*Prompt: 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?*

As I turned on the ignition key, I heard stutters from the front accompanied by visuals of black smoke from the muffler of the 90s Toyota Kijang. I hurriedly hopped out, opened the hood, and was immediately presented with viscous black smoke covering the silhouette of the engine. I waited for 15 minutes. Once the black vapor slowly dissipated, a seemingly clearer view of different colored cables protruded out of the engine. “Again… Seemingly!!” My eyes cannot distinguish these colors as I was reminded of my protanomaly. Mixed feelings ensued: excitement to fix the Toyota and disappointment due to my limitation that hinders me from investigating this object.

For years, people around me (distant family, family friends, etc.) had enforced a limitation upon me based on one flaw. Somehow, there has been this unknown stigma, “someone who’s colorblind CANNOT become an engineer.” It took a toll on me as it slowly pulled me away from my dream. I was frustrated and wanted to disconnect from the world. It was tough, but this inherited van that appeared as my 14th birthday gift has grounded me. It became a force that keeps the engineer inside me alive despite my colorblindness.

As I studied this vintage’s engine, I saw the enthusiasm in my dad’s eyes. While his enthusiasm motivated me, it also served as a strong pressure magnifying my fear of losing that look. So, I disassembled all the cables from the engine in an attempt to fix it. Disassembling meant I had to know how to re-assemble them. Thus, my frustration rose when I tried to identify their colors. I couldn’t stick to my current situation: I tried enlisting my sister’s help to stay beside me as my color translator.

It worked, but it wasn’t a good solution. She couldn’t stay for the entirety of my attempt - which would take hours. I needed a better solution.

Inspired by my sister's obsession with *Sarasa* colored pens, I noticed that each pen has its own label indicating its respective colors. I borrowed her pen collections, spread them out on my portable workshop table, and began comparing the colors of the cables and pens side by side. It worked! It was a more sustainable solution. However, this created another problem, carrying hundreds of pens everywhere I went was inconvenient.

So, I shifted my brain into the fifth gear to search for a better and more practical solution.

Remembering my recent science class’s litmus paper experiment, I thought of an idea to create my own “color litmus test” device based on my previous *Sarasa* pen solution. It started out with a 7-by-4 cm sheet of standard white paper with varying shades of diverse colors and their respective labels as my first prototype. Next, I upgraded it using a *Rite in the Rain* waterproof paper and laminated them to make it more durable. It is now compact, portable, and sturdy.

A few days later… I called dad to the garage

Me: “I won’t guess the color this time. This is green right”

He had a surprised look accompanied by silence for a few seconds; it felt like forever. For each second that passed, I began to doubt my answer more. Then, a gentle smile appeared.

Dad: “You got it right on your own. I’m proud of you.”

The happiness in his voice was irreplaceable. I'm astounded at how I was able to create something so meaningful to me with just a pen and paper (and plastic). The greatest barrier in life is not the lack of skills. Instead, it is how we allow our flaws to define us, thinking that obstacles are permanent. This car is exactly why I can challenge myself, and I’ll use everything in my arsenal to prove them wrong. Now, I’m grateful for what I have. Now, I will treat any challenges in life as temporary speed bumps acting as traction towards the finish line.

Hi Mellvin,

I really enjoyed reading your story and experience here and I was even imagining how it was like for you at that time. I think you’ve really told the story well and included a lot of details, especially in your attempts to overcome your colorblindness.

From your essay here, I understand that fixing the Kijang was a challenge that helped you overcome your color blindness. Due to your excitement and determination in overcoming the challenge and stereotype you ended up making a prototype that has become a practical and useful tool to help you (which is awesome!). I have added a few suggestions in the comments to help make it stronger. ☺