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What would I sacrifice for the greater good of my country?

There was a time when I saw moving every few years with my military family as in some way, sacrifice. I rarely saw the opportunities these moves afforded me choosing only to see the inconvenience of leaving behind good friends. When we moved from Germany to Maryland between my first two years of high school, I was convinced my sacrifice could be no greater. It took one visit to the National Naval Medical Center in Bethesda, Maryland to change my perspective helping me to better appreciate what sacrifice truly meant.

It was August 2008 and my parents accompanied me to my annual sports physical. Never before was I a patient in such a large hospital and contrary to the mood I presented was impressed, particularly with the helicopter that landed shortly after we arrived. While I thought it "cool", my dad, recently deployed to Afghanistan, had a different perspective. Observing the patient being transported into the hospital, he pointed out the line of Marines who were assembled, all saluting. My dad shared that the patient was likely wounded in battle, and that if he was flown in by helicopter, his wounds were serious. Here I was, 14 years old focused on my own selfish inconveniences, while a few yards away, a young Marine was fighting for his life.

Since that day more than two years ago, my understanding of sacrifice has evolved. I've spent many hours at the hospital as a Red Cross volunteer getting to know wounded warriors and their families. They were always grateful for my support and very interested in discussing with me my goals. I recall once speaking about how I "sacrificed" a social life for good grades and athletic glory. All the while the veteran I spoke with smiled that smile of higher understanding never once reminding me that his sacrifices were already far greater than mine.

In my town, it is not uncommon to see neighbors overlooking their civic responsibilities for personal pursuits. Our community is affluent and many have comforts few Americans will ever appreciate. My parents always conveyed to my brother and me that service to our country should always supersede the pursuit of purely monetary reward. Their Air Force careers never made them wealthy, but seeing the look in their eyes whenever the National Anthem was played at my volleyball matches always affirmed in me an appreciation for their sacrifices and those of others in our nation who, like them, have served.

I have always known that defending our country is a responsibility all Americans should be willing to accept for the privilege of living in a free country. I too am willing to make this sacrifice for the greater good. However, I have always known that my call to serve is to complete medical school. Becoming a physician will require me to dedicate more than twelve years of my life. America needs dedicated physicians. Becoming one is how I plan to sacrifice for the greater good of my country.