*“Start anywhere, follow it everywhere.”*

My journey to who I am today, an ambitious advocate in my community and future medical school student, is extraordinarily long, winding, and filled to the brim with strife. Despite this, I’ve come to find that my most basic motivation in all that I do is simple and can be boiled down to this: I believe that working within a broken system is simply perpetuating its dysfunction, and I refuse to do that. While this may possibly be an oversimplification, the complex piece to this, the one that took me so long to come to, is the definition of the word “broken”. What does a broken system look like? How can we measure the “brokenness” of a system? Can it be fixed? If not, what’s the point? Answering these questions made up the majority of my Story of Self; discovering that institutions vital to our society neglect those that need the most attention was the catalyst that pushed me toward achieving something greater.

Growing up, surviving through abuse and poverty, I kept trying to simply adjust my circumstances within what I could control to make the situation bearable. But, that logic is flawed at its core. You wouldn’t expect a caged animal to simply adjust to life in the cage. You wouldn’t judge her for kicking, screaming and biting her way out. Overcoming these two themes, shame and inaction, required a fundamental realization about what it means to be an agent of change: change is horribly loud, messy, and uncomfortable; it takes kicking, screaming, and biting. Adjusting to life in the cage is just allowing the bars to remain erect, and I had to learn that the shame and inaction I was raised to uphold cannot be in my vocabulary if I intend to fight my way out. Breaking down an established system in order to build it back up again with communities in mind requires a shameless conviction that I only learned by being kept down for so long that arising stronger was my only option. I had to learn to take up space to be heard.

I feel so much connection to the stories in *Walk Out Walk On* because of their greatest commonality; rejection of the norm. So much of my journey to healing from trauma has been the acceptance that I cannot try to categorize myself into the world’s binaries while also being an effective agent of change and finding self-love. Many of the most pivotal moments in my life have come at the times when I make peace with the fact that I am not following any sort of traditional path. The most exciting times since declaring my goal of medical school are those when I forge something new and beautiful to serve my needs and therefore serve my community’s needs. My internship with OHA was a show of my willingness to stray from the standard pre-med checklist: wet lab research, volunteering, and shadowing. I feel so deeply for the Zapatistas, who simply want their education to actually serve them in the way they need. This is what I hope to do through my education and career – change the systems as I move through them in order to make them equitable for those who come after me, and vital to those whom the systems serve. In doing this, never letting “cynicism trump evidence” (Pg. 38), a sentiment from the Zapatista story I will carry with me.

My connection to this work in particular, my Story of Us, is based in experiences in healthcare that highlight the ways in which our system neglects the most vulnerable people. It took an extraordinary amount of sociological education and reflection to realize all of the ways I was marginalized by my socioeconomic status in the way of healthcare. For example, I got into a car accident at 16 years old. The car we could afford had problems with its alignment, making tight turns difficult, and lead to my car lying upside down on a country road. The only thoughts running through my head, while I hung upside down secured by my seatbelt were “how will I get to work tomorrow? How will we survive higher insurance payments? How long until we can afford another car?”. My worries were not unfounded. The EMTs that came were required to treat me, a minor, because my parents were at work and could not consent for me to go home instead of to the hospital. I think of all the moments of privilege another may have had. With the privilege of money, my parents could have bought a car that was safe to drive or one of my parents could have the flexibility to be home during the day and answer the phone and avoid the hospital cost. Finally, with the privilege of money, we could have had insurance and not been nearly bankrupt by a teenage mistake. No person should live with the constant fear that they are one life event away from total financial destruction.

Interning with OHA and working with Medicaid recipients is especially important to me because of our shared understanding that healthcare is human right; living without it is living without dignity. Having Oregon Health Plan instigated a wave of calm over my life, and I know that feeling is echoed in this community. I know how important healthcare is to building strong communities and dismantling disparities in marginalized communities, so working to make healthcare as equitable and accessible as possible is deeply honoring work to be doing. I, of course, look forward to being part of policymaking that fixes all of the problems already identified, but I am most looking forward to identifying and understanding injustice I don’t see yet and delving deeper into things that I don’t yet have an opinion about. I hope, more than anything, that my work continues to force me to grow and change with what I learn. I’ve broken out of the confining mold that my upbringing stuck me in, but that doesn’t mean I’m finished. I hope to constantly be pushed toward greater and greater aspirations, with consequences more and more uplifting and transformative.