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 from one of Ngugi Wa Thiongo's books is one that really resonates with me and my journey to seek education to be 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 quote 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 up a two year contract to train the Ugandan Police in forensics (he was a hand writing expert) but he fell so much in love with this 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 that he could make available and that is why he sent my brothers and me to the United States for our undergraduate studies and I am eternally grateful to him for that.

I went to Louisiana State University (LSU) for my undergraduate and majored in General Studies with minors in Business Administration, Economics and Communication. The reason for this degree of choice was that I had a strong love for Economics as well as Business/Commerce 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 adopt 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 adopt very quickly to a new environment be it a new city, work place or a social gathering. It was personally important for me to be able to support myself while in college as much as I could and that is why besides the college tuition, I never asked my father for any living expenses as I took up various student campus jobs to cover my personal expenses. It was important for me to know that I am trying to take at least some load of my father's shoulders financially so that he could save for his retirement.

As I completed my undergraduate I got more clarity as far as my career aspirations that is why I pursued a Master of Business Administration (MBA) with a concentration in Information Technology. Soon after graduating I took up a position with a firm in the Information Technology field as a 'Business Analyst'. A Business Analyst in the IT/software development world refers to a liaison between the business and technical parts of an organization. There were several responsibilities of a Business Analyst but the most important one was meeting with the business, understanding what their problem statement is, what would be a good software or process that should be put in place to alleviate their problem. I would then take my findings and explain them to the technical/software development team who 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 the communication skills as I can easily apply them in the 'story teller' role that a Data Scientist has to play which involves sharing possible insights obtained from the data with an audience that is not technical or statistically savvy. Being in the Information Technology field requires one to be a constant learner as new technologies, software development methodologies are always being introduced. I thrive at that as I have always been great at teaching or educating myself on any work related topics via either online learning sites like Udacity, Youtube or just Google search.

I am an avid reader and about two years back 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 being someone from the technology field, this was the first time I had seen that phrase and it sparked by curiosity. This book was a phenomenal read and I recommend it to any of my friends and coworkers that wanted to better understand this field as it did a great job explaining the term 'Big Data' and also diving into how this will gradually change the world around us. I was amazed to find out that we can 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 as it was costly and that is why emphasis was made to store things such as customer or parts data.

It wasn't until a year back that I started to contemplate a possible career in this field. The two equally important skills I believe that a good Data Scientist should have are a strong statistical base and data extraction/management and wrangling abilities. Once I get my Data Science degree my eventual career goal is to be a Big Data expert that advises and makes sure that the organization that I work has the correct Big Data strategy to compete and hopefully get an edge on 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 a Chief Data Officer of an organization. I know however in order to get the right experience I need to take on different roles such as a Data Analyst, Data Visualizer, Data Engineer etc. so that I can gain a good understanding of the different aspects of Big Data and 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 the culmination of my passion, life and work experience thus far and I would like your institution to be my part as I embark on this journey.

Thank you for your consideration.