***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?***

“Music itself is healing, an explosive manifestation of humanity, a universal language, and most importantly it is the soundtrack of our lives...” emphasized by Mr Yandri, the chairman of the music department. Yet, I never really understood what he meant at first.

My interest in guzheng, known as the Chinese harp, which I frequently saw in my grandma's Chinese drama, started during the instrument exhibition at my school. From the right hand's string-plucking to the left hand's pushing of the string to alter the pitch and generate vibrato, everything about how it was performed screams elegance. I daydreamed of playing this instrument, pleasing my grandmother, and perhaps becoming as pretty as the lady in the drama. But, of course, learning new things isn’t easy especially when your teacher doesn’t speak the same language as you. However, Gui Lao Shi would simply teach me all the methods physically and correct my form, allowing me to be part of the Chinese orchestra thanks to her “ad-hoc” teaching method. As my dream seems to go smoothly, covid-19 happened. I simply couldn't grasp all of the new techniques being taught using only visuals and voices. Music class became my dreaded weekly lesson, where all of my frustrations would coalesce, my stress level would skyrocket and my motivation to perform well would vanish.

What Mr Yandri said at the beginning, “...healing…universal language…soundtrack of our loves…” played over and over again in my head. But why did I truly believed guzheng was a waste of time? At this point, my life skills teacher introduced me to the Gibbs Reflection cycle, a framework that assists individuals in identifying their issues, places for improvement, and actions they can take to learn from their experiences. Modifying it somewhat to meet my situation, step 1: Problem is ineffective communication. Step 2: Feelings are stressful and unproductive. Step 3: Evaluation is eliminating the communication issues. Step 4: Purpose is for me to learn this instrument and simply not giving up without putting in more effort. Step 5: Action plan is to learn Chinese to understand Lao Shi so I can continue to learn guzheng. My reflection sessions provided me with the motivation I needed to begin practicing hard despite all of the underlying barriers.

Ever since, I resolved to devote more time and effort to learning the instrument, including learning Chinese to overcome the language barrier and increasing my practice time. Slowly but surely, there was definitely progress in my guzheng skills. Two years later, I managed to get a solo performance. I was on cloud nine: I immediately called my grandparents and invited them to come watch my solo performance.

On D-day, I walked out and stood in the middle of the humongous stage with that fluttery nervous stomach feeling; I was shaking and my entire body seemed to be drenched in sweat. In the corner of my eyes, I could see my grandparents cheering me on, which gave me all the calmness that I needed. I plucked my first note, and the sound echoed throughout the concert hall. The rest of the song went off without a hitch, with no major blunders or nerve-racking moments.

At the end of the day, seeing my grandparents smiling, clapping their hands and being proud of me was worth all the tears and effort inputted for this. My grandmother is not a very expressive person, so the moment when she said, "Good job, I'm really impressed of you," and then proceeded to prepare her specialty, mishua, is one that will always hold a special place in my heart.

Throughout my guzheng journey, I realized that challenges come pre-packaged with life lessons. Whatever barriers there are between people, those are not impenetrable. Just like how I overcame my barrier by putting in more effort and empathizing with my teacher. I can’t always expect people to adjust to my lifestyle, I need to be flexible and take the initiative to adjust myself no matter what situation I will be in. I guess now I can say that I understand the meaning behind Mr Yandri’s words now.

Hi Victoria,

This is a great story to write for your essay! I can see how you’ve learned a lot from this experience.

To make this essay stronger though, I would suggest you to be clearer on what the barriers are (difficulty of learning the instrument itself and language), and elaborate more on your process in overcoming them, to really highlight what you learned even clearer.

All the best!

Caroline & Fedora

ALL-in Essay Editors