**“Discuss an accomplishment, event, or realization that sparked a period of personal growth and a new understanding of yourself or others.”**

From a young age, I was driven to be the most active and high-achieving student in my class. The thrill of performing well and earning high grades gave me an immense sense of satisfaction that I craved more and more with each passing year. This desire for perfection turned into a behavior that persisted throughout my academic career and was deeply ingrained in my mind. As an outcome, I was often classified as the "smart one" among my peers.

The end of elementary school was a time of great stress and anxiety for me, as I was faced with weekly tests in a variety of different subjects. My teachers had warned us from an early age that these kinds of tests often resulted in a drop in scores for even the top-performing students, and unfortunately, I was no exception. Despite my best efforts to adapt to the new routine, I found myself struggling to keep up with the rigorous demands of the weekly lessons. As someone who works better learning on their own, I found it challenging to thrive in a group setting, which only added to my stress and frustration.

After a few weeks, I started to understand that the weekly lessons were just not right for me. I believed that trying to keep up with my classmates was a waste of time and energy, and as a consequence, my grades suffered. It was difficult for me to accept this, especially because I felt obligated to participate in the weekly lessons with my friends. I was nevertheless aware that in order to succeed, I had to put my own needs and learning preferences first.

Although being labeled "smart" may sound like a compliment, it actually presented a series of challenges for me. My peers would frequently put pressure on me to perform above and beyond during those times when my grades were declining because they had grown accustomed to expecting nothing less from the "smart one." Thus, rather than being an honor, this label turned into a burden. Just to maintain my reputation, I felt compelled to pursue excellence in every aspect of my life. This stereotype placed a tremendous amount of pressure on me, and I could never let my guard down or relax. The constant pressure to be the best weighed heavily on me, causing me to develop controlling and perfectionistic tendencies. I became obsessed with achieving academic success and craved validation through my grades. I always felt like I needed to prove myself and outdo others, even turning casual interactions into competitions. I even felt envious and competitive when I came across someone who was more talented or intelligent than me.

My mental health was significantly impacted by the pressure to be perfect, and I had trouble managing to maintain a positive relationship with my academic accomplishments. I began to tie my self-worth to my grades and performance, which only increased my anxiety and stress. Over time, this negative thought pattern became deeply ingrained in my mind, and it began to affect other areas of my life as well. I then realized this mindset was not healthy. While success may bring temporary praise and validation, failure can leave you feeling invisible and worthless. When we break or lose control, we might feel as though we have shattered into a million pieces. It can be difficult to pick ourselves back up again, but with time and reflection, we can learn from our mistakes and become stronger.

Reflecting on my experience, I can say that being labeled as the "smart one" may initially seem like a benefit, it can quickly turn into a burden. It is like being put on a pedestal, where when you do well, people will applaud and compliment you, but when you fail, people will question and criticize you. The pressure to continously be the best can lead to controlling and perfectionistic tendencies, as well as jealousy and the desire to compete with others. However, failure is not the end. It is an opportunity to learn, grow, and become stronger. While the pressure to succeed can be overwhelming, it is important to remember that mistakes are part of the journey and that success is not the only measure of your worth. So, let us strive not only for success but also for self-acceptance and personal growth.