***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?***

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. Gui Lao Shi would simply move my hands to match the techniques and correct my form, allowing me to be part of the Chinese orchestra. As my dream seems to go smoothly, COVID-19 happened. I simply couldn't grasp all of the new techniques being taught through Zoom sessions. Music class became my dreaded weekly lesson, where all of my frustrations would coalesce and my motivation to perform well would vanish. I truly believed guzheng was a waste of time and considered giving up guzheng.

At this point, my life skills teacher introduced me to the Gibbs Reflection cycle, a framework that assists individuals in identifying their areas of improvement and actions they can take to learn from their experiences.

“If the language barrier is the main issue,” I thought, “isn't it something that I can overcome? Can't I just put in more effort and devote more time to learning Chinese and practicing instead of complaining about my situation? Am I really going to give up now that I've come this far in learning guzheng and throw away all the hard work I've put in over the years?” I asked myself. My reflection sessions provided me with the motivation I needed to begin practicing harder despite all of the underlying barriers.

Ever since, I resolved to devote more time and effort to learning the instrument. Putting hours and hours of hard work into learning Chinese textbooks and flashcards to understand my instructor, understanding specific guzheng terminology, and increasing my practice time. It would be inaccurate to say that the path was always smooth, but with the assistance of Google Translate, it was smoother. 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 by 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, they are not impenetrable. I need to continually see the value in setbacks, learn from them, and have a positive outlook. Focusing on the rewards you will receive rather than the struggles just may be the pinch of motivation that I needed. Just as when I put extra effort into my learning process, I was rewarded with a solo performance, the ability to speak Chinese, and feeling somewhat like the pretty lady in my grandma’s Chinese drama playing guzheng.

Hi Vicky!

We’re soooo close to getting this essay finished. There are just a few tweaks to make to help the reader understand why continuing your guzheng lessons was so important to you, so that the reader roots for you.

Last round of revisions, let’s go!

Caroline & Chiara

ALL-in Essay Editors