**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? (350 words)**

My “90” was never anything compared to my brother’s “97”. In no way was it bad, it was good, just not good enough. Growing up, math was my biggest enemy. Not realizing I was perfectly capable academically, my downward spiral began by constantly comparing myself to my elder brother. I cast away math just because I felt I wasn’t good enough, and my grades became a reflection of my decline in efforts.

But the 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. There was that constant fear in the back of my mind, one that made me put down my calculator more times than I would’ve liked. Frustration would eat me up, as I stood there stagnant struggling through the problems my brother would breeze through.

 Yet, I never let it swallow me whole. I stand forever grateful that I was able to strive through that phase. Forcing myself to ask questions in math classes, watching Khan Academy for hours on end, to even asking my own brother for help. Even though it felt like I abandoned my pride, deep down I knew it was for the greater good.

To realize that math was understood through practice and not raw talent. I found myself deeply engrossed in equations, I had sat there doing math for three hours, enjoying it. Enjoying how solving a question in one go made me feel, and the struggle it took to get there only amplified that addicting feeling. The electrifying feeling when I saw that “A” in my report card for the first time in years, nothing could ever compare.

I was my own limiting factor, not just in math, but in multiple aspects of life. Not doing things because I would be the only one to do it, or never doing anything anyone deemed as  “hard” because I felt like I couldn’t do it.  It took some pitfalls for a change in mindset, just because I wasn’t “as good as them” doesn’t mean I was inadequate. I was good enough in my own way. My grades gradually improved and I was content with where I was.

Though comparison occasionally slips through the cracks, I remind myself of my journey with math, and tell myself that the only person I should be outdoing is me.