\*Discuss an accomplishment, event, or realization that sparked a period of personal growth and a new understanding of yourself or others. (1,250 - 3,250 characters, approx. 250 - 650 words).

My mansion’s double doors opened as I stepped into my Italian marble-lined hallway, past my double staircase foyer before heading to the master bedroom, and finally into my living room with windows outlooking my towering minarets. I walked past my DJ booth before settling into my million-dollar massage chair. My character had quite the day living a life of luxury in The Sims.

Gaming is something I share with millions of people, but this game is different. When I play The Sims, I call the shots. I was committed to creating the virtual version of myself, who lives a life full of riches that the real me dreamt of. However, I was unaware that attaining my virtual-self’s wealth would lead to my real-self’s social poverty. The signs were there and questions of concern from the people around soon turned into feelings of loneliness and guilt. I shoved them down until my then-boyfriend and friends left me due to my obsession. It then dawned upon me on the fallacies of my life’s focus: perfecting a virtual life that does not exist instead of pursuing the milestones that would improve my real life.

This game sent me into a downward spiral, resulting in no friends, no relationship, and no life outside The Sims. I’ve hit rock bottom. In the midst of declining social life and grades, I asked myself, “Why was I so into this game?”

The answer was, “it boosted my confidence.” I didn’t need to think twice before clicking on any actions here. This level of confidence in The Sims was one I never really had in real life. Here, I could play God and these little people followed my set commands. In real life, I’d be scared of making wrong decisions. But in The Sims, I could easily switch characters once things go awry with the current character.

After realizing my problem, however, I still couldn’t get over the hurdle of getting past my virtual life and start making a difference in my real life. Feeling stuck, I asked my father for guidance.

“Nothing in life should be feared, it should be understood.” These words struck me as he proceeded about how life still goes on no matter what. His words assured me that reality is not as bad as I thought. With his words deeply engraved in me, I started having clearer life goals and the courage to start pursuing them. I wanted the life I gave myself in The Sims, and I was willing to take the steps necessary and risks to get there. This was the beginning of an era for me: an era of a new understanding of myself.

Ever since, I have slowly changed how I spend my time. I gradually left the computer screen and lived in reality instead. I made new friends, went to the gym to improve my health, and made a list of ‘100 things I can do besides gaming’. Sure, I’d feel anxious as I moved away from my old habit, but I was able to fight these urges. Although I’m back to level 1 in real life, I’m taking baby steps to eventually reach the top just like how I started off from nothing in The Sims.

Time can’t be bought, not even on The Sims. Starting this application and finally following my dream regardless of my fear is a giant leap in the right direction. Learning from the past and this game, I’d never use excuses to escape reality and take the steps to claim the life I deserve.