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“They say the best surgeons are trained, not born”. This profound sentiment forms the foundation of my pursuit for a career in acute care surgery.

Reflecting on my early years, there were no visions of stethoscopes and surgical scrubs dominating my childhood dreams. My aspirations, like those of many kids, lacked clarity. I had an unrefined desire to mend things, possibly even people, but the specific path to achieving this ambition was not quite mapped out.

My journey into the world of medicine was not a linear one. It was, instead, a winding road marked by self-discovery and growth. Drawn in by my fascination for the complexity of life and the beauty of science, I pursued a degree in Biology. However, during my academic journey, I quickly became aware of the differences that set me apart from my peers. The discouragement borne out of this realization led me to choose another path—working in preventive medicine for US Army hospitals.

Imagine the transformative setting of Army boot camp, where potential evolves into mastery. Here, in this demanding environment, discipline is ingrained into your core—stringent routines, precise orders, and the synchronization of a team. In confronting strenuous physical demands and mental pressures, resilience emerges. When transferred to the realm of surgery, surgeons pilot through the unpredictability of the operating room, unexpected complications, and the emotional burden of challenging patient dialogues.

In the operating room, surgeons are often required to push past the barrier of exhaustion. From the meticulous quest to perfect their craft, the stamina required to stay the course during surgical procedures to the persistent need of knowledge due to the evolving world of science, the backbone of an acute care surgeon is developed—these values are the pillar of the surgeon’s ethos. They are assets carved out through relentless training, challenges, and experiences.

The army experience was enriching and rewarding, but it simultaneously amplified my yearning for a more direct, hands-on role in the healthcare system. I desired a position where I could exercise greater influence and have a more meaningful impact on patients’ lives. This longing for a more direct role in patient care reached a peak with the birth of my daughter in 2018, when I needed someone to advocate for me. This pivotal moment impelled me to become the role model that I once needed, propelling me toward my dream with a newfound sense of courage and determination—the dream of donning the white coat and joining the esteemed ranks of medical practitioners.

My third year of medical school marked the beginning of my passion for acute care surgery. I recall the captivation I felt during my first surgery, a sigmoidectomy due to sigmoid volvulus. Next was the exploratory laparotomy where I watched the surgeon systematically examine each organ reminding me how intricate the human body can be. But the real magic emerged in the recovery phase—the remarkable healing progression in patients, their transition from critically ill to thriving. These were not mere operations; they were defining moments in my life.

Acute care surgery is a detail-rich field that fascinates me, offering a chance to explore the full scope of medical practice. It allows the opportunity to prevent, treat, and manage illness even in critical moments, giving patients renewed life opportunities—a privilege I am excited to seize. As an acute care surgeon, one leads and mentors a healthcare team, striving for a unified goal: bettering patient lives. The constant evolution of this field, requiring adaptation and contribution to its advancing knowledge, enhances its appeal.

While I am intrigued by the rewards and challenges inherent in acute care surgery, I am also aware of the prevailing biases that exist against women in this field. The current narrative often implies that a woman cannot effectively balance the roles of a surgeon, wife, and mother. I stand resolute in my determination to debunk this myth.

Growing up as an African-American woman in a small town, I faced a scarcity of role models in medicine. Nevertheless, this did not deter me from carving out my path. Drawing parallels from my time in the army—where I transitioned from a novice individual to a trained soldier—I am confident that training can empower individuals to transcend their limitations. I strive to convey this message to other women aspiring to pursue surgical specialties, to assure them that it is indeed possible to have a rewarding career while maintaining a rich personal life.

Medical school, like life, is molding me to be the best version of myself. It is endowing me with qualities—resilience, commitment, passion—that are instrumental in my journey and are critical attributes for an acute care surgeon. Every step, every experience, and every hurdle is shaping me, honing my skills and enriching my character, preparing me to fulfill my dream.

My goal extends beyond personal accomplishments. I aspire to become a role model, to inspire future generations of diverse, talented individuals. I aim to show them that they too can break barriers, envision themselves in white coats and surgical scrubs, and enrich the field of medicine with their unique perspectives and

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contributions. As I strive toward this goal, I am reminded once again of the wisdom encapsulated in this statement: ‘The best surgeons are trained, not born’.

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