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

“How is it that customs in a culture have no impact on your identity?” my Affirmative counterpart bewilderedly probed.

“Well, I believe that multiple aspects in my life, if not all, checked the boxes that justifies the weak causality between tradition and personality development. Let me break it down for you,” my miss independent stance miserably failed to clarify.

A supposedly 5-minute quick briefing for a presentation on the significance of cultural customs in society led to a heated, personal debate that took longer than needed. Chaotic, loud, and non-sensical are how I would describe my ineffectively immature, competitive side. Winning in the general sense would mean that I was able to prove my points right until the parley has substantially ended, a sense of satisfaction I do not find valid anymore. At least that was how I used to view two-way exchanges – allies or opponents, winning or losing.

About fifteen minutes has passed and I could feel the heat on my face as I charged on like a blind bull. Only after my ceaseless spouting of arguments drained my energy to a critically low level that she started blatantly cackling as her curled fist and emotional build-up relaxed and simmered down. The spotlight hit me as I was brought to a humiliating silence. I realized that my incessant, hard-headed blabber has made what was a friend now a lowly animal, for which I have stooped down to that of the latter. Soon enough, the dam I have been proud of all my life broke and burst as years-long mold were exposed in the flowing water of what I thought was crystal clear, mountain produce.

I finally felt the *hurt* – of not being heard.

“Your parents are going to be very disappointed, you know?” she uttered bluntly, “everything that your teachers have imparted, all the late-night advices you always ask off of me?” She was right, I have never really acknowledged the people closest to me. I have taken them for way too granted. I paused, unconsciously wanting to prove her wrong yet again. Her statement creeped deeper in me the more I tried denying it, and I finally decided to stop that day – a compos mentis decision I use as a promise to myself whenever my ego would try to get the best of me by having to win an argument.

I learned that everyone can be winners in a discourse through the power couple constructive criticism and mutual respect. Even better is when I would actually lose. Not necessarily because I lowered my playing field or did not want my counterpart to feel bad, more so because I know that my learning curve is at its steepest that day – and that for me is downright the biggest win one could truly have. Rewinding the debate about customs, pulling back on my horses would have enabled me think twice about my argument, and either come back stronger or prepare myself to hug her and say, “thank you.”

For me, it is no longer through MUN or World’s Scholars Cup that I define ‘debate.’ Nevertheless, they have highlighted in me two important aspects which have and will continue to challenge me on my journey to being the smart listener that I aspire to be: time and imperfect information. As much as I want to be the fairy goddess of mediation and problem-solving, my life journey so far has been a display of the hard truth of limited resources – the double-edged sword which has nurtured in me the ruthless, win-it-all behavior.

From a conversation on what to cook for breakfast all the way to what role I would choose to play in this game of life, I am grateful for what I cherish as the “customs debate” for it has set my sails up high to go strong against the wind and currents I will be facing throughout my humbling odyssey.