

## **The Runner**

*This applicant sets herself apart by emphasizing a hobby that she loves and accounts for a dip in her grades caused by illness.*

Pounding, rushing footsteps started to close in on me. The roar of the crowd echoed, as I extended my hand to receive the baton that signaled my turn to run. As I tightly wrapped my fingers around it, I felt the wind rush around me, and my tired legs started to carry me faster than I ever dreamed possible. As I rounded the final stretch of track I remember battling fatigue by contemplating two paths: slow down and give up my chance of winning to gain momentary comfort, or push myself even harder and give up momentary comfort to receive greater rewards later. I chose the second path and later held a trophy that represented my perseverance and hard work. The years of running — consistently choosing the second path — have taught me discipline and perseverance. These qualities will help me cross a different finish line and achieve a new goal: becoming a doctor.

I have had to learn to budget my time to meet the demands of school, training programs, and volunteer activities. Although I trained and ran at least thirty miles a week throughout college, I also served as a big sister to Kelly, an abused child, and worked in a hospital trauma unit and as a medical assistant in an OB/GYN clinic. My most satisfying volunteer activity, however, was participating in mission work in Mexico City.

In Mexico City I continually saw young children whose suffering was overwhelming. These children had never received vaccinations, were lice-infested, and suffered from malnutrition. They also frequently had infections that antibiotics can easily treat, but due to poverty were left untreated. For a week our team worked feverishly to see as many children as possible and treat them to the best of our abilities. I will never forget the feeling of complete fulfillment after a long day of using my talents for the betterment of others. The desire to replicate this feeling strengthens my commitment to becoming a physician.

Isaac Asimov once said, "It has been my philosophy on life that difficulties vanish when faced boldly." Difficulties have tested my commitment. In September 1992, at the beginning of the running season I developed a severe case of mono. My doctors advised me to drop out of school for a semester and not run for at least four months. Though devastated, I refused to give up. I managed to keep up with all my classes, even when I came down with pneumonia on top of mono in early November. I resumed training in the beginning of December, two months earlier than doctors originally thought possible. Today I am preparing for the LA Marathon in May.

This test helped shape my attitude towards the work that I am now doing in Dr. Lee's molecular biology research lab. In searching for a cure for colon cancer, the work can become tedious, and the project progresses very slowly. Many just give up, feeling that the answers they seek are buried too deep and require too much effort to find. But my training and the battles I have fought with illness have taught me persistence. I realize that many times progress plateaus, or even declines before I find the results I seek. Most of all, I know that the more hard work I invest, the more exciting, overwhelming, and fulfilling are the later rewards.

As a result of my efforts I have been able to experience the joy of breaking through the tape of a finish line, having my name on a journal article in press, seeing the smile on Kelly's face as I walk with her, and hearing the sincere expressions of gratitude from homeless children who have just received a humble roof over their heads and the medical attention they so desperately need. I hope to cross the finish line in the LA marathon and enter medical school this year.