

Personal Statement

The resilience of the human spirit has always awed and inspired me. This was especially true several years ago, when I visited my father who was living in Thailand. To introduce me to this new place, he hired a boat to take us down the river to the market. Our boat cut through the brown muck of the river, and I looked at the stilted shacks lining its banks. Most were smaller than my modest closet at home; all opened into the same pea soup water. I watched as the river inhabitants bathed, drank, and excreted into its waters (causing me momentary concern at the large amount of water that I had allowed to splash in my mouth). As we continued down the river, I saw extreme levels of poverty, the kind you might see between the pages of National Geographic but would never expect to encounter in this life. My heart sank; these were real people and this was their plight. As sadness began to fill me, a flash of color caught my eye from the riverbank. A boy, no older than 5 or 6, was dressed in the bright orange robes of a Thai monk. As I watched, he ran down the dock laughing and leapt high into the air, showing his excitement for some childhood pursuit. A moment later he was out of sight, but he remains frozen in my mind, a streak of exuberant orange in mid-air.

When I began my psychiatry rotation as a third year student, I once again encountered this strength of spirit. I quickly realized that each of my patients had an interesting story to tell, and a need for personal interaction and compassion. As I worked to fulfill their needs, I grew close to many of the patients on the unit, and spent as much time talking to each as my preceptor would allow. I longed to know more about these people, and to understand their illness and the impact it had on their lives. I found myself walking to my car rather late every evening, but always with a smile on my face. I had never before found a workplace that I enjoyed so much. Where once I thought that the tragedies of others would bring me sadness, I found working with these patients brought me joy. I have wondered many times at this apparent contradiction, and have come to conclude that working with the mentally ill is inspiring to me. I am awed by the incredible resilience that so many of my patients have shown. I have had patients describe to me a lifetime of unbelievable tragedy, and yet in the same conversation they describe their capacity for love. People continue to forge on and search for joy in their lives despite astounding odds, and this is what moves me.

In my undergraduate years, I pursued a minor in anthropology. I was fascinated with the roots of mankind, and especially fascinated with the evolution of the human psyche. In my biosocial anthropology classes, I was astounded to learn how many of our emotional responses are simply instinct, evolved over millions of years to perpetuate survival. I now find myself drawn to a profession involving human thought and behavior, and it is no surprise that psychiatry is the perfect match for me. I love to interact with people. I enjoy talking with people and counseling them. There are few physical ailments that can rival the devastation that psychiatric illness can have on a person's life. I am continually impressed by the vast improvement in quality of life and level of functioning possible with modern psychiatric pharmaceuticals.

I want to help people lead productive and happy lives, and I feel the best way to do this is through psychiatry. My ideal residency program will have an emphasis on psychotherapy and behavioral therapy in addition to the standard biological curriculum; I

love psychotherapy and feel that it is a learned skill that too many programs ignore. It will have fellowship opportunities that allow me to investigate my interest in child psychiatry. Most importantly, I seek a residency program that will mirror my passion and provide opportunity and flexibility. I seek to treat each patient I see with compassion and empathy, but my strongest asset is probably my sense of humor. Where some will react to a difficult patient with anger and frustration, I can react with humor. I've tried to bring a little bit of laughter and fun to every workplace I've been in, and I hope to find colleagues who can do the same. I am extremely excited to be involved in such an exciting and constantly evolving profession, and I look forward to beginning a career in psychiatry.

Excellent!