

## The Thumbs Up Guys Scholarship Essay

Shivers shot through my body as I looked out the compact airplane windows. It was June of 2014 when I left for my first trip to Nigeria, and I was excited to experience the vibrant culture surrounding me. Every morning, I would wake to see my parents meticulously laying out different medications for me and my brothers to take. Slightly annoyed, I didn't understand the importance of taking our medicine and felt that it was getting in the way of my chance to explore Nigeria.

One day, my curiosity got the best of me and I decided to ask my dad why this medicine was important. He explained that it was intended to protect us against malaria, and explained the danger of the malaria disease. However, at my young age, I did not understand a word of his explanation. I sat in front of him mindlessly nodding my head as if I understood, and we went about our day. As the day went on I began to think about my previous conversation with my dad, and one word caught my attention: mosquito. I was able to gather that malaria, a deadly disease, was caused by tiny, parasitic mosquitoes. This fact completely baffled my 11-year-old mind and lingered in the back of my head for the rest of our trip.

As we continued our six-week stay in Nigeria, I was extremely attentive to any insect or mosquito I saw coming our way, constantly swatting and striking into the rather vacant blue sky. I began to notice that my family who lived in Nigeria were not as concerned about these mosquitoes as I was. This confused me, but I chose to keep my concerns to myself.

Years passed since my first trip to Nigeria, yet the word 'mosquito' continued to have a place in my thoughts. I went on my second trip to Nigeria in 2019 and noticed the same patterns I saw with my family five years ago. Being far more mature than I was those years ago, I asked my family in Nigeria why they were not meticulously protecting themselves from these insects. They explained that mosquito repellents were not easily accessible, and the malaria vaccine was extremely costly. As they continued their explanation, intense emotions rose and overcame me. Anger, frustration, and confusion bubbled up within me and internally I began to question why they were not able to have access to these safety precautions. I understood the disadvantages they were facing and just how significant they were. I thought about my own life in the United States and learned the dangers of the commercial mosquito repellents we commonly used. On my trip back home, I decided that I would contribute to a change for my family in Nigeria and all over the world.

I decided to begin intensive research into the effects of malaria and environmentally-friendly mosquito repellents. Returning to my hometown excited to begin my research, I realized that I didn't know the first thing about environmentally-friendly repellents. I spent hours glued to my desk, researching to find a possible solution to my research query. I came across the use of candles, oil-burning torches, and other possibilities as repellents, but ended up rejecting them. Finally, I learned that monoterpenes, a chemical compound of many essential oils, are highly

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effective in repelling mosquitoes. Not only are essential oils safe for environmental use, but they are easily accessible and cost-efficient, which was a big concern of mine when I began my initial research.

Presently, as I continue my research project, I learn more information about the positive effects of essential oils as repellents. Thinking back to the conversation I had with my family in Nigeria and the knowledge I gained on chemically dangerous repellents used in the United States has been a constant drive for me, and I will continue to work towards finding a solution to this problem.