**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?**

Growing up, math was my biggest enemy. My 90% always felt like nothing compared to my brother’s 97%. I knew I was smart, but somehow it never felt enough. Slowly, I cast away math because I felt I could never be good enough. My grades became a reflection of my decline in efforts: 90% became 70%, and soon enough, math was dead to me.

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. I could feel myself falling further away from my dream school and the future I wanted.

“Math isn’t just talent, girl, you have to practice.” My 11th grade Math teacher had noticed how I’d grown quiet after getting my test back, holding back tears.

Her words clicked into place. I had thought that I would never be as good as my naturally talented brother, but… I forced myself to ask questions in math classes, watched Khan Academy for hours on end, and even asked my brother for help. At some point, I asked my mom to confiscate my phone until I had finished studying. At some point, the glass fractured—I was no longer afraid of math.

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.

I realized that all this time, I was my own limiting factor. Just because I wasn’t as good as others doesn’t mean I was inadequate. With enough practice, my grades gradually improved and I was content with my results. Getting better at math taught me how to be patient and motivate myself in a healthy way. Though comparison still occasionally slips through the cracks, I remind myself of my journey with math. In the end, the only person I should be outdoing is the past me.