**5. Describe the most significant challenge you have faced and the steps you have taken to overcome this challenge. How has this challenge affected your academic achievement? (350 words)**

My “90” was never anything compared to my brother’s “97”. Growing up, math was my biggest enemy. Unaware I was capable academically, my downward spiral began by constantly comparing myself to my elder brother. I cast away math because I felt I wasn’t good enough, and my grades became a reflection of my decline in efforts.

But the years went by, and the growing pressures of getting into a good school and building a good future made academics my main priority. I was forced to get back into math, not to be on par with my brother, but for my own survival. There was that constant fear in the back of my mind, one that made me put down my calculator more times than I would’ve liked. Frustration would eat me up, as I stood there stagnant struggling through the problems my brother would breeze through.

 Yet, I never let it swallow me whole. I stand forever grateful that I was able to strive through that phase. I forced myself to ask questions in math classes, watched Khan Academy for hours on end, and even asked my own brother for help. Even though it felt like I abandoned my pride, deep down I knew it was for the greater good.

Realizing that math was understood through practice and not raw talent, I found myself deeply engrossed in equations. Solving a question in one go was exhilarating, and my struggle to get the answers only amplified that addicting feeling. The electrifying feeling when I saw that “A” in my report card for the first time in years was incomparable.

All this time, I was my own limiting factor. Just because I wasn’t as good as others doesn’t mean I was inadequate. I was good enough in my own way. My grades gradually improved and I was content with my results.

Though comparison occasionally slips through the cracks, I remind myself of my journey with math, and tell myself that the only person I should be outdoing is the past me.

Hi Amanda,

You’ve chosen a relatable topic about sibling rivalry and how you’ve successfully overcome your struggles. The steps that you did to improve yourself was also written in sequence, which made it quite easy to follow.

However, I feel that you spent too much focus on the sibling rivalry part in the first and second paragraph. To make your essay clearer, try splitting it into three segments.

1. The Challenge: In one paragraph, talk about why you felt insecure and why you constantly compared your score to your brother’s. This resulted in you putting less effort and decline in grades. The challenge would be why you needed to improve your score. (see comments above)

What You Did: This is the part that is the highlight of your essay, so spend more time elaborating on your self reflection. There are some questions to help you answer this section.

-What made you strive despite your struggle?

-What was your inner strength that gave you the motivation to study? (rather than wanting to be better than your brother, did you have a specific goal in mind such as getting into a top school to pursue your dream?)

What You Learned: This part is quite well written. There is a clear inner reflection of wanting to be better than the previous “you.” To make your values easier to read, talk about how being self-critical only wore you down, but how acknowledging yourself helped you love yourself more and maybe improve the relationship between you and your loved ones.

Best wishes,

Melinda