

Finding My Niche by [REDACTED]

It is June 18th, 2015 in Bình Phước, Vietnam and my seventeenth day of clinic has just begun. Dr. [REDACTED], the founder of our medical mission and lead doctor, has called for me to carry a disabled individual into the clinic for treatment. I swiftly run outside in the 98-degree tropical weather to a woman, carry her fireman style into the clinic, and gently place her on the treatment bed.

As I take a moment to examine the patient, I realize that she is around my age. She gazes into my eyes with urgency, and immediately I feel a personal connection; a personal connection with a peer who has been through more than I can imagine. Snapping back into my professional demeanor, I now notice that my patient has been diagnosed with extreme polio. I could not help but think how truly blessed I was to be here.

I enrolled into [REDACTED] as an eighteen-year-old boy interested in Biomedical Engineering and eager to pursue my dreams of being a collegiate National Championship wrestler. During my freshman year, all signs pointed to the accomplishment of this goal, as I placed 5th at the National Collegiate Wrestling Association National Championships and was the highest placing freshman in [REDACTED] history. As a sophomore, I started the year as the top ranked wrestler in the nation with my eyes set on achieving the first national championship in program history. Feeling invincible, I was rudely awakened with the knowledge that every Achilles has their Achilles heel, and mine was my right shoulder. After five shoulder dislocations, I decided to have surgery and reluctantly hang up my wrestling career.

I replaced my previous zeal for wrestling with a drive to become a leader amongst my peers. I was recommended to become a [REDACTED] Ambassador, a highly honorable leadership position usually reserved for upperclassmen that represents the student body to the surrounding community. After a rigorous application and interview process, I was chosen to represent my peers...but this was just the beginning. I followed that up by becoming my Class President, being selected as one of five Biomedical Engineers at our school chosen to research with Dr. [REDACTED], and various other academic and leadership credentials.

These opportunities at [REDACTED] reminded me that I was a trailblazer without athletic endeavors. I now realize that I am a person with a passion, but now that passion has been molded into and redirected towards something else even more impactful than my individual pursuits. I now pursue my old passion by coaching wrestling at a local high school and acting as a mentor to the next generation of wrestlers. Now my dream has transferred to becoming a lower limb orthopedic surgeon, and one day, a medical Professor.

Snapping back into reality, I now find myself carrying the patient out of the clinic to her mother as a translator approaches. The translator informs me that this family barely has enough means to survive. I feel the pockets of my scrubs and find 200,000 Dong or the equivalent of \$10.00 that I planned on spending later in the day on a scoop of strawberry ice cream. Quickly handing it to the patient, her mother gives me a kiss on both cheeks and screams "Còm On!" or thank you repetitively as they ride off in the distance on their Moped. Barely being able to contain myself, I walk back into clinic and soak in everything around me. Sitting down on the patient bed I whisper to myself, "I have found my niche in the medical field."