***Discuss an accomplishment, event, or realization that sparked a period of personal growth and a new understanding of yourself or others.***

Throughout junior high, I was always consistent in one thing: being both the shortest and smallest in my basketball team. My 5’2” height would mean that opponents could easily swat away my layups as I got close to the basket. My small physique would constrain me from shooting from far away as I lacked power. This eventually led to me getting benched for most of the games. Nonetheless, my passion and love for basketball has never diminished.

This left a question that remained unanswered, “Why do I like playing basketball? Is it the thrill? Is it the sweat? Is it the victory?”

As the pandemic struck, I began to feel a growing desire to find the answer to that question. Every 5 pm, loud thumps of dribbling coming from outside would mock me of my lockdown. With each passing day, I grew more and more uneasy as I yearned for the times where basketball was a regular part of my life. So, I started investigating.

I chose a quiet time to sneak out and play basketball alone. In a small basketball court located near my house, I took a couple of shots and practiced some moves. It gave me a sense of relief, but something still felt lacking. I realized that my attachment towards basketball wasn’t just something physical but something of deeper philosophical value.

Arriving home, I proceeded to scour through the old photos of my basketball team. As I went through each file, one photo stood out in particular. It was a pregame photo of our team in the finals of a championship. A game that would eventually lead us to our first ever tournament win.

Kneeling next to me in the photo was Bobbie, my closest teammate. A talented shooter who was quick on his feet and one of the team's core playmakers thanks to his quick thinking.

Standing behind me was Rayner, an absolute wall of a player. Though not the tallest or the biggest, his dedication to give his absolute all and put his own body on the line makes him an exceptional defender.

Next to him was Dillon, the heart and flare of the group. A great leader who trusts his teammates and motivates through optimism and spirit.

Looking at those pictures made me realize that It wasn't the game that I fell in love with; not the thrill, not the sweats, not the victories. What matters most are the connections I was able to establish with the incredible individuals in my team. To get to know them alongside their strengths and weaknesses, and to make up for one another's shortcomings while developing together as a team. I loved basketball because it allowed me to connect with people.

Upon discovering the answer to the long reigning question, I proceeded to search for alternative activities to fill in the void left from being unable to play basketball. My search led me to attend numerous organizations, including the student council and the church apostles. After investing my time and efforts to participate in each organization, I came to understand how this had improved me as a person and helped me find purpose in my life. Therefore, it whetted my appetite for attending more organizations in the years to come.

Being part of different organizations allowed me to meet and connect with a lot of people, much more than what I was able to get from basketball. Doing so has given me a lot of new insights, and shaped me into a more open-minded person. Furthermore, it allowed me to build a positive network of friends.

In the future, I aspire to study abroad at a well known school so that I can meet and connect with diverse people from around the world, learning new things from each and every one of them while developing myself as an individual.