***Prompt 5: Discuss an accomplishment, event, or realization that sparked a period of personal growth and a new understanding of yourself or others.***

It was the peak of the exam week, and the weight of my academic demands and extracurricular commitments was starting to take its toll. The tasks that I needed to do kept on piling up as if each day brought a new challenge to conquer. As someone who likes cooking, within the midst of this adversity, cooking became my source of relief. It was at this point that had led me to learning that cooking is not only the source of relief, but also the source of my self-control.

In the middle of this hectic week, like usual, I decided to distract myself with cooking. This time, I chose to cook chicken teriyaki. As I was fileting a chicken breast, the knife slipped from my hands, resulting in a deep 1.5-cm cut on my index finger. As blood started to gush out from said finger and dripped down on the ingredients that I prepared, panic built up and started to take over me. Funnily enough, the panic was not about my finger. Instead, it’s about how this red liquid would ruin the ingredients that I was preparing and contaminate my bulldog who was spectating on this whole debacle. However, in that moment, a different instinct took hold—a desire to salvage the dish which also restored my sense of control.

Calmly, I quickly applied pressure to my finger, ran it under running water to check if it needed stitches - which it did - then bandaged it up with cotton and gauze under the sink. I also managed to clean the blood off my dog’s snout, keeping everything sanitary, and still affording to salvage the dish all with my uninjured hand. Afterwards, I started contacting my parents, seeing if someone could help me get to the hospital. To no avail, no one answered. Another panic struck me, but again another instinct surfaced as I calculated that walking 2 km to the hospital was the fastest option.

As I walked my first km, an instant regret washed over me: the hospital is so near yet so far. The walk took longer than expected. Much… much… longer. However, it did give me time to reflect on the events that led to my current situation: how I got cut due to my blunder and my subsequent response to it. As my hands were occupied with keeping my blood dripping off the streets, I began to wonder what would happen to my barely cooked chicken. I also prematurely turned off the heat, leaving the garlic insufficiently browned and the vegetables untouched. Lost in thoughts, I suddenly found myself at the hospital’s ICU and promptly received treatment. Throughout the treatment, the doctor commended my composure and even joked that, had I panicked, I might have found myself lying unconscious due to severing a large vein. While quite insignificant, his remark made my realize that it was my love for cooking that kept me composed throughout the ordeal. If the success of my dish was not threatened, I might not have reacted the way I did. With this realization, I realized that cooking was more than just an interest - it’s what keeps my emotions and thoughts under control during crisis.

Since this realization  I have actively embraced cooking as a tool to navigate the challenges that I faced in my life. One particular instance occurred during my junior year research project. The focus of the project was to develop an affordable and nutritious instant noodle using tempeh, a staple food in Indonesia. Throughout the project, I’ve encountered a persistent issue with texture: the noodles were consistently crumbly and dry. Drawing upon my cooking experiences and the composure they fostered, I managed to approach the issue from a fresh perspective, which led me to incorporate additives like kansui that’s used to give the chewiness of ramen. Moreover, I’ve also introduced a novel method to increase their fiber content using psyllium husk. It was eye-opening to see how intertwining my cooking skills with my research elevated the popularity of my research presentation’s booth. It surprisingly garnered the highest number of visitors, including the executives from a renown instant noodle company “Mie Sedap,” which has confirmed the potency of cooking as my own problem-solving tool.

Cooking has been more than just a hobby; it has been a source of fascination and a powerful medium to express myself. Looking back, it’s clear that my profound passion for cooking has played an instrumental role in my personal growth. It has taught me invaluable lessons not only on maintaining control, but also provided me with insights into my own identity. With this, I intend to continue to pursue cooking as my companion and consistent problem-solving tool. Cooking will forever remain my chosen path that will guide me in the future that will enrich my culinary exploration, academic pursuit, and self-discovery.