Sample Personal Statement #2

I spent my holiday visits home from college watching my mother care for her dying father. My grandfather suffered from Parkinson's. While his mental faculties remained intact, the rigidity with which he moved during the simplest task left a lasting impression on me. These visits were admittedly marked with a sense of dread as I was forced to confront the struggles of aging and dying. The frailty of the human body so starkly apparent in my grandfather, I repeatedly questioned how there was not more we could do to preserve or restore neurological function as our bodies grow old. None of these things seemed to unnerve my mother. I watched her care for my grandfather with ease, showing no expression other than one of confidence, or perhaps, acceptance.

Inspired by grandfather's struggle against neurodegenerative disease, neuroscience is what ultimately brought me to medicine. My academic studies, however, did not immediately direct me to become a physician. After graduating with degrees in math and economics, I worked as a researcher and programmer at a public policy research firm. I managed and analyzed data for health and education organizations such as Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services. While I knew I contributed to important work, I wanted to do more to tangibly help people and impact health. I wanted to do something that I truly loved. I resolved to pursue medicine, enrolling in a post-baccalaureate pre-med program at American University while continuing to work full-time. Resuming school while working full-time was daunting, but I was motivated by the prospect of applying my training and experience in public policy to advance patient care.

As a medical student, my work quickly started to revolve around neuroscience and neurosurgery. I spent the summer after my first year working in an epilepsy lab, where I wrote code for computational models of neural networks in order to understand how seizures propagate. This was an opportunity to apply the quantitative and analytic skills that I had developed in my previous work experience. Following the completion of my third year, I took a year off from medical school to expand my investigative career in neurosurgery. During this time, I initiated and contributed to several projects with my mentor, Dr. Sandi Lam. We used large administrative databases to investigate clinical neurosurgery questions that were otherwise difficult and expensive to study in individual, smaller institutions. For example, we analyzed national data from an insurance claims database to study predictors of success for endoscopic third ventriculostomy in children with hydrocephalus. Using another database, we published a study examining risk factors for venous thromboembolism in children with traumatic brain injury.

These experiences have culminated in a love for neurosurgery. The direct application of technical skills to alleviate neurological impairment has great personal and academic appeal for me. As my grandfather so clearly embodied, the nervous system enables the body's most basic functions as well as the complex behavior that define us as individuals. I was struck by the impact I could have as a neurosurgeon in helping patients retain their identity and independence. I am also aware that operations of this order have extremely high stakes and require a lifelong commitment to training and honing one's craft. I cannot imagine spending my life doing anything else. I offer a deep analytical foundation and intend to build on this throughout my career, in the operating room and through healthcare outcomes research.