The marble book ends weighed heavy in my carry-on as I made my way to the car for a summer visit to Boston, Massachusetts. It’s a running joke in my family that whenever I travel, I have to remember to take my 5 pound, horse-shaped, marble bookends. Admittedly, I regretted my decision to take them as soon as I realized that much to my convincing, albeit slightly annoying pleas, my mother was not going to hold my carry-on for me.

So there I was at the tender age of nine, begrudgingly lugging 10 extra pounds down the terminal onto the plane. This memory would not be the last in my life where I can freely admit, I should have erred on side of caution instead of choosing to go my own route and causing myself more grief than originally planned. At the time however, I didn’t realize that this resolve would be the stronghold that would drive me into a space where I would achieve things that had yet to be achieved in my family, such as attending and graduating from college.

I do not consider my academic career to be a conventional one. It is marred with doubt, distractions and even sometimes fear. I allowed myself to believe that because I was not born into an environment that fostered education and promoted higher learning, that I was somehow going against the grain, or dare I say, against fate, especially if I strived for things that were much bigger than my current circumstances. I was worried of how my dreams and goals might inconvenience my family, monetarily and otherwise. It has taken me years to realize that my capabilities are my own to develop and not contingent on whether my parents, or even grandparents graduated from college. Allowing myself to believe that I could not only achieve but persevere past my hardships, was a hard fought lesson to learn.

Now you may be asking yourself, how does this all relate to a career in medicine? In my limited experience I’ve found that the most successful people are those that have persevered and kept preserving no matter the obstacles. When I began college I knew that I wanted to work in a field where I could achieve things bigger than myself. So I went for the gusto. Once I started on this trajectory, it was without a doubt laced with some of the most challenging hurdles. I struggled in some of my science courses but kept my eye on the prize because as I began to immerse myself in the field, I was overcome with a sense of harmoniousness that I had yet to experience up until that point. Shadowing in the ER and cardiac unit as well as working in the hospital as a pharmacy technician, exposed me to what some might say is cliché in terms of wanting to be a doctor, still it never ceased to amaze me how the healing facilities of one human being can have such a profound, positive influence on another.

It became increasingly apparent to me that becoming a doctor would not only help to express my innate ability to heal and care for others, but it would reward me with an overwhelming feeling of pride and accomplishment. While working the overnight shift as a pharmacy technician in the OR, I witnessed some truly horrific things. I watched victims of drunk driving accidents fight to save their lives and patients with heart problems in need of life saving intervention. The physicians always remained steadfast in their skill and confidence to administer the proper techniques in order to save the ailing life. I always found their calm composure to be their most uniquely heroic trait. The steady hand of doctor to suture a busted chin or splint a tibia fracture in my opinion is an invaluable strength.

But it wasn’t just the technical, skill-orientated facet of medicine or the compassion

that lured me to the field, it was the knowledge that I was acquiring in the midst of my studies. If I had to admit one thing that enticed me more than medicine, I would have to say it is the acquiring of knowledge. I was given the opportunity to explore this by participating in research alongside a PhD candidate at the Nano Science Center in Central Florida, I was able to assist in the creation of Nano particles whose characteristics would be studied and possibly implemented in cancer research for a potential foundational basis of topical cancer medication.

Additionally, I worked alongside my medical sociology professor Dr. Sikorska and co-authored a study that investigated the presence or lack thereof, of palliative care education in U.S. medical schools. Not only was I able to present our findings at a conference in New Orleans, Louisiana, I was able to observe the scientific process up close. As it pertains to the research itself, of the 41 schools surveyed, 37 (26%) had an organization unit devoted to palliative care. This small fact speaks volumes to the needs within our medical community. The caring of the terminally ill is an important responsibility for any physician and the research I was able to conduct has given me discerning perspective that I will safeguard through my career in the medical field.

Whether it was working alongside the emergency medicine doctors in the ER and witnessing firsthand how they brought someone back from the brink of death, or even watching a surgeon at 4am in the OR save someone’s leg from a horrific car accident. It was these court side seats that gave me the courage to keep trying day in and day out and whenever the burden became too heavy to bare, I thought back to that girl, who against vehement pleas of her parents still decided

that the beautifully carved, beige marble bookends were an essential carry-on item but more importantly, I thought back to the fact that my perseverance and dedication are unyielding.