Scoliosis Essay

V7

160cm

***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?***

At age 14, I could hold my breath for 203 seconds. Yet, I couldn’t lift a plastic bottle due to a sharp pain weighing on my back. My doctor called it the **Moderate-Severe Genetic Scoliosis Disorder**.

At age 14, the biggest change in my life wasn’t puberty. It was understanding that my maximum height would be the lifeless and stout 160cm. It couldn’t be fixed, only maintained. Dr. Nicholas proposed swimming as a solution to my condition. My predilection towards being still had come back to bite me: the stacked irony. It was the first time I felt suffocated at the bottom of the pool. The quiet atmosphere was disrupted by an ear-splitting thought that I would be the next *Quasimodo*; I’d have nobody to sit with during lunch; a hobby turned into a chore.

At age 15, I stopped swimming altogether. I resented anything that reminded me of the things I couldn’t control—including my hobby and my NaiNai, my grandmother.

My sweet NaiNai, who makes my favorite Rendang, passed down the disorder to me. Feeling zero remorse; her calls were never answered, and I refused to eat her meals. October 1st, I showed up on her doorstep with an uninspired ‘Happy Birthday’. I rang her bell multiple times, but she didn’t answer. I got in with an extra key and found her in the kitchen, agony sewn into her face. A look I was too familiar with. One never knew where the next pain might be—the side of your hip, the nape of your neck, or your lower back…

Overwhelmed with guilt, I tried to blame the common enemy. NaiNai frittered my cynical thoughts and responded: “All we need is one act of insane bravery to accept change and you might be surprised.”

I learned that NaiNai couldn’t alleviate her pain since she couldn’t swim. Her meek attitude sparked a realization that in life, the only constant is uncertainty. I figured change wasn’t like the rice-cooker that papa bought last week—it has no warranty. Change reeks of 50-50 scenarios I would mull over for hours. And if I do embrace newness, I’d have to edit an insane amount of data in my record book, but it could feel like diving headfirst into the pool. It could feel like losing my first tooth. Thus, began my journey to teach NaiNai how to swim.

Baby steps. I began documenting change as a means of improvement.

Every Wednesday, NaiNai brought warm Oolong and her game face on. She was scared, but there was glee with every handhold, affirming the trust between us. Sure, there were days where NaiNai’s steps couldn’t reach the pool. There were bleak hours where NaiNai would panic. There were times I’d be the one in pain. But Wednesday became my favorite day again. I was no longer impatient for our lesson to be finished. Instead, I sat in wonder as I cheered NaiNai on.

Seeing NaiNai dancing in the kitchen to *Que Sera Sera* made me comprehend that change has always been a two-sided coin. The risk triples but the reward stretches to the horizon. And when the coin lands on the right side? The joy, the absolute joy…

7 years ago, if Papa had checked for a monster under my bed, change would look at him directly in the eyes and say hello. Today, I look for opportunities to be surprised at every corner, starting with the Scoliosis-prevention swimming class I created.

NaiNai armed me with the mindset to have the courage and embrace my own frailty. I’m tall (and brave) enough to ride Giant Goliath in Six Flags, yet I’d cramp up every time we had a 24-hour flight to America. And I guess I’ll never catch up to my lanky peers…

Well, that’s what high heels are for, right?

Word count: 637

Editor’s Comment

Really, really fun essay! I enjoyed reading it, you’re an awesome storyteller. Good luck!

NO NEED TO REVIEW

What’s it like to swim for a reason?

Watching the bubbles escape my nostrils was my safe haven; a place where I enjoyed the seconds of tranquil stagnation. There, I have no worries of the past nor the future.