***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?***

“Music is a universal language.”, “Music is known to lighten the mood”, “Music allows one to self-heal”. There are countless praises that were said about music, but I didn’t understand them at first.

It all began during the instrument exhibition at my school, where I developed an interest in the guzheng, also known as the Chinese harp. Everything about the way it was played screams elegance, from the right hand's plucking to the left hand's pushing of the string to alter the pitch and generate vibrato. Realizing that this was the same instrument in my grandma's Chinese drama played by a beautiful lady during afternoon tea parties, I daydreamed about playing it,  making my grandma proud and possibly growing up to be as pretty as that lady. But, of course, learning new things isn’t easy especially when your teacher is Chinese and is unable to speak the same language as you. However, it was still manageable because Gui Lao Shi would just physically teach me all the techniques and fix my form. After a few years, I managed to become part of the Chinese orchestra thanks to her “ad-hoc” teaching method.

As my guzheng dream seems to go smoothly, covid-19 happened. Now, not only was there a language barrier, but there were also technical issues such as an unstable internet connection. I simply couldn't grasp all of the new techniques being taught using only visuals and voices. When I messed up a section of the music sheet, there was no one to physically correct and fix me, not to mention that the notes in my script just kept getting more and more foreign with strange symbol and number combinations. My dream to surprise my grandma just seems to be slipping further and further away. Music class became my dreaded weekly lesson, where all of my frustrations would coalesce, my stress level would skyrocket, and my motivation to perform well would vanish. At the time, I truly believed guzheng was a waste of time. These questions were ingrained in my mind: "How will I even be able to perform for my grandma and make her proud if we can't even communicate?"

I returned to those music quotes and pondered ‘if this is how other people think of music, why can’t I think like that?’ Introduced to the Gibbs Reflection cycle by my life skills teacher, I decided to alter it a bit to fit my context. Step 1: Problem is ineffective communication. Step 2: Feelings are stressful and unproductive. Step 3: Evaluation is eliminating the communication issues. Step 4: Action plan is to learn Chinese to understand Lao Shi so I can continue to learn guzheng. My reflection sessions provided me with the motivation I needed to begin practicing hard despite all of the underlying barriers.

From then on, I resolved to devote more time and effort to learning the instrument, including learning Chinese to overcome the language barrier and increasing my practice time. Slowly but surely, there was definitely progress in my guzheng skills. Two years later, I managed to get a solo performance. I was on cloud nine and immediately, I 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.

Throughout my guzheng journey, I realized that challenges come prepackaged with life lessons. Whatever barriers there are between people, those are not immovable. Just like how I overcame my barrier by putting in more effort and empathizing with my teacher. I can’t always expect people to adjust to my lifestyle, I need to be flexible and take the initiative to adjust myself no matter what situation I will be in. I guess now I can say that I understand the meaning behind those music quotes now.