Scoliosis Essay

V7

160cm

***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?***

Getting the wrong McMuffin is scary but changing your staple order is frightening. I have lived all my life under confinement: 7 years of the same order, the same song on repeat, and the same hobby—swimming. I abhor uncertainty; the risk of not having everything under control.

My solution?

I began documenting change as a means to control the inevitable.

At age 14, I could hold my breath for 203 seconds. The same age I couldn’t lift a plastic bottle due to a sharp pain weighing my back. The same year I heard the term ‘**Moderate-Severe Genetic Scoliosis Disorder**’.

That year, the biggest change wasn’t puberty, it was understanding that my maximum height would be the lifeless and stout 160cm. Worse? It couldn’t be fixed, only maintained.

Dr. Nicholas proposed swimming as a solution to my condition. My predilection towards being still had come back to bite me: the stacked irony.

It was the first time I felt suffocated at the bottom of the pool. The quiet atmosphere was disrupted by an ear-splitting thought that I would be the next *Quasimodo*; I’d have nobody to sit with during lunch; a hobby turned into a chore.

At age 15, I stopped swimming altogether. To have my bones curve into an S! I recalled thinking Superman was overrated. I resented anything that reminded me of the things I couldn’t control—including my hobby and NaiNai.

My sweet NaiNai, who makes my favorite Rendang, passed down the disorder to me. Feeling zero remorse; her calls were never answered, and I refused to eat her meals. October 1st, I showed up on her doorstep with an uninspired ‘Happy Birthday’. I rang her bell multiple times, but she didn’t answered.. I got in with an extra key and found her in the kitchen; agony was sewn into her face. A look I was too familiar with. One never knew where the next pain might be—the side of your hip, the nape of your neck, your lower back…

Overwhelmed with guilt, I tried to blame the common enemy. NaiNai frittered my cynical thoughts and responded: “All we need is one act of insane bravery to accept change and you might be surprised.”

I learned that NaiNai couldn’t alleviate her pain since she couldn’t swim. Her meek attitude sparked a realization that in life, the only constant thing is uncertainty. I figured change wasn’t like the rice-cooker that papa bought last week—it has no warranty. Change reeks of 50-50 scenarios I would mull over for hours. And if I did embrace newness, I’d have to edit an insane amount of data in my record book, but it could feel like diving headfirst into the pool. It could feel like losing my first tooth. Thus, began my journey to teach NaiNai how to swim.

Baby steps. I began documenting change as a means of improvement.

Every Wednesday, NaiNai brought warm Oolong and her game face on. I could tell she’s scared, but there was glee with every handhold and a trust between us. Papa helped, supporting NaiNai’s weight by directing arm movements and the required balance for her to stay afloat. Sure, there were days where NaiNai’s steps couldn’t reach the pool. There were bleak hours where NaiNai would panic. There were times I’d be the one in pain. But Wednesday is my favorite day again. I’m no longer impatient for our lesson to be finished, instead I sit in wonder as I cheer NaiNai on.

Seeing NaiNai dance in the kitchen to *Que Sera Sera* made me comprehend that change has always been a two-sided coin. The risk triples but the reward stretches to the horizon. And when the coin lands on the right side…the joy, the absolute joy…

7 years ago, if Papa had checked for a monster under my bed, change would look at him directly in the eyes and say hello. Today, I look for opportunities to be surprised in every corner, starting with the Scoliosis-prevention swimming class I created.

NaiNai armed me with the mindset to have the courage and embrace any frailty . I’m tall (and brave) enough to ride Giant Goliath in Six Flags yet won’t cramp up during a 24-hour flight to America. And, if I ever need to catch up to my lanky peers…

Well, that’s what high heels are for, right?

Editor’s Comment

Really, really fun essay! I enjoyed reading it, you’re an awesome storyteller. Good luck!

NO NEED TO REVIEW

What’s it like to swim for a reason?

Watching the bubbles escape my nostrils was my safe haven; a place where I enjoyed the seconds of tranquil stagnation. There, I have no worries of the past nor the future.