversations/vol49/iss1/11>

Great Steps Forward Through Education

From a Refugee Camp to Le Moyne College

Amazing Professors, Great Mentors and Friends

By Zacharia Mohamed

I was born in Somalia, but I was raised by my sister in a refugee camp called Kakuma in Kenya. My family got separated during the war in Somalia when our village was attacked. My 10-year-old sister rescued me during the attack and escaped the country carrying me on her back. Years later I was told I was about 11 months old. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Nairobi sent us to the refugee camp. Growing up there, I saw early on the importance of health care and the dire need for it. I was lucky; growing up in the refugee camp I got sick only once, but other kids were not so lucky. Only one small clinic served most of the camp. I remember that sometimes it took days to get treatment. The small clinic was consistently crowded, lacked medications to treat patients, and most of the time did not have enough staff to meet patient demands.

By age 10, I wanted to go to school but could not while

in the refugee camp. My sister could not afford to send me to school. She was already working very hard to feed me and her infant son, so any extra money had to go towards food and clothes. For most people in the refugee camp, hope for a better life was sponsorship to another country. My sister, her son, and I were very fortunate get sponsorship to the U.S. from UNHCR and Catholic Charities. After a long series of interviews, we came to the United States in 2005. Coming to the U.S. has opened up a world of opportunities. I was able to learn English, attend school and learn to read and write. Learning English was an important achievement for me. Attending and graduating high school were also a major milestone because no one in my family had ever gone to high school or college.

I am currently a senior majoring in biology with a philosophy minor at Le Moyne College. I will be applying to medical schools. I have gained so much from attending Le Moyne, both

academically and personally. I have been surrounded by amazing and caring professors who go above and beyond for students. I have gained many great mentors and friends. I have been successful in college because of the supportive, caring, and nurturing environment that aims to educate the whole person. I have had hurdles to overcome while in college, the biggest one being balancing my education with taking care of my disabled sister and my two young nephews, 10 and 13 years old. Le Moyne College has given me the support, encouragement, and educa-

tion to get me closer to my dream of becoming a family doctor. After completing my medical school education and training, my goal is to practice medicine in the U.S. until I gain adequate experience and training to be able to work in refugee camps. This has been my long-term goal and dream since I was 10 years old.

Zacharia Mohamed is a senior at Le Moyne College majoring in biology with a philosophy minor. He is now the sole caregiver for his sister, who has become blind, and he is in the process of applying for medical school.

The Dream Fulfilled

From Undocumented to Medical Student

By Pablo da Silva

When I decided I wanted to go to medical school, I knew it would be a long road. The application process was very competitive; but more than that, my immigration status at the time raised issues. Medical schools would not accept students who were undocumented, in part because they did not qualify for federal loans and, there-

fore, had no way to meet the high costs of attending medical school. But more important, the schools feared that without a Social Security Number and a work permit, we would not be able to become practicing physicians after graduation.

With the advent of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), qualified undocumented students were granted a Social Security Number and a

renewable work permit but were still ineligible for federal loans. Shortly after the creation of the DACA program, Loyola University Chicago's Stritch School of Medicine became the first medical school in the country to openly declare such students eligible to apply. Furthermore, the school partnered with the Illinois Finance Authority (IFA) to create a loan program to help DACA students finance their education. Under the program, physicians who practice for several years in underserved areas in the State of Illinois after completion of their training will have the interest on their IFA loans forgiven.

A little over a year has passed since I was accepted to Stritch. Having completed my first year of medical school and already begun my second, I can say with confidence that I'm growing into the physician I want to become not only because of Loyola's commitment to social justice but also owing to the great education I'm receiving here. During the rigorous process of medical training, students oftentimes become overwhelmed by the sheer volume of information they have to learn and lose track of the idealism of serving others. I found that here at Loyola, that is not the case. The university does a great job at keeping its students grounded and places great emphasis on ensuring that students learn not only the scientific components of medicine but its humanistic aspect as well. I came to

Loyola because the Jesuits' belief in social justice, compassion, and service are values I share deeply and strive to live out in my personal life. I wanted to be reminded of them daily in my professional formation.

In my experience as a DACA student here at Stritch, not once have there been any unfortunate incidents or unpleasant comments regarding my immigration status. On the contrary, my classmates, along with the institution, have given me an incredible amount of support throughout my educational journey thus far. I'm blessed and grateful for the many opportunities I've received at Loyola. I know that "much is required from those to whom much is given." Thus, I have been awarded an Albert Schweitzer Fellowship that is enabling me to work to implement a pipeline program aimed at helping community college students become healthcare professionals. As expected, I have Loyola's full support.

As for the future, I plan to become a surgeon and practice medicine both here in the U.S. and abroad. I want to bring medical relief to areas beyond the boundaries set by politics, insurance plans, and personal interest, living a life of service dedicated to the "least of these," wherever they're found.

Pablo da Silva is a second-year medical student at Stritch School of Medicine at Loyola University, Chicago. He can be reached at pdasilva1@luc.edu.

From the Congo: Learning a New Language, New Customs Great Challenge, No Barrier

By Prisca Tshibambe

Three years ago, I left my home nation of the Democratic Republic of Congo to pursue a bachelor's degree in business administration. I was 18 years old, I spoke no English, and I had no family in the United States. I came to the United States to receive more than a better education. I came to find a better life. Arriving in the United States presented an exciting but daunting opportunity. An American education meant learning to speak, read, and write English. The challenge taught me much about persistence, hard work, and adaptability.

A Jesuit education was a tradition in the Catholic family into which I was born. Both my father and grandfather attended Jesuit schools, and it was an honor for my parents to perpetuate this tradition through me. At first, a Jesuit education meant nothing more to me than any other education. During my three and a half years in college, I learned a lot about the Jesuits and their accomplishments in the world, but it was only after attending a campus ministry retreat that a Jesuit education started to

mean a lot to me. I received not only an intellectual but also a spiritual education, which is not something a lot of graduates can brag about in today's world.

While I made a lot of progress with my English, I had not adapted yet. I became very quiet, shy, and unconfident. I was afraid that the students and the teachers would not be able to understand my English or, worse, would make fun of me. I started to withdraw and talked less. During my first semester, I did not actively participate in my classes for fear of embarrassment. Back home, you are expected to speak French perfectly, and when you mispronounce a word or use the wrong article everyone laughs at you. But in Wheeling it was different. I had supportive friends who would teach me to pronounce some words. In French the H is silent at the beginning of the word while the H is pronounced in English. It took me two years of practice and a patient friend to master this skill.

I also had to learn new social customs: back home, we kiss twice on the cheeks to greet friends, and we give a handshake to our elders. In the U.S.A., we hug among