

Personal Statement

I had atopic dermatitis all my life, and even today, although my condition is much better as I eat healthy, exercise, and take care of myself, at times, my skin is occasionally itchy (but by now, I'm used to this).

Now that I think about it, this did shape me. For one, I learned to accept it as a part of my life.

However, it wasn't easy. Back then, I always wore long sleeves—I couldn't wear shorts even in the summer because of blisters and scabs. When I studied at Manchester, where it'd rain five days a week, inflammation easily flared up.

Looking back, I can say that on some occasions when this condition would worsen, I wanted to go back to my family and hometown, a suburb 1.5 hours from Seoul. It is not what you'd consider a nice posh neighborhood that is well-developed, but it offered clean air. In fact, when I first moved there 22 years ago, there were rice paddies.

However, in many ways, this was precisely the reason I wanted to go abroad. Although the beauty of my hometown offers its residents stability and a natural environment, living here all my life was rather smothering at times because it was essentially like an "island," a gated community. When I was little, transportation wasn't as good as it is today, and the train to Seoul passed once every hour.

Also, it was the stories of the world that my father, an international businessman, used to bring home that motivated me as well. He was away four days a week and took thousands of red-eye flights. Whenever he left on business trips, I imagined with anticipation the stories he'd tell me of.

Yet another driver was that I was a bookworm—dreaming about the outside world as I read stories about foreign countries and characters who too managed to move beyond to realize dreams. As such, I literally "lived" at the library. While in the military, I read any book I could get hold of—I must have read over 150 by the time I was honorably discharged (reading is still my favorite hobby).

Earlier this year, at the age of 29, I was diagnosed with adult ADHD. This revelation was both surprising and enlightening. It shed light on many of the struggles I had faced throughout my life without understanding why—the restlessness in my small hometown, my insatiable appetite for reading, and the challenges in maintaining focus amid a whirlwind of ideas.

Looking back, I realize that my constant thirst for new experiences and knowledge was perhaps fueled by undiagnosed ADHD. My mind was always racing, seeking stimulation and novelty. Although confined in that little neighborhood most of my life, I grew up to become an individual with big dreams. As of today, I have realized many of my dreams. For one, I could pursue my passion for studying in Canada, the UK, and now the U.S.

Likewise, I'm so grateful. My father worked day and night for his family. When he was the busiest, he could barely enjoy family dinners as he had business meetings. I can only second guess how hard it must have been for this man who wanted to spend every moment with his family.

Later, as I pieced together the puzzle, I learned that my assumption was right. Although a man of few words, I remember seeing him cry. He left a dream workplace at a conglomerate and started his own business from the bottom up. Sometimes he had to endure door-slamming or verbal abuse from clients. Even on holidays, he had to carry his business phone in case overseas clients would call—so now I understand his tears a little.

Yet, he did it for us, his two children. He endured all these to provide us with the opportunities to live in a wider world. My younger brother also studied in the U.S., thanks to him, and is currently in pilot training—yes, to see the world.

So, I had to excel—and to persist through any obstacle. That's why I always gave my best efforts in any given position. Despite being an international student, I won scholarships throughout schools to help with my tuition. In college, while working as a researcher, I managed schoolwork and volunteering as well. My body might feel tired after working all night, but it was rewarding.

I also enjoy my life (my parents' No. 1 priority was and still is and will always be to be happy first and foremost). So, in high school in Canada, I performed at the Roy Thomson Hall with the school choir and enjoyed activities including canoeing and skiing. In college—this time in the UK—I sang in a rock band, organized Korean cultural events, and made friends for life. As a student, I often saved money to travel. Even now, I travel around the U.S. with friends or alone. This is why I always try to enjoy my life.

Looking back, I learned many things. Although you can never "overcome" atopy (there is no cure), I developed a set of skills to master ways to go around it. Sometimes it relapses, but through exercise and diet control, I always keep my body in balance and manage my health.

Similarly, understanding my ADHD has been a journey of self-discovery. Just as with atopy, I've come to accept ADHD as part of who I am. I'm developing strategies to manage it, feeling more balanced and in control than ever before.

Consequently, my body and soul are much healthier.

This in turn made me feel that if I can manage atopy and navigate ADHD, I can overcome virtually anything—like stage fright. Once I had stage fright due to atopy and was scared to present in front of others, but now I'm not afraid of singing in front of hundreds.

And I have a sense of empathy. Although the form of pain differs, having suffered from atopy and ADHD my whole life, I can understand the challenges others face. That's why I'd like to help people by doing work with positive social impact.

Above all, I learned from my father the foremost life principles. Inspired by his sacrifice, I also didn't give up in the face of adversity, took on challenges, and grew to become who I am today.

Who am I? I'm somebody who has learned one or two formulas for overcoming challenges. And, at the same time, I'm somebody who has felt that motivation is the most powerful why.