***Tell a story from your life, describing an experience that either demonstrates your character or helped to shape it. --> 650 words***

I had never really liked bracelets and used to think that would never change. Since my family was of Chinese background, on special occasions, my relatives would give me a red envelope containing money and bracelets which supposedly fends off evil spirits. I’d wear it during family events and photos or when they were around, but take it off right after, just for it to be another addition to the collection of bracelets sitting on my shelf, collecting dust.

Last year, I received another bracelet from Jocelyn in school. Not wanting to disrespect her kindness, I wore it for the time being.

“I’ll take it off when she’s not around,” I said to myself.

The bracelet left an unpleasant feeling on my wrist as it constantly moved and rubbed against my skin. Hours went by and the school bell finally rang. I reached home and the same fate befell this bracelet without giving it the chance to grow on me.

Without realizing it, I had found myself in a cycle of avoidance whenever I felt discomfort. This same phenomenon seemed to pervade other parts of my life. I found myself avoiding relatives I didn’t recognize during large family gatherings because it would have been too awkward to start a conversation. When hiking during family trips, I’d always take the easiest routes, fearing risks and failures. During the transition from middle school to high school, I was overwhelmed by the huge jump in course rigor and having to balance my studies with my student council responsibilities. As a coping mechanism, I procrastinated and isolated myself in my room.

As my second year of high school drew dauntingly close, I found myself in my room gazing upon the ever-growing collection of awards I’ve accumulated over the years. There was one that stood out in particular, the trophy for winning first place in the Chinese Drama Competition during 6th grade. Looking back, it wasn’t the fact that I won that made the award memorable. It was the fact that my parents signed me up for the competition against my will that made a lasting impression on me. I realized that if I wasn’t pushed outside my comfort zone in the first place, this wouldn’t have been possible.

Moving forward from that realization, I tried to change my mentality bit by bit. I started pushing myself with simple activities, like forcing myself to take cold baths and exercising more often. As time went on, I pushed myself further and further until before I knew it, I was able to confront my limitations, take on new responsibilities, organize national-scale events and even take on an internship.

Just this year, I participated in a hackathon with a team of 4 for the very first time in the hopes of exploring more about the field of computer science. Despite knowing I had close to zero experience in app development, let alone in pitching, I registered anyway. I didn’t want to succumb to my fear of failure and discomfort and let this opportunity go away. With only a few days till D-Day, I studied as much as I possibly could and, to my surprise, placed second. Deciding to make that small push into the unfamiliar had changed how I approached my difficulties and opportunities.

As I’m writing this, I’m at my desk, my hands typing away on my keyboard as I stare at the document on my monitor. The bracelet I previously cast away is now on my left wrist, visible in my periphery. What initially felt like a shackle both physically and mentally, the bracelet had now become proof and a constant reminder to me that sometimes life’s greatest and most valuable moments exist outside your comfort zone. You just have to keep pushing yourself to take that extra step. Me? I just had to wear the bracelet.