**2. 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?**

My high school journey was a roller coaster ride. From middle school until the end of my sophomore year, my friends made every school day a living hell. They would shun me, call me names, and leave me out of group tasks. "Oh no, here comes the virus." I was the disease-ridden monster that roamed the school hall. I dreaded waking up on a school day and cherished the drive home. But all these taught me something important: compassion.

I’ve learned that most people have experiences of drawing the short straw in life, and it has allowed me to empathize and connect with them. Dealing with bullying is not as straightforward as other people might think. It isn’t easy to *just* ignore the bullies, and it definitely isn't easy to *just* tell the teachers either. The bullies get their kicks from their victims' reactions, and that is exactly what I shouldn't give them.

As an attempt to ignore the bullies, I looked for ways to assist others who were also facing difficulties in life. My mom suggested that I participate in volunteering activities held by school clubs. I saw it as a much-needed distraction. At first.

I was given the chance to teach underprivileged children from the local neighborhood.The teaching program allowed me to interact and make new friends with people from outside of school. As I started my class games, everyone rushed to raise their hands to volunteer. All eyes were sparkling. Encouraged by their enthusiasm, I extended class time and added extra activities. The warmth radiating from these pure students melted the hardened wall that protected my heart. I guess it was the first time that I felt accepted, appreciated. Seeing the joy on the children's faces started becoming my joy. During those moments, I could forget my troubles and stopped being self-conscious. But, most importantly, being part of all these made me realize that our self-worth and value are not defined by what others think, but by our actions.

Semester after semester, I kept on adding the hours I spent with the children, from two hours a week to five and eventually ten hours. I even spent my lunch breaks devising teaching material. At that point, I didn't even have the time to think about the bullies at school. Their insults no longer bothered me.

Now, I saw my volunteering work as an integral part of me which has inspired me to create several community projects outside of school. A baking business project where brownies are sold to help the less privileged, a student-run photography service to assist home industries in promoting their products, and a device to prevent riverbank erosion developed using recyclable materials. I couldn’t stop the bullies from calling me a virus, but I could make something out of it: I infected the people around me with compassion.

These experiences have shaped me to become who I am today. By channeling my energy to care for other people and thinking less about my own needs, I found a new purpose in life. Compassion and service to others. It was these commitments that defined my self-worth and boosted my confidence. I am now better equipped in handling stressful situations; accepting and facing life problems with optimism. All the bullying I experienced in middle school has been a rewarding experience for my personality and character. Although I wouldn't want to go through it again, I am grateful that I did.

*Hi Rachelle!*

*I am glad to see that you’ve come out of your battle victorious! Undoubtedly a tough battle; but as they say it: what doesn’t kill you makes you stronger.*

*I think this piece of yours is very well-written and aptly flows with ease. However, with 75 words to spare, why not make the most out of it by, perhaps, telling us a bit more about what you did on the second to last paragraph. I’m intrigued by your erosion-preventing device!*

*But at any rate, keep up the amazing work and always continue to inspire!*

*- Matthew*