

When I was a small child, I had never even heard of Alports Syndrome. It was not until I had received a physical when I was twelve that I even knew there was something different about me. At that time, the doctors detected blood in my urine, a known symptom of Alports. This was a cause of great concern for my family doctors. My mother, from whose side of the family I inherited the disorder, mentioned to the family doctor that kidney disease runs in our family. It was at this point that I began seeing a nephrologist at a local medical research hospital. After a few visits, development of more symptoms, and a review of my family tree, I was formally diagnosed with Alports syndrome.

Before any of the symptoms started appearing, all I ever wanted was to attend a service academy, specifically the United States Naval Academy. My family has a history of military service and my uncle graduated from the Naval Academy, so it was only natural that I was drawn to Annapolis. Some of my fondest memories are attending their home football games, which were more than just games. At every home game, the entire school, approximately 4000 cadets, made a march in full uniform from the academy grounds to the football stadium. After forming up their ranks in the stadium, The United States Navy Blue Angels performed a fly-over. The entire presentation was a spectacle, and it left an impression on me as a young child. Nevertheless, after a few visits to the doctor, I was told my diagnosis of Alports would prevent me from ever being part of the traditions I had witnessed at the Naval Academy.

This left me confused, angry, and unsure about what to do with my future. I had never considered another option besides attending the Naval Academy and now I knew that it was impossible to go there. Throughout the rest of high school, I maintained my high GPA, was involved in extracurricular activities, and achieved well enough on the SATs that Alports was truly the only road block between me and Annapolis. I had to begin considering other

options.

During this time, I turned back to another childhood passion of mine: the woods. I grew up in a rural setting and spent most of my days as kid in the woods. I would go around turning over rocks and stumps to see what I could find. I would fish at the pond near my house. I would use a minnow net to catch minnows in the stream and see what kinds I could find. As I got more involved in school, I had less and less time to just go be in the woods, but I cherished the time I spent there. This time and reflection alone in nature lead me to the conclusion that nature had helped make me the person I was, and therefore, as a way of giving back to what had molded me so deeply, I wanted to be a steward of the wild. Thus, I have gone down a path of environmentalism and pursued a career in Fisheries Biology. I am currently a senior, and at the end of my studies here I am going to attend graduate school in the field of ecology.

Outside of the classroom I still enjoy my time alone in the woods more than anything else. I have learned the art of fly-fishing from several of my peers, and spend any time I can alone on a small stream, searching and hoping to catch the wild trout that inhabit the mountains around my school. I have also been heavily involved in campus organizations for the past four years here at Mansfield University. I have held executive officer positions in four clubs, and of those four I have been president of two. I have held several jobs on campus as well. During my sophomore and junior years, I served as a Resident Assistant, overseeing about 40 of my peers each year in the dormitory setting. I am currently a tutor in several capacities. I tutor for a program at our school called TRiO. TRiO provides support and assistance for students who are considered “at risk.” These students often come from homes that may not be the best socio-economic situation, they may be first generation college students, or they have learning disabilities that make college much more of a challenge for them. I also am the supplemental

instructor for our general chemistry course. Supplemental instructors go beyond the normal role of the tutor, in that they also attend class in order to have a more personal interaction with the students. Outside of school, I am involved in a local non-profit environmental organization and a local church, of which I am a member.

With the Paul Silver Tribute Award, I would like to supplement my college education and travel to Europe to witness one of the largest seafood expositions in the world. The award itself would be used to help cover the costs of travel expenses, such as airfare and hotel accommodations for the European Seafood Exposition. The European Seafood Exposition in Brussels, Belgium is one of the pinnacles of fisheries science, as many of the issues we face are brought to the forefront at this conference and others like it. It is held annually and occurs between May 6th and May 8th of the upcoming year. The scale of this event is amazing. In 2012 alone over 25,600 buyers, producers, and other associated groups attended the exposition from over 140 countries around the world. Attending this conference would be the opportunity of a lifetime, an opportunity many professionals in fisheries science do not get.

Alports Syndrome has dramatically altered the course of my life. If I did not have the disorder, I would surely be in a military uniform today, and not ordinary street clothes. In the end however, the direction Alports has sent me has turned out to be what I feel is a more rewarding life, and one that will continually challenge me intellectually as I pursue higher levels of education. I would not trade where I am today for where I would be without Alports, and I feel that once again Alports is giving me a chance to go somewhere I never thought of going before. The European Seafood Exposition is an opportunity of a lifetime, and it would definitely have a huge impact on my overall worldview and my perspective as a fisheries biologist.