

FRANCISCA WALDEN

My interest in healthcare began at an incredibly early age when I would tease my older brother about his future career as a nurse and mine as a Doctor. I barely knew what my body parts were called but the one thing I knew for sure was that I was going to become a Doctor. This passion for medicine could have been influenced by my mother's nursing career or by the fact that African households have only two career options: Doctor or Lawyer. However, all my experiences as an adult have only solidified this passion and even when I could barely afford to eat or find a place to live, I held on to it with everything in me.

I got to experience an amazing recovery of a leg ulcer when I was about 12 years old living in Ghana. A friend in my neighborhood had suddenly developed a big wound in his leg which had eaten through the leg muscle that you could see his tibia and fibula. He could not walk and was constantly in pain, so his parents brought him to my mother's home clinic and over the course of a year and some change I saw for myself not only the power of medicine but also the body's incredible ability to heal and repair itself. The leg got healed and with some physical therapy, the boy was able to walk again. I did not understand the scientific aspect of this process and I do not remember what medications or drugs were used but I do remember them coming everyday for a dressing change and me seeing the muscle tissue grow slowly as the weeks went by. I knew then that I wanted to learn everything about the body so I could also help to heal someone that way, and that is exactly what I did.

I would come to experience many challenges including the loss of my mother and having to stop going to college for many years due to lack of finances but the jobs I took in between those years would have a significant impact on my resolve to become a Doctor. I became a Home Health Aide at age 21 when I was out of college and had the opportunity to work with a 95-year-old woman. At first, I thought she would be bedridden due to her age as I had experienced with most people her age but to my surprise, she was completely mobile, went out with her friends and lived a completely healthy life unlike the other people I worked with. I thought that this was due to her genetics but as I worked with her over the months, I noticed that she eats a healthy diet, takes vitamin supplements, and exercises regularly even at her age. My observations of her lifestyle and conversations with her proved to me that body has an incredible potential to stay strong for an exceedingly long time if given the right tools and resources.

After my mother's passing at age 24, I joined the US Navy as a Hospital Corpsman and got to work in the Emergency Room for two years. One day, a young man came in with a supraventricular tachycardia and this was my first time seeing any kind of cardiac emergency. I was lost in the rush of everything and did not know how to help so I stood aside and decided to be a runner to get everything they asked for. The nurse I was working with told me the patient would get cardioverted and to get the defibrillator pads ready. However, after everything was set up, the Attending Physician said he was going to try something called a Valsalva maneuver. I thought it was going to be a complicated procedure but to my surprise, he asked the patient to blow into a 10ml syringe and we had to lift his legs and lay him on his back simultaneously right after he was done blowing into the syringe. I saw the heart rate drop slowly to normal in a matter of minutes. My mind was completely blown as I had never learned or heard about this before that day and my interest in medicine reached a new peak that day.

I am now 26 years old working with the marine corps as a hospital corpsman still and about to finally graduate with a bachelor's degree. My journey may have been a long and challenging

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one, but I have learned and experienced so many things that make me excited about becoming a Doctor and I will continue to enjoy these learning experiences until I finally get there.