

### Unprecedented Affair

It was Friday afternoon in Chicagoland, a year after my graduation from St. Olaf, when I got the most exciting phone call of my life. "You've been accepted to the D.O. Class of 2001," an admissions official from California said. My brother, mother, and I spent the next two days driving across the country with a moving truck. No sacrifice was big enough to dilute my excitement, energy, and happy anticipation. For many years I had been almost exclusively focused on accomplishing this goal, and all the hard work and discipline was starting to show results.

I studied my way through the first semester and enjoyed every day of it, I was proud to succeed in the anatomy class which several students were failing. That meant they could expect a summer at school retaking the class. I, on the other hand, was already thinking about the offering my brother had made: to use his frequent flyer miles and spend the summer in my birth country, Argentina. Upon the end of second semester, I was convinced I needed a well-deserved vacation. I was mentally exhausted, and tired of being on constant duty mode since I had moved to the U.S. eight years earlier.

As much as I rejoiced with friends and family all summer, I was very enthusiastic about starting my third semester as a T.A. for the Class of 2002. However, my passionate dream was trampled when the Immigrations official denied my student visa. After the initial shock passed, reality struck me like a tsunami traveling across a vehement ocean. My return date to the U.S. was uncertain, I lost my chair in the D.O. Class of 2001, and I was far away from my immediate family. Unaware that I was embarking on a life-changing journey, I spent the next five years fending for my overall well-being. I quickly realized I had grown unused to the insecurities Argentinean citizens endure every day.

It has now been four years since I returned to the United States, and I can clearly reflect on the profound impact those seemingly uneventful years had on my thoughts and feelings. Abruptly and unexpectedly, life as I knew it vanished leaving me stripped of every possession, aspiration, dream, and hope. Unmistakably, though, one trait always persevered in me: my spirit. At extremely bleak times, I consoled myself by understanding that nobody could take away who I was inside: my knowledge, values, morals, and resolve. Having more spare time than I truly desired, one question persisted in my mind: What is the living force of my being?

The answer to that question gradually took form over the years. Before my misfortune, becoming a doctor ruled my world. Today, I feel privileged to have had the opportunity to become a wiser person and awaken to the belief that strong, loving personal relationships are paramount to my sense of purpose in life.