

Growing up in Country X to Guinean parents, I had a tumultuous upbringing. My parents often fought, and many evenings were punctuated by loud arguments, smashing dishes, and slamming doors. In the midst of the chaos, the city library became my place of refuge as a teenager. I loved reading in the atrium, surrounded by a calming canopy of vegetation and illuminated by abundant sunlight. As I wandered the aisles, I usually ended up in the autobiography aisle with books written by inspirational authors such as Anne Frank, Betty Mahmoody, and Waris Dirie, who had faced great adversity in their lives. Despite experiencing war crimes, abuse, and other unimaginable horrors, they showed unshakable perseverance and hope in humanity.

In the midst of these memoirs, there was another recurring theme: their communities failed to protect their basic human rights. Reading about innumerable human rights violations, I felt a mix of disbelief and anger that such atrocities were reality for so many people. Upon finishing these books, I wanted to assist survivors of injustices in seeking justice.

So at age 16, I researched countries to potentially move to and settled on America, believing it to be an ideal place to advance my education and learn about the law. I needed to take efforts to acquire knowledge in a different setting and apply this knowledge to help others and maximize its social impact. I came to take the words of a West African proverb to heart: "Knowledge is like a garden: If it is not cultivated, it cannot be harvested."

While the garden of knowledge is precious, cultivating it is often challenging. I faced significant cultural and religious obstacles in America, as I completed high school at a private Christian school; black students were rare and Muslim students even rarer. But I eventually found a supportive community that encouraged me to leave my comfort zone and adopt a mentality of risk-taking, curiosity, and exploration, which I continued at X University.

X University is known for its broad liberal arts education, and it provided an excellent academic environment for me. Philosophy, logic, and communication classes taught me the tools of rigorous argumentation and gave me the opportunity to research and discuss controversial topics such as racial profiling, segregation, and the limits of free speech. Our discussions directly correlated to the injustices experienced by authors such as Mahmoody and Dirie, motivating me to thoroughly explore underlying causes of these problems.

I also took to the field of psychology. The core classes provided me with empirical frameworks to understand behavior, while advanced therapy classes taught me about effectively listening and completely understanding others before trying to help them. I was especially intrigued by exploring the legal implications of psychological concepts such as unconscious bias, criminal responsibility, and the reliability of memory recollection. I was pleased to see that people were beginning to apply psychological insights to the law, with the development of alternative criminal justice methodologies based on a fuller understanding of mental health issues, which more effectively served the needs of both defendants and society.

Following graduation, I moved back home to Country X and found a position at a law firm that specializes in defending clients dealing with traffic violations. This was a detour from my initial aspiration to work in human rights, but I firmly believe that it has helped me plant important roots. Working in teams to study the details of Country X traffic laws and advocating for our clients has helped me develop invaluable interpersonal and collaborative skills. I have been able to develop and apply my ability to empathize, listen to, and advise clients and employees with very different communication styles, backgrounds, and opinions. My supervisor has thanked me for introducing relevant psychological concepts and frameworks, which have improved the team dynamics and level of mutual respect on our team.

My time at the firm solidified my desire to return to America to pursue a full legal education, this time with the goal of working in human rights. There are a wealth of legal issues that I am passionate about exploring and legal conversations I would like to participate in, from the numerous types of discrimination laws to religious freedom to the legal response to the global refugee crisis.

In law school, I look forward to further cultivating the garden of my academic interests and past experiences. I want to learn from professors who share my heart to help others, but who can empower me with legal knowledge to effectively use my voice for change. I also seek to engage and collaborate with talented classmates who can bring their life experiences and perspectives to bear on legal issues.

Obtaining a legal education will allow me to assist others who are seeking to write their own stories. I have grown significantly since my time in the city library, and law school will help me flourish into an attorney that can help to ensure that their stories have better endings.