

Good afternoon everyone,

Thank you so much for inviting me to be here today. It is truly an honor to stand before you as a recipient of a St. Andrews Auxiliary Scholarship.

Before I tell you about medical school, I'd like to tell you about a game my brother and I would play growing up.

We call it First Breath. This game was played anytime we returned to the state, may it be a 10 minute or 10- month separation.

Our anticipation would build as the green arch of Piscataqua River Bridge came into view, spanning the divide between Maine and New Hampshire. The rules were simple; whoever opened their window first when we crossed the Maine border and took that first breath of Maine air, was crowned winner.

Both of us would trigger our windows to open simultaneously, racing to inhale the first intoxicating gulp. The car was flooded with our beloved Maine air. It was a game where victory was shared equally, as if the very essence of Maine welcomed us both with open arms every time.

The funny thing is that I'm 26 now, and I still play that game. I even got my Canadian fiancé racing to roll his window down. These days its more often a 1 player game, but every time I cross into Maine and take that first breath, I get the same feeling: I'm home.

That feeling is part of the reason why being here today means so much to me.

Maine isn't just where I grew up. It's the place that shaped who I am.

My grandmother, who was about as Maine as they come, taught me what it meant to be part of a community. We hauled lobster traps together, hiked in Acadia, camped on islands, and spent our days outside. One of my favorite memories was collecting buoys that washed ashore and hanging them on a designated tree so lobstermen could recognize and reclaim their gear. It was such a simple thing, but it reflected something I have always loved about Maine: people look out for each other.

That spirit of community is one of the reasons I chose the Tufts Maine Track MD Program for my medical education.

For those who aren't familiar with it, Maine Track is a partnership between Tufts University School of Medicine and Maine Medical Center. The goal is to educate physicians who understand Maine's unique healthcare needs and who are committed to serving Maine communities.

One of the biggest challenges facing our state is access to healthcare, especially in rural areas. Maine needs physicians who understand these communities because they grew up in them, lived in them, and care for them. The Tufts Maine Track was designed to help meet that need, and from the moment I learned about the program, I knew it was one I had to be a part of.

Every Maine track cohort is roughly 40 students, all driven by that same mission. During our first year, Maine Track students are fully integrated with the rest of the Tufts medical school class in Boston, where we complete the same foundational science curriculum. After that, we transition to Portland, where we continue our education together as a Maine Track cohort and learn in classrooms and clinical settings centered around Maine's healthcare system.

In our third year, many students participate in a Longitudinal Integrated Clerkship, or LIC, where instead of the traditional clinical rotation with one specialty at a time, we follow a panel of patients over the course of the year as they move through different parts of the healthcare system. It gives us a unique opportunity to build long-term relationships with patients and see healthcare from their perspective.

For 9 months these LIC students, in pairs, are immersed into a community at 1 of 9 sites across the state from Portland all the way to Caribou. For the fourth and final year, we complete advanced clinical rotations and electives, many of them throughout Maine, while preparing for residency and the next stage of our training.

My first year of medical school has been everything people warned me it would be: challenging, humbling, exhausting, and incredibly rewarding.

I spent countless hours studying anatomy, physiology, pathology, and every other subject that comes with learning how the human body works. We also spend a large deal on human connection and emotion. There were definitely moments this year when I questioned whether it was possible to fit one more fact into my brain.

But this year also confirmed that I am exactly where I am supposed to be.

One of my favorite moments from this past year happened during one of our surgical skills sessions. We were learning how to suture, and one of my boston classmates looked over and asked, "Why is this coming so naturally to you?"

Without thinking, I made a joke, "What, you've never worked as a first mate on the charger fishing boat in Boothbay harbor?"

I think I left them quite confused, I'm not sure they knew what to do with that response.

Apparently spending years tying knots in rope and fishing line during rough weather turns out to be surprisingly useful in medical school.

It's probably not included in most surgical training manuals, but I like to think Maine prepared me pretty well.

While medical school has been a huge part of my life recently, it isn't the only exciting thing happening. My fiancé, David, and I are getting married right here in Boothbay next summer. We are busy planning a wedding while I am studying medicine, which has been an adventure all its own. But it feels especially meaningful that we'll be starting that next chapter of our lives in a place that means so much to me, now us, and to our black lab Millie. Keep an eye out for her at Barrett's Park that's her favorite spot.

When I first learned that I had received this scholarship, I was overwhelmed with gratitude. Medical school is an incredible privilege, but it is also extraordinarily expensive. Every scholarship dollar makes a difference. Your support has made a meaningful shift in my ability to focus more fully on becoming the best physician I can be, and helps make a career serving Maine communities more attainable. I want to thank each of you for the time, effort, and dedication that made this scholarship possible.

But what makes this scholarship especially meaningful is knowing where it comes from.

It comes from all of you.

It comes from volunteers who donate their time, energy, and talents to support students they may never meet. It comes from countless hours spent sorting donations, pricing items, stocking shelves, helping customers, and building a community through the thrift shop.

And I have a confession: I know that thrift shop very well. I'm sporting my most recent purchase Who could pass up J. crew for \$10?

Many of the items in my apartment came from there. In fact, I probably see something from the thrift shop every single day. Every lamp, dish, table, or piece of furniture tells a story, not just about the person who donated it, but about the people who volunteered their time to turn that donation into an opportunity for someone else.

What might seem like a small act of service has an incredible ripple effect.

A donated item becomes a thrift shop sale. A thrift shop sale becomes a scholarship. A scholarship helps educate a future physician. And someday that education will help patients throughout Maine.

That is a remarkable impact.

One thing medical school has taught me is that nobody gets where they are alone.

We are lifted by parents, teachers, mentors, friends, communities, and people who believe in us.

Today, all of you are part of that story for me.

Years from now, when I am caring for patients somewhere in Maine, your investment in my education will still be making a difference. Your kindness will continue to ripple outward through every patient I care for and every community I serve.

So thank you, not only for your financial support, but for your faith in Maine students, your commitment to this community, and the countless volunteer hours that make opportunities like mine possible.

Every time I cross that bridge, roll down my window, and take that first breath of Maine air, I'm reminded that home is more than a place.

It's the people who invest in you, support you, and help you become exactly who you're meant to be.

Thank you.