

My dream of qualifying for the Olympic equestrian sport of three-day eventing is vividly illustrated by the walls of my room. The yellowed newspaper clippings and posters of many famous riders and their horses have covered the walls for years now, hiding the bright turquoise paint that is underneath. I began riding thirteen years ago, and have dreamed about competing at the Olympics for nearly as long. All those years ago, I rode my horse each day with the solid purpose of becoming good enough to be selected for the Olympic equestrian team.

Through my involvement in The United States Pony Clubs, I was provided with the tools necessary to help me achieve my dream. I learned the fundamentals of English riding, attended national clinics where I improved upon my riding, and qualified for several Pony Club National Championships. Knowledge of horse health care and barn management was essential; therefore, I learned all of the systems of the horse, various medications and how to administer them, and signs and symptoms of diseases of the horse. I found the study of veterinary medicine fascinating, and in the back of my mind I thought that if I did not qualify for the Olympics, I would possibly be satisfied with veterinary medicine.

Then in high school, I began working in my father's orthopedic office where I was exposed to human medicine. At first I was intimidated by the new experience since I was unsure of how to respond to the patients and my coworkers. However, I found that I enjoyed interacting with people and helping them, although early on the only way I could help people was to direct them to the nearest bathroom. Gradually, I developed a burning desire to help people in the field of medicine. My involvement in Pony Club helped fuel this aspiration because I found it fulfilling to see the Pony Club kids I taught understand riding and horse care topics I explained to them. Since then, I have felt compelled to be of service to people. As I branched out and ventured into new experiences, I found confidence in myself, a confidence that grew out of my rule for life.

My rule for life is that everyday I try to do one thing that I think is hard to do. "Hard to do" can be virtually anything. Hard could be getting down on my knees to pray before I go to bed. Hard could be yesterday, when I finally sucked up all my nerve and when out to the local park to meet my running group for the first time at 7 am. We are training to run a half marathon in September to benefit The Leukemia and Lymphoma

Society, and even though I knew I was running for a good cause, I was nervous that I would not be able to keep up with the group or run the entire distance. Hard could also be what I am doing right now, writing this personal statement as part of my desire to go to medical school.

The interesting thing that I have noticed is that I seem to be finding more opportunities everyday where I can apply my “hard to do” rule. As I find more situations to apply my rule to, I find myself stretching beyond my comfort level. I find my hard to do rule applies to every area of my life, even to the inevitable failure. Life is interesting, because when I wake up in the morning, I never know what challenges I might face that day. I have tried so many new things due only to the fact that I viewed them as challenges.

My research on articular cartilage has been a challenge, yet also an incredible experience. I have had the chance to work with two doctors at the local Veteran’s Administration Hospital who are researching a possible surgery option for patients afflicted with osteoarthritis. Reading the papers published by other researchers and combining their results to formulate my own hypotheses is fascinating. I find it exciting to build on the knowledge of researchers who have come before me. My research initially sought to prove or disprove a theory of articular cartilage structure, which was first formulated in 1929. My research advisor and I ran into some problems and needed to change our approach to the project. I am now researching the articular cartilage of animals commonly used in cartilage research projects. I was careful to modify my research so that my results could still be useful to other researchers who are exploring new treatments for osteoarthritis. I saw many patients suffering from the disease while I was working in my father’s office, and I hope I can make a contribution to the research being performed to find a cure.

One never knows what surprises life has hidden around the corner. Life is full of challenges and one can choose to be defeated by them, or one can choose to rise up and take on the obstacles. I named my first horse “Aspiring Heights”, since the name seemed appropriate to my attitude on life. I always try to aspire to reach the highest heights possible no matter what the challenges. In retrospect, it appears that I developed my

hard-edged determination when I was young, when the posters on my wall encouraged me to seek out my dreams.