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

It was 2 a.m. I woke up to that characterized Skype jingle. It’s Kath; *I’m not getting much sleep tonight.*

I caught a single tear breaking free through the painfully pixelated screen. Between the audio breaks we’ve begun associating with these sessions, I heard her staggered sniffling.

Entering secondary school, I had never consider myself shy – I was never bothered by one too many invitations to a party, though I wouldn’t be bouncing too excitedly either. Most of my time I would spend walking down mental hallways of memories, picking up and inspecting the hanging picture frames. Deep down, I have never felt the need to interact with classmates beyond “how’s the progress with your group project?”

That, however, changed four years ago with a passing question I asked Kath just to fulfil the obligatory need for a chit-chat. “Why are you so excited to leave town?” We were flying out to perform in a school concert.

“Just bored of home,” she hesitated. Seemingly wanting to say more, I avoided opening that door, though I got my answer on the ride home.

We were rummaging through the overhead compartments and overturned bags – nothing. Her face turned pale as it sunk in: she’d lost her phone. Scathing through common topics trying to hold up the flight for as long as I could, I failed. As if her soul had been wrung out, Kath’s head collapsed onto my shoulder.

*Oh gosh.*

*What do I do.*

Just as suddenly, she shot upright as if pulled by an imaginary string waking up from a nightmare.

*What am I even supposed to say? What if she faints again? I have to say something though, right?*

“Kath, what’s wrong?”

She stumbled on her words, accelerating until the commas in her mumble disappeared.

*Oh no. Not good*.

“I mean, it couldn’t have been worse than Brian confessing to you in the canteen yesterday?” I poked her in a playful manner. In my veins, though, all I could feel was my hands quickly turning cold as the metal body passed by a dark turbulence.

*Please don’t let me be the reason she faints again.*

As if life came back to her in a snap, she cried out a snot-filled laughter. *Phew*. *Close call*.

Incredulity took over as she removed a bump under her seat cushion – her phone. With a guilty giggle, she hugged me. A comforting warmth gushed through my veins, a feeling so familiar yet so far out of reach. That moment – a shared feeling of much-needed serenity, coupled with the boomeranged gratification that I had perhaps made the slightest difference in her life, imprinted on me.

Kath came from a foreign land. I have never had to endure my mother’s passing or be a fortified dam for the drastic rainfall as relatives and comrades took their respective hits. I have also not encountered a temperamental father who couldn’t seem to realize how he was hurting others. Having shut the curtains, it was my first time opening a window into the rich stories which makes up one’s identity. Helplessly frozen amidst the chilled air circulating through the vessel that night, I realized how little I knew of the people around me.

To be on the same wavelength as someone – in our harmonized laugh over an internet meme or tears over a song that triggered memories of a breakup – makes me feel at home.

Be it in dedicatedly collaborating with fellow prefects long after school hours or in tutoring my friends with great academic potential through Zoom, I have since actively sought to forge that meaningful bond with others and partake in their rollercoaster rides because at the end of the day, what is the adrenaline for if not shared with friends, right?

As I woke up to that Skype jingle for the hundredth of time, I buckled my seatbelt and chanted in excitement: *game on*.

*Hi Harvani!*

*As of writing this commentary, my headspace is in the middle of an action-packed movie and that is a good sign! Kudos to this piece of yours and I hope that the admissions committee would feel the same way. Really like all that added narratives which brings liveliness and soul to your essay. Great work!*

*- Matthew*