

## Blake Billings

How did growing up in Alpine influence your decision to pursue medicine?

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I kind of got in, got in medicine, kind of by on accident, kind of seeing my dad and being, you know, born into and I was kind of thought that was his thing. I'd go on rounds with him. And initially it was the burritos in the hospital, they had the best breakfast burritos, and I go with him on his rounds, and he'd usually stick me either at the nurses station or in labor and delivery. I got to meet all of those lovely ladies working at the nurses station. And that was really kind of my introduction in medicine. And it wasn't till probably about middle school and high school, when I was really, oh, like, this is actually really impactful work that he's doing. And so once I kind of realized that, I kind of decided to explore more. And, you know, really see, you know, this is really life changing work as well. And I think as I went into, that influenced when I went to UT Austin for my undergrad for these past four years, then I was like, Okay, I really want to explore public health and how you can affect populations health. And after that, I really kind of realized, oh, like being from the West Texas area, being especially from Alpine Texas, with one hospital serves 12,000 square miles, you know, there's a lot of barriers to care and a lack of access to care in my area that's unique to its area, and especially along the Texas, Mexico health border. And so I really got to know about the health disparities, and I got to have some higher level conversations with my dad about those health disparities. And so that's what really kind of reinforced, you know, okay, I do want to do medicine. I do want to, you know, influence people's lives and kind of incorporate public health into it and affect populations on a broader scale, rather than just in the clinic as well.

Can you tell us more about how watching your parents serve that community in the medical field impacted you?

1:29

Yeah so both my parents were in healthcare. My mom works for the 588 co-op for the Alpine ISD school district. But they are unique in that they serve both Terlingua all the way from Ft. Davis, Marathon, Marfa all the way to Sierra Blanca, up on I-10 and Van Horn as well. And so she was traveling all over the area. And sometimes I'd see her working within, you know, my elementary school, or my middle school or even high school, working with students of hers. And I think that coincided with my dad getting to see him work in the population in Alpine as well as driving down to Presidio and Marfa when he was traveling all those different directions. And so getting to see those communities, and, you know, be side by side shadow and in those communities, the same communities that I was playing, you know, high school sports in, and seeing the health disparities that were again coming up in other towns, really engaged my interest in seeing how my parents had to drive to these different areas to give care to these communities, and that they didn't have really stand alone physicians or physical therapists in that area. And so I think that definitely reinforced my, you know, my values of service and wanting to give back to my community and seeing how they were changing lives. Really, I wanted to be a part of that when I grew up.

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How did your experiences as an undergrad shape what you want to do in the future and which communities you want to focus on serving?

2:39

So I went to UT Austin, for my undergrad. And that really shaped, the public health degree there's really, really great program. They've got a really, a bunch of really amazing professors. And I think I brought a perspective to the classroom from rural areas. And alongside me were Texas Mexico areas, Texas Mexico border areas such as the valley. And getting to meet students like that within the public health degree program really reinforced my commitment to, you know, go back to West Texas and go back and try and be a part of those solutions to Texas, Mexico, health disparities through my public health degree. Now it really reinforced, you know, there's a joint MD MPH program, so Master in Public Health Program at Texas Tech. And so I was like, okay, that's definitely something I want to do, and get to know more of the policy side and advocate on a broader scale. I've seen a lot of the work that my dad has done with the Texas Legislature, as well as other you know, bigger institutions that have bigger access, and being able to leverage those resources for my own community is really important to me.