

Every individual has a unique journey to medicine, so what exactly qualifies my journey as one that is often deemed nontraditional? Is it because I am a 24-year-old African American male? Is it because I have a degree in [REDACTED] engineering? Or is it my Master's degree in [REDACTED]? Whether it is one of these factors or a combination of them, history has shown that nontraditional individuals are essential to influencing positive change. With that, I believe my own unconventional journey has undeniably shaped my passion for medicine and all the nontraditional things that it entails.

My journey began with my brother, [REDACTED], being born at [REDACTED] hospital in [REDACTED] on [REDACTED], 1991. Following his birth, my mother was rushed to the operating room. Her womb started collapsing endangering the life of the second child. After performing an emergency Cesarean section, the doctors sadly reported that the [REDACTED]'s twin possibly suffered some brain damage due to a prolonged lack of oxygen. Fearing the worst, the OB/GYN introduced me, the baby, to my father. Seconds later, while my father was leaning over me to evaluate his newborn son, his shirt was sprinkled by a small yellow liquid projection. My father said, at that moment, he knew that I would be just fine; and I am. Medicine saved me. However, this was only one of two near death experiences I have encountered in my life.

The second occurred nineteen years later, when I was studying in the library at the University of [REDACTED]. I received a text from my [REDACTED] brother, [REDACTED], saying "... I love you... but life is too hard, and I can't do this anymore. I'm sorry." My heart dropped so far that it felt as if it fell through a chute and out of my body. The thought of losing my twin brother filled me with a sense of helplessness. He wasn't just my brother but also my best friend. For a split second though, I realized that this wasn't about me. His text meant that he was reaching out and that there was a good chance that he was still alive at that moment. Knowing that he was in [REDACTED] and possibly nearby, I frantically called his phone so many times that I lost count. He eventually texted me saying that he was at an overpass about fifteen blocks from me. I barely remember running full speed out of library towards the bridge. When I arrived at the bridge, I didn't see him. I slowly walked up to the rail and reluctantly looked down the thousands of feet below... I still did not see him. With a glimmer of hope, I immediately scanned the area and, to my indescribable relief, I saw him sitting dejected in his red 2001 Mustang coupe.

Immediately following, our family sought to find the cause of my brother's scare. [REDACTED] and I played soccer at a very competitive level from the age of four through our high school years. [REDACTED] elected to continue to play soccer in college. Unfortunately, he suffered a major concussion during a game in his sophomore year and it was his third major concussion in as many years. It was a blow in every sense of the word. Not only did [REDACTED] have to give up his hard earned starting position, but the doctors also insisted that he stop playing soccer competitively all together. At the time, he was in [REDACTED] being monitored for new prescription intended to remedy his concussive symptoms. Medical professionals informed my family a few days later

that the prescribed medication was the cause of my brother's suicidal thoughts; it amplified his clinically diagnosed depression. My brother almost fell victim to a medical oversight.

The threat of losing my twin brother stirred me. Medicine saved my life at birth, however it nearly took the life of my loved one. These experiences revealed that medicine is an imperfect science. As opposed to resenting the field, I was ironically drawn to it. I proactively worked towards a career where I could directly affect the lives of others, specifically helping individuals who are, similar to my brother, suffering from injuries. As a [REDACTED] engineer at [REDACTED], I am part of a team that strives to improve the lives of people with disabilities. We provide rehabilitative interventions to individuals who have suffered spinal cord injuries via state-of-the-art medical devices, such as robotic exoskeletons. While our practices present many benefits, there are also many associated risks. Some of the risks include falls, bone fractures, and skin breakdowns that can, in turn, lead to more serious issues. Therefore, prior to any rehabilitative interventions, we perform a series of examinations to ensure the well-being of the patients. I am devoted to every aspect of my work because I know that families are entrusting me and my colleagues with the health of their loved ones. I treat each patient as if it is my brother sitting in front of me.

Medical school is the next step of my journey. The integration of my education, professional experiences and personal experiences has equipped me to enter medical school with an unrelenting purpose. I am a [REDACTED] brother, an African American male, a Bioengineer, a [REDACTED] biologist, and more. Most importantly, I represent positive change and I will make it happen the way I know best – nontraditionally.