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UTA ambassador keeps moving forward

Simi Tometi’s willpower allowed him to adjust to his disability and develop himself

BY PEYTON C. NORTH
The Shorthorn staff



The Shorthorn: Lorena Torres Romero

Simi Tometi said when he came to UTA in 2015, he got a second chance at life.

Tometi is a graduating biology and exercise science senior taking 22 credit hours. That may sound daunting, but Tometi said he makes time to devote to his studies and fulfill his role as a UTA ambassador.

“There is always something to do,” he said. “For most people, that stresses them out, but for me, it excites me.”

Tometi’s morning routine begins with a physical therapist helping him get out of bed, into his wheelchair and ready for a packed schedule he said helps him stay positive.

In December 2011, halfway through his junior year in high school, Tometi was involved in an automobile accident where he was ejected from the vehicle, breaking two vertebrae and partially tearing his spinal cord. He doesn’t remember much before waking up in the Intensive Care Unit.

Tometi remembers being confused when the doctor asked him about going into surgery. He thought maybe it was going to be a minor surgery like a tonsil removal.

“I could see the distress on my mom’s face,” he said. “Moms, they worry a lot.”

While friends visited him in the hospital, Tometi said it took days

In 2011, Simi Tometi, exercise science and biology senior, was involved in an automobile accident, which left him with two broken vertebrae and a partially torn spinal cord. Tometi said living with his disability accelerated his personal growth.

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The Shorthorn: Presley Glotfelty

Simi Tometi, exercise science and biology senior, left, and information systems senior Tatenda Ndlovu laugh during the Student Governance banquet April 25 in the University Center Bluebonnet Ballroom.

Simi

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before he fully understood his situation.

"I remember there was one instance, I was like, 'Can somebody uncross my legs?'" he said. "And they're like, 'your legs aren't crossed, they're straight.'"

While going through physical therapy, he wasn't sure about the severity of his injury. Tometi played football in high school — he was used to getting hit and getting back up.

After graduating high

school, Tometi spent the next three years reconstructing his life, learning to cope and understand his disability.

"Life is completely different," he said. "I need assistance with a lot of things."

Tometi attended community college close to home in Midlothian, TX, and said during this period, he had little to do besides go to class and come home.

When Tometi left to attend UTA, his family was worried about the challenges he would face becoming independent.

"We were very nervous about him leaving to

college," said Tometi's mother, Angela Tometi. "To our surprise and joy, the first week of college, Simi didn't call for anything."

She said out of all her children, Simi Tometi has the strongest will.

"It was so devastating," she said. "But one thing he never did was go down that road of self-pity."

Hardship is relative, and understanding that comes with growing up and loving yourself, Simi Tometi said.

"You're the most important project you are ever going to work on," he said. "You just got to keep going, keep going and keep pushing."

Roger Mora, Simi Tometi's best friend from high school, said he has seen his friend grow strong and mature over the years.

"His words of wisdom and what he knows and just the way he communicates with people," Mora said. "I think that we are missing a lot of that from people-to-people interactions."

Simi Tometi said the daily reality checks that come with his disability have accelerated his personal growth and maturity.

"I was just caught up in trying to be who I believe everybody wanted to be instead of just being myself," he said. "I would

say now I'm, for the most part, unapologetically myself."

Mora said Simi Tometi has stayed the same just as much as he has changed. He has always had the charisma, the artistic drive and humor he has today.

"I call that guy if I'm having a bad day, man," Mora said. "I couldn't ask for a better friend, honestly."

Simi Tometi said he feels lucky to have formed the bonds he has. He said it's important to have friends who hold you accountable and have characteristics you desire in yourself.

"A lot of things I believe are out of my control," he

said. "You can call it divine intervention or luck or what have you, but I don't believe I'm doing all this by myself."

After graduation, Simi Tometi said his passions could lead him to become a physician, pursuing business or following his love for visual communication and film.

"I just love people. I love helping people out," he said. "I thoroughly believe you reap what you sow, and so far that underlying theme has proven itself true in my life."

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