

SHP: We imagine you have won many awards, what makes being named a [2015 Top Scholar by the National Multiple Sclerosis Society](#) special to you?

Ashley Haynes: This award is very special to me because it represents what I am so passionate about – pediatric Multiple Sclerosis and related demyelinating diseases. I think most of us know the sound advice of “when you hear hoof beats, think horses, not zebras.” MS in the pediatric population really is a zebra; a very complex one.

In comparison, MS is the most common neurological disease in young adults. My platform really is Pediatric MS. When you grow up with two immediate family members (her mother and grandmother) with MS and you physically witness what this disease can do, you develop a different perspective on life.

In my case, I developed a deep hunger to learn everything I can about this disease and the human body and become a physician. I remember growing up and seeing them both completely fine one day; and then the next day, for example, wake up and not be able to move their legs; and then a week later be walking again, and I would think, “How can a disease do so much without warning just in a matter of a short time interval?”

People with MS often look “normal” on the outside, unless they are having difficulty walking and moving around. However, looks are very deceiving. For the most part, it’s a very invisible disease. Others don’t know when individuals with MS have double vision, when their extremities are tingling with a weird sensation, when their legs feel like their dragging concrete around, or when their legs are so stiff and have painful muscle spasms.

Furthermore, this award really is not about me, I am dedicating this award to some of the most extraordinary individuals I know including my mom, grandmother, all adults with MS, and especially all of the courageous kids with MS and related demyelinating diseases who truly are superheroes.

Also, this award would not be possible without all of my mentors, professors, advisors, my twin sister, family, and friends who go above and beyond on a daily basis. For me, this award is everything, and it is very humbling and truly an honor to represent the AL-MS Chapter of the National MS Society as a Top Scholar.

SHP: Do you know why you were honored? If not, why do you think you were chosen?

Ashley Haynes: According to my award letter, there were 595 new scholarship recipients in the U.S. for the 2015-2016 academic year. From that cohort, the National MS Society conducted an extremely extensive review process to name the Top Scholars.

Only ten recipients were honored this year with Top Scholar recognition. These were the highest scoring applicants based on review of all components of their application (academic performance, leadership and participation in school and community activities, outside recommendations, work experience, education and career aspirations, and an essay on the impact of MS in their lives).

Beyond the scope of the criteria used, I would hope that I was chosen because they felt something different when they read and heard my story – they listened. There is a very profound difference between hearing and listening. You can read all day long and not sincerely listen to the words you are reading. I hope when they listened to my story through my words, they envisioned a young adult full of

passion, empathy, sincerity, perseverance, determination, resilience, and a heart for helping others – someone who wouldn't give up when faced with adversity.

I would have to thank my mother and maternal grandmother, who both live with MS, for teaching me through their own actions dealing with this disease the power of positive attitude and a fresh perspective.

Trust me; it's very easy when things get complicated, especially in the prime of your life to setback briefly. You have to allow yourself to do this but not for long. You have to stand up and look at it, whatever it may be, straight in the face, move it to the side, and trudge on with your passion wholeheartedly.

Passion can move mountains.

SHP: We believe most award winners are driven and focused, have you set your career path yet? If so, what are your plans?

Ashley Haynes: Yes, I have set my career goals. However, I have learned that there is no straight path to get from Point A to Point B.

Career paths are full of unexpected curves, valleys, and mountains. You can't always see what's just ahead – and that's okay. Like most pre-professional students with Type A personalities, I have had a four-year plan since I graduated high school with everything laid out accordingly.

However, you learn often very quickly that things always don't align with your timeline. So, I have learned to have a very open mindset that is not rigidly on a planned schedule – it's just not reasonable.

Point B is definitely getting into medical school for me. I absolutely love learning the physiology and anatomy of our bodies, but I have a deep, passionate interest in learning about our nervous and immune systems, specifically. The intricacy involved is extraordinary and the pathologies that unfortunately can come along with it are very fascinating and challenging to me.

Therefore, I have a very strong interest in becoming a pediatric neurologist who specializes in taking care of kids with MS and related demyelinating diseases. I say pediatric because it's a MS cohort that is under recognized in both the general and medical community, there are no FDA-approved drugs, and we are in great need of molecular research in pediatric MS and related demyelinating diseases.

Furthermore, I also have an interest in basic science research working specifically with pediatric MS. Every kid deserves the right to know that despite overwhelming adversities, they can achieve their goals in life, and that they are not alone in their fight. If anything, I want my work to be felt by the individuals in which I will do my best to help and serve; my name, I could care less about because it is not about me. It is for the brave kids and their courageous families who fight each day and smile through the pain.

Ashley Haynes is in the [UAB School of Health Professions'](#) Honor's Program. She is majoring in Biomedical Sciences and is on track to graduate in April 2016. She is carrying out her Honor's Project, through her senior year, in pediatric MS under the exceptional mentorship of Chander Raman, Ph.D., Patrizia De Sarno, Ph.D., and Jayne Ness, M.D., Ph.D., the director of the [UAB Center for Pediatric Onset Demyelinating Disease](#). The CPODD is one of only nine Pediatric MS Centers of Excellence in the United States. She works as a clinical and research student assistant with the [CPODD at Children's of Alabama](#).