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## Finding Hope

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## Finding Hope

Arinze Awagu

This is the story of a young man who was given hope through medicine and found the strength to carry on following his dreams because of it. Living in Nigeria posed a lot of challenges for a young boy who was born with sickle cell anemia. “Harry” was the fourth of five children, and the second one to develop this genetic disorder after his eldest brother “Will.” This meant that both brothers had restricted childhoods in many ways just to be “safe.” At a young age Harry was already accustomed to hospitalizations and was on a heavy medication regimen just like Will. They lived in a society where being frequently ill was stigmatized and earned them the title “sickler” very early in life. They were told that sicklers did not live long and they had to be extra careful with everything they did. They despised that term and everything it stood for. They wished they were “normal” so they could play sports, go swimming, play in the rain and do other things that they saw kids their age do. They prayed for a miracle, but it came a little too late for Will.

Harry was only 8 years old when he witnessed his 17-year-old brother lose the battle against sickle cell disease. Their entire family was devastated about his demise. Harry was not only devastated, but he also began to subconsciously come to terms with his own imminent demise, this made him depressed and despondent. He wanted to get to grow up, be a doctor, enjoy life, even have kids of his own. All that seemed like a fool’s dream to him now.

He did grow up, but he lived life like he wasn't going to be around much longer and at 25, he went to the United States to earn a Master's degree. That was when he had a hematologist for the first time. After months of care under his new doctor, he was offered a spot in a stem cell transplant clinical trial for sickle cell anemia. Being a microbiologist, he understood the science behind the procedure and the flames of hope for a "normal" life were rekindled in him.

He underwent the procedure and is expected to make a full recovery and lead a fairly normal and long life. He has also started the process of studying to become a doctor himself so he can help revive the same hope that he got from other people.

To hope is to expect and desire something to happen, sometimes against reason. The ability to hope is something that unifies all of us, it is an attribute of humanity at its core. Having hope restored or given through medicine can be a very powerful source of strength and willingness to move on, to keep going, to live, and to enjoy life. Hope can be found in various places and situations and wherever there is life, there is hope.

