

My capstone project examines the struggles and stories of a small black community in Houston -- the lower income, Christian, and mostly elderly members of Word of Life Ministry. This community lives in some of the poorest areas of Houston and has limited access to good education and quality healthcare. The stories of these black residents are highly relatable to other lower income groups across America. As a member of this community, I want to better understand the discrepancies in healthcare that my people face. Growing up, there were so many times when I told a person that I wanted to be writer and their immediate response was: "Oh please, Thomaia, write my story." There is a strong need to be heard beyond our small community and I think our desire to share our stories and struggles grows stronger with time. My goals are: to accurately represent a small black Christian community in Houston; to share their stories with the general public; and for these stories to be relatable to all types of people.

This project allows me to put into practice the techniques and research methods I've learned about in my study of English literature and narrative medicine. I will have a specific angle on the healthcare journeys of people in this community and that is related to my own pursuit of having a medical career. During my time shadowing doctors at Texas Children's Hospital this summer, I observed that many of the patients were black and/or Latino. It's difficult to say what their economic backgrounds were, but there seemed to be a trend of people with poor primary healthcare who had serious conditions that could've been prevented. My capstone project has the potential to reveal what social, economical, and spiritual environments lead to limited or delayed healthcare access. I'll be working with the members of Word of Life Ministry in Houston, TX. On campus, I'll be receiving guidance from ESI graduate fellow, Chris Babits, and (potentially) my former non-fiction writing professor, Gregory Curtis. I draw inspiration from physicians who are also authors, like Dr. Jerome Groopman, the author of *How Doctors Think*. They are able to share stories of other physicians, patients and their families. Narratives like these can help people receive better treatment and learn how to better advocate for themselves. I hope the stories that I record, interpret, and write about are helpful in a similar way.

I began recording stories while I was in Houston this summer, but I need to conduct additional interviews over the coming academic year. I would rather collect stories in person because my methodology also takes into account body language and the environment. In light of this, I want to use my ESI research funds to travel to and from Houston. I would make sure that I consolidated my trips so they would be fewer in number (ideally, heading there two or three times each semester). Although I have been using my phone to record these stories, I think having a portable, external recorder would be very helpful. I've also taken photos of people I've interviewed, so perhaps access to a good camera or knowledge of how to edit photos would be beneficial. Other than that, I would need as much writing assistance as possible -- people to look over and edit my work. The Writing Center would be a great resource for that. I'm still considering the best way to publicize these stories. Ideally, I'd love to get published in a newspaper or magazine. Perhaps a blog or website would be another way of getting these stories to the public.