

Finding warmth in the cold

New friends and strong mentors created a memorable medical-school experience

By Dr. Melvin Ooi '09



When I first arrived at Halifax International, the customs officer took a good look at my paltry jacket and said, "Son, this is not going to cut it." I politely told him that he was the third person to tell me how cold it is in the Maritimes. His partner on the next aisle promptly interrupted, "Then let me be the fourth."

Coming to Canada from a tropical country halfway across the world, I knew the climate would take some getting used to. But if my experience here has taught me anything, it's that stereotypes are always wrong. My two years in Halifax have been perhaps the warmest of my life (figuratively speaking, of course, as I still find it ridiculously cold in the winter).

There were glitches, at first. Phrases like "clear as mud" were favourites among my mentors and had me pondering for days (mud is murky brown!). A loonie means a dollar—I can't tell you how many times I stared at the cashier until I figured out that she meant something else. A case of "lymphnoid(!?) as described by an elderly patient is not a new disease. And how almost all conversations inevitably included a brief discussion of the weather. These little quirks and idiosyncrasies are what made the Maritimes so endearing and unique. In time, I realised that a double-double at Timmy's doesn't get you two cups of coffee.

Cliché as it sounds, Canadians are what make Canada great. The hospitality and friendliness of Nova Scotians never ceases to amaze me. Fleeting encounters with strangers quickly turn to lasting friendships. I recall an incident during a short stint in P.E.I. where a passer-by, having taken a pity on my snow-covered shoes,

drove me to Zellers to get a pair of rubber boots. New friendships forged with classmates as we went through what seems like endless exams and long days in wards will be well cherished.

My mentors at Dal have all played a huge role in my education, inspiring me to strive harder through the dedication that they show in their work. My Dalhousie experience, especially the people that I have met, has left a lasting impression in my life. I hope my two short years here have the same effect on them.



There are many important elements for those seeking freedom from addiction: experienced and qualified counselling, nutrition, physical activity and a peaceful and inspiring setting.

Ledgehill provides all of these as well as the vital support of a powerful and ongoing aftercare program.

Incorporating sound clinical decision-making based upon the best available evidence ensures that Ledgehill's programs are unparalleled in the residential addiction treatment field.

www.ledgehill.com • 1-800-676-3393

The bigger world beckons

Ya Fatou Samba overcame many obstacles to achieve her dream of studying medicine

By Dr. Ya Fatou Samba '09



Dr. Ya Fatou Samba and mother.

It was a major decision to leave my home country of the Gambia (the smallest country on mainland Africa) in exchange for the bigger world. Yes, my judgment was first and foremost driven by my determination to learn medicine but there was more to it than that. I also aimed to master the finest art and skills in medical practice. With this goal in mind, I felt I was armed with much courage and fortitude to break all obstacles and doubts regarding my aspirations to succeed.

Shortly after completing my high-school

education at home, my long and ambitious medical-degree journey took me to one of Nigeria's centres of academic excellence—Ahmadu Bello University. Here, I initially registered into the pre-medical training program with the intention of completing my medical education there. However, the educational instability did not allow me to. Returning home, I joined the third intake of the first-ever medical school in the Gambia. There, I completed the pre-med training program. At that time, my older sister, who was reading for a doctorate in the U.K., was visiting Malaysia. It was during this period that she was introduced to the International Medical University (IMU) in Kuala Lumpur. Her strong interest in the institution's style of medical education convinced me to apply. I started at IMU in 2004.

Two-and-one-half years later, I subsequently completed IMU's pre-clinical MD

curriculum and then came to Canada. This followed my success in being matched to my first choice of twinning for the clinical phase of the MD program. My choice of Dalhousie was related to my familiarity with the academic link that existed between Nova Scotia and the Gambia. This was also strengthened by my knowledge of Dalhousie's history of distinction in training medical students. I was not disappointed!

In Halifax, and particularly in Dalhousie, I was pleasantly surprised by the hospitality of the people, although the winters were not fun! The university community, patients and hospital staff, remain part of the fun memories that formed my studentship in Halifax. I will be heading to Newfoundland—a colder place with warm people—to embark on my residency in General Surgery. Upon completion of residency, I will return home to the Gambia to practice, no doubt with memories of Canada only enjoyable.

The personal touch

For Derek Smith, medicine was a chance to inspire

By Dr. Derek Smith '09

Ten years ago I was helping out a friend in Brampton, Ontario by teaching math to senior high-school students during a critical teacher shortage at her school. This experience came at a pivotal point in my life, as I had recently decided to withdraw from my study of engineering and did not yet have a clear plan for my future. The satisfaction I felt from teaching those eager students made me realize that I wanted a career in which I could make an impact in people's lives on a personal level. The seeds for a career in medicine were sown.

I returned to university to earn my bachelor's degree in Science, followed by a master's degree in Immunology. With my graduate studies complete, I felt I was

ready to pursue a career in medicine.

From my first days at Dal I felt comfortable and eager to delve into my new studies. I enjoyed all aspects of my studies and was fortunate enough to win prizes in Anatomy, Physiology and Psychiatry in pre-clerkship. As much as I enjoyed my academic study, the social side of medicine was what truly brought me to the field. I was honoured to be chosen as the COPS representative for my class and was happy to contribute to the newly formed Professionalism Committee. My early interactions with patients through my clinical electives assured me that I had found what I was looking for in medicine.

During my clerkship rotations, I discovered the amazing field of Neurology and I



Dr. Derek Smith and wife and daughter.

am thrilled to be starting my residency in Neurology at the University of Ottawa. Although the next phase of my training is taking me back to Ontario, my experiences at Dalhousie have enriched my life immeasurably and as a Dal alumnus, I will be forever grateful.