Graduate Admission Essay

Being born and raised in Africa, the literary figures whose work I loved growing up were not the likes of Shakespeare or Emily Bronte; instead, it was African authors such as Ngugi Wa Thiongo and Kwame Nkrumah. The following quotation from one of Ngugi Wa Thiongo's books is one that really resonates with me in my journey to become a data scientist. [Here it goes......] "Being is one thing; becoming aware of it is a point of arrival by an awakened consciousness and this involves a journey." My decision to seek education in this new and exciting field of Big Data will have a significant impact on my life that will require hard work, discipline and courage, and that is why the above quotation really serves as a form of inspiration and reflection for me.

My parents are originally from Pakistan, but they moved to Uganda, a country in East Africa, to seek better employment opportunities. My father took on a two-year contract to train Ugandan police in forensics (he was a handwriting expert), but he fell so in love with the country that he ended up taking a job in the private sector there, and our family has been in Uganda ever since. We were in no way a wealthy family, but it was important for my father to make sure that all his children had the best education available, and that is why he sent my brothers and me to the United States for our undergraduate studies. [I am eternally grateful to him for that.]

I went to Louisiana State University (LSU) for my undergraduate studies and majored in general studies with minors in business administration, economics, and communication. I selected this program because of the love of economics and commerce that I have had since high school. The transition from a small high school in Uganda to a university of 30,000 in a new country was certainly a culture shock, and the situation required that I adapt and adjust to my new environment, which I did very quickly. Over the years, I have come to take pride in the fact that I am able to adapt very quickly to a new environment, be it a new city, workplace, or social setting. [It was personally important for me to be able to support myself while in college as much as I could, and that is why, apart from my college tuition, I never asked my father for any living expenses, and I took up various student campus jobs to cover my personal expenses. It was important for me to know that I was trying to take at least some of the financial load off of my father's shoulders so that he could save for his retirement.]

As I completed my undergraduate degree I got more clarity with regard to my career aspirations, and that is why [I pursued a Master of Business Administration (MBA) with a concentration in information technology. Soon after graduating, I took a position with a firm in the information technology field as a business analyst.] A business analyst in the IT/software development world is a liaison between the business and technical parts of an organization. [There were several responsibilities for me as a business analyst, but the most important one was understanding what the problem was and what kind of software or process could be put in place to alleviate the problem.] I would then take my findings and explain them to the technical/software development team, which would then make sure to build a system or software that would put the business team in the best position to succeed. I have thoroughly enjoyed my role as a business analyst, and this role has greatly improved my skills, especially my communication skills. I apply these in the "storyteller" role that a data scientist has to play, which involves sharing possible insights obtained from the data with an audience that is not technically or statistically savvy. Being in the information technology field requires one to be a constant learner, as new technologies and software development methodologies are always being introduced. I thrive at that, as I have always been great at educating myself on any work-related topics by using online resources such as Udacity, YouTube, or just Google search.

I am an avid reader, and about two years ago I was looking around for my next fun read and I stumbled across the book "Big Data: A Revolution That Will Transform How We Live, Work, and Think," by Viktor Mayer Schonberger and Kenneth Cukier. I was very curious about the term Big Data in the title of the book, because this was the first time I had seen that phrase, [and it sparked by curiosity]. This book was a phenomenal read, and I recommended it to any of my friends and coworkers who wanted to better understand this field, as it did a great job of explaining the term Big Data and also of diving into how this will gradually change the world around us. I was amazed to find out that we do not have to depend on relational databases to store extremely large amounts of data, as we have discovered much cheaper and effective ways to store and access this information (such as leveraging MapReduce). In the past, organizations (especially the smaller ones) had to make decisions regarding what to store because it was so costly, and that is why an emphasis was made to store things such as customer or parts data.

It wasn't until a year ago that I started to contemplate a possible career in this field. [The skills that I believe a good data scientist should have include data extraction/management and wrangling abilities.] Once I get my data science degree, my eventual career goal is to be a Big Data expert who can ensure that the organization that I work for has the correct Big Data strategy with which to gain an edge over its competitors. With the explosion of Big Data, I strongly feel that we will see designations come about such as "CDO" (Chief Data Officer) in the industry, and I would love to have the skills and experience to serve as the Chief Data Officer of an organization. I know, however, that in order to get the right experience I need to take on different roles, such as those of data analyst, data visualizer, and data engineer, so that I can advise my organization on how best to leverage this beautiful thing called Big Data. I know that I will be successful in the field of data science due to my successes thus far, and I would like your institution to be my partner as I embark on this journey.

Thank you for your consideration.