**The lessons we take from obstacles we encounter can be fundamental to later success. Recount a time when you faced a challenge, setback, or failure. How did it affect you, and what did you learn from the experience?**

During a certain period of my life, being fat was a blessing.

My body was a way to entertain people as I often cracked fat jokes about myself or even played fat characters in school plays. I had the time of my life since people respected me for who I was. However, my world changed when my parents moved me to a new school.  
  
This school was an all-boys institution with a long history of sporting excellence, but I still hoped I could fit in with a large figure. I was wrong. One day, when I was told to run ten laps around the football field in my PE class, some of my seniors suddenly gathered to watch me run, ridiculing me — this led to my classmates normalizing fat-shaming me on a regular basis.   
  
I was extremely frustrated that, in reality, others still valued a standard as petty as ideal body weight. But at the same time, I believed my body weight wasn't a reflection of my worth.  
  
During the pandemic, I started to turn my life around. My daily bowl of instant noodles turned into Caesar salads. Afternoon naps turned into cardio training. Netflix binge became YouTube learning sessions on nutrition. As I became preoccupied with the science of fat loss, I learned how nutrition plays an extremely vital role in our diet and health.

As I lost more weight, I became ecstatic. An impossible task, now within reach, I felt bliss over the thought of overcoming my biggest insecurity. After twelve months of stringent diets and consistent workouts, I finally lost 36 kgs.

But I didn't stop there.   
  
As I volunteered at RHAI, an NGO based in Jakarta whose mission is to help Indonesian children improve literacy rates, in November 2021, I noticed that many of these children look stunted. The more I interacted with them and their parents, the more I learned about their situation — how financially difficult it was for them to make informed decisions about nutrition.   
  
Hence, I decided to create Grow & Grub — an initiative whose aim is to empower children in Jakarta with knowledge of nutrition and health. For my first project, I developed various cheeky meals with a 2:2:1 ratio for balancing carbs, protein, and fibers. On the side, I was raising money to kickstart the charity process.

After raising enough money, I returned to RHAI in March of this year— this time to teach the children nutrition and bring them nutritious lunches! As I unloaded 50 portions, all the kids came to see their lunches — crispy katsu with some broccoli and brown rice. Using the meal as an example, I explained what micronutrients were and the importance of each ingredient for the body.

I would continue to do this for months, bringing different meals each time. It warmed my heart to hear students ask about why they needed carbohydrates, or when their parents asked for my recipe. It moved me to see the children appreciate my cooking and food in general, with which I used to have a bad relationship.

This moment served as a milestone to how far I've come. What started as a vengeful diet journey to prove to my seniors and friends that I was a worthy human being — this has become a twist and turn along the path of self-discovery and compassion.

When I returned to school post-Covid time, students' murmuring punctuated the halls — as I surprised them with my new look. The initially rowdy class was abruptly silenced when all saw the anomaly standing by the door: me. A shrill voice broke the silence and said, "Is that Rayandra?!" As more classmates realized who I was, they abandoned their seats to applaud my victory. Weirdly enough, their excitement felt anticlimactic to my being at that moment, as I no longer needed their validation to define me as a person.

Hi Rayandra!

I am joyous to see your transformation and how your relationship with food was amended. You even successfully became a pillar and a role model for healthy eating. Well done! I feel that your journey can be better reflected by including more details into your thought process and self reflection (see comments above) as fixing those parts would create a more coherent and dramatic story: an essay the admission committee would love ☺

You’ve focused on the actions that you’ve taken after learning more about healthy lifestyle, so I’d like if you can give the same focus on your feelings and thought process beforehand so the readers can walk along your journey (see notes).

Best wishes,

Melinda