

Summer Internship Personal Essay

I had been volunteering at Albert Einstein Medical Center for about three weeks and had grown comfortable with the environment. The doctors I worked for treated me with interest and respect and I was fortunate enough to listen in on many of their medical discussions. But for all that I was learning my greatest lesson came one afternoon when we returned from lunch to utter chaos: everything was in motion and everyone seemed to be running frantically through the emergency room.

Confused, I asked one of the doctors what was going on. All I could process were a barrage of red lights and a cacophony of shouts and commands. A patient had been robbed and suffered a gunshot wound to his brain. The doctor standing beside me, the man I had just seen finish a turkey club at lunch, was going to perform the surgery and attempt to save this man's life. It was surreal to witness the sudden transformation of a mundane reality into the most consequential scene of my young life.

I had never seen this doctor appear so uneasy. He was pale, sweating, and had a look on his face that could not mask his fear. I had always seen him as confident and self-assured, but in that moment he was human – fragile and uncertain. I watched the doors to the OR swing closed behind him. As night approached, I went home to my family and friends, anxious but sure everything would work out.

I remember thinking at the time about moments in my life when I was forced to perform under pressure. Images of the ballet recital when I was eight and left the stage in tears floated through my mind. Somehow I found it hard to believe that my relatives still carried around any disappointment about the whole thing, considering I continued dancing long after and they got the chance to see me perform probably more times than they could have ever wanted to. I thought about those figure skating competitions when all eyes were glued on me, but competition never scared me; in fact, it pushed me to do even better. My speeches for student government, important exams - nothing I had ever done could even come close to the kind of drama of that day.

When I returned the next morning, it was business as usual at the hospital. Naively I thought the doctor must have rescued the man from the brink of death, like they so often did on TV, but he didn't. The patient died on the operating table. I was stunned. I never even knew the patient and yet I felt like somehow I had failed him. It was ridiculous, although I couldn't help but think that here was some significant moment in my life and instead discovering a storybook ending, I found a cruel reality.

I walked aimlessly down the hallway until an elderly woman tapped me on the shoulder. "You remind me of my granddaughter." There it was, plain and simple. I had been pondering what exactly I had learned from an experience that was so obviously important, but seemed to offer no clear, understandable "lesson" for me. I first met the woman at the beginning of the summer in the nephrology unit, and we had spoken several times since. "All I want to do is see her graduate," she continued. The patient had opened up to me before, though I had never fully appreciated until right then exactly what she had been telling me.

Some lessons are learned in the classroom and some are not; some are easy to see and some are not. It took a dramatic moment in the ER to make me pay attention to a seemingly trivial moment in the hallway. I realized the big epiphany I was searching for

was actually an illusion. What I had been doing all along in my life was more important than this dramatic life and death moment. Those performances and those speeches are what define me – as a student, as a daughter, as a granddaughter. I am the sum of my experiences, not the girl in the background of someone else's final hours.

I honestly believed my college essay was supposed to be the story of some brilliant triumph, some larger than life moment when I could show off my skills or insight. I now recognize that life isn't really about those fleeting experiences; it is what we do before or after that makes us who we are. The memories we carry around may be small, but they are precious and, at just the right time, they can be exactly what we need to get us through the day.