

**2015 EAST Oriens Award – This is Why I Want a Career in Trauma**  
**Fellow Winning Essay**  
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Having grown up in a household with domestic violence, some of my earliest memories are of stepping between my mother's body and my father's fists. I had to protect someone who could not protect herself. As I grew older, I no longer put myself in harm's way. Instead, I stood tall, spoke my mind and learned to stop simmering conflicts from boiling over into pain and suffering. I channeled my childhood experiences into a positive force that provides help and comfort. And I eventually directed this force toward a career in medicine.

Throughout medical school, I wondered how I could best apply my personal history to a specific field. At first, the modern medical world seemed cynical and stringent. There seemed to be no room for my brand of empathy. Was there still a specialty for a doctor who wants to stand in the uncertainty between tragedy and joy? I did research and found myself attracted to acute care surgeons and became most interested in trauma surgery. I came to believe that this specialty would offer the opportunity to become the helper I felt compelled to be.

But when I shared this belief with colleagues, many laughed and implored that trauma surgery was not about heroism. They chided that I would end up baby-sitting other surgeons' patients and warned that if I pursued a lifetime in trauma, I would end up with nothing but exhaustion and cynicism. During general surgical residency, I explored other specialties, first plastics then vascular then endocrine—none felt right. So, during my fourth year, I sought to prove my aspiration for trauma surgery could manifest a satisfying career, and I volunteered in the aftermath of the Haitian earthquake.

I treated dozens of earthquake victims amid the chaos of sweltering operating rooms, mismatched surgical instruments and recurring brownouts. I comforted the parents of a child I could not save and celebrated after a patient who had been crushed by falling debris took his first steps. It became evident that trauma surgery would indeed let me build the career I had imagined. During my second trip to Haiti, I operated on a young missionary shot through the colon and pelvis. Equipped with only basic tools, I felt like I stood between his injuries and death. I halted the pelvic hemorrhage, repaired the colon and removed an embolus from the distal femoral artery. I battled to get this young man transported to the safety of the United States. And in August this year, I attended his wedding. During the reception, his wife thanked me for my dedication to helping the less fortunate, and in this moment, I solidly knew that a career in trauma surgery is the path for me.

Now, when I walk through the trauma bay doors, I feel like I am on the adventure of a lifetime. Trauma surgery excites and employs all of who I am. Trauma patients supply the motivation to delve into the depths of my past and put my passion for intervening in tragedy into practice. Even when the timing and circumstances of trauma activations are frustrating, I feel at home. While others might think the ins and outs of trauma care are rudimentary, I find meaning and take pride in preventing worsened injury. I am thrilled by the operative improvisation and agility required of trauma surgeons and muster endurance for weeks of critical care from the knowledge that in time, a damaged body can resume a vibrant and productive life.

I belong in the world of trauma surgeons. Trauma surgeons risk intervening in a broad unknown in order to deliver help and comfort. They may not always have the opportunity to be heroes but they are definitely a positive force in the world.