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Great Steps Forward Through Education: From a Refugee Camp to Le Moyne College: Among Professors, Great Mentors and Friends

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Great Steps Forward Through Education

From a Refugee Camp to Le Moyne College

Amazing Professors, Great Mentors and Friends

By Zacharia Mohamed

I was born in Somalia, but I was raised by my sister in a refugee camp called Kakuma in Kenya. My family got separated during the war in Somalia when our village was attacked. My 10-year-old sister rescued me during the attack and escaped the country carrying me on her back. Years later I was told I was about 11 months old. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Nairobi sent us to the refugee camp. Growing up there, I saw early on the importance of health care and the dire need for it. I was lucky; growing up in the refugee camp I got sick only once, but other kids were not so lucky. Only one small clinic served most of the camp. I remember that sometimes it took days to get treatment. The small clinic was consistently crowded, lacked medications to treat patients, and most of the time did not have enough staff to meet patient demands.

By age 10, I wanted to go to school but could not while

in the refugee camp. My sister could not afford to send me to school. She was already working very hard to feed me and her infant son, so any extra money had to go towards food and clothes. For most people in the refugee camp, hope for a better life was sponsorship to another country. My sister, her son, and I were very fortunate get sponsorship to the U.S. from UNHCR and Catholic Charities. After a long series of interviews, we came to the United States in 2005. Coming to the U.S. has opened up a world of opportunities. I was able to learn English, attend school and learn to read and write. Learning English was an important achievement for me. Attending and graduating high school were also a major milestone because no one in my family had ever gone to high school or college.

I am currently a senior majoring in biology with a philosophy minor at Le Moyne College. I will be applying to medical schools. I have gained so much from attending Le Moyne, both

academically and personally. I have been surrounded by amazing and caring professors who go above and beyond for students. I have gained many great mentors and friends. I have been successful in college because of the supportive, caring, and nurturing environment that aims to educate the whole person. I have had hurdles to overcome while in college, the biggest one being balancing my education with taking care of my disabled sister and my two young nephews, 10 and 13 years old. Le Moyne College has given me the support, encouragement, and educa-

tion to get me closer to my dream of becoming a family doctor. After completing my medical school education and training, my goal is to practice medicine in the U.S. until I gain adequate experience and training to be able to work in refugee camps. This has been my long-term goal and dream since I was 10 years old.

Zacharia Mohamed is a senior at Le Moyne College majoring in biology with a philosophy minor. He is now the sole caregiver for his sister, who has become blind, and he is in the process of applying for medical school.

The Dream Fulfilled

From Undocumented to Medical Student

By Pablo da Silva

When I decided I wanted to go to medical school, I knew it would be a long road. The application process was very competitive; but more than that, my immigration status at the time raised issues. Medical schools would not accept students who were undocumented, in part because they did not qualify for federal loans and, there-

fore, had no way to meet the high costs of attending medical school. But more important, the schools feared that without a Social Security Number and a work permit, we would not be able to become practicing physicians after graduation.

With the advent of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), qualified undocumented students were granted a Social Security Number and a