1. Reflect on something that someone has done for you that has made you happy or thankful in a surprising way. How has this gratitude affected or motivated you?

**OR**

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

**With another frustrated groan, I banged my fists against the ivory keys, emitting what could only be described as a screech from the piano. I am certain Mozart hadn’t meant for his composition to elicit such violent reactions, nor did Yamaha intend for their Kreutzers to be subject to my abuse. Regardless, I was upset. My fingers kept stuttering through the pianissimo and my tempo kept falling horribly offbeat. With a steady cumulation of mistakes, my indignation rose and rose.**

**Truthfully, I was angry. I was angry about the smoothie that was dumped in my locker during recess- angry about being locked in the school bathroom minutes before my dance recital.**

**At that moment, I wasn’t on the piano bench anymore; I was out in the school corridor, listening to the resounding echo of my giggling peers. The event replayed endlessly in my mind. Irritated tears started to build up in my eyes, and the bitterness I harbored reflected in my playing. In the midst of my exasperation, however, a gentle hand reached out, pulling my tightly closed fists away from the instrument. It was my teacher.**

**He was a wizened, weather-beaten old man who spoke in broken English. In a word, I would describe him as warm. He smelled of chai tea and had crow’s feet appear by his eyes when he smiled, which happened to be more often than not.**

**Wrapping his calloused hands around my own, he faced me and said, “Megan, you’re pushing on a door that clearly says pull. Take a moment to breathe, and try again.”**

**It hadn’t occurred to me then, but my beloved teacher wasn’t only talking about the composition. With every lungful of air I breathed in, the image of their Cheshire grins, that once tormented me so, faded.**

**My fingers hovering over the keys, I make another attempt at Mozart’s Piano Sonata No. 16 in C Major. The heartbreakingly gentle melody filled the room with little effort and my troubled mind was soothed by its invitation of solace. I could hardly believe I was playing the same piece just moments before. Unlike ever before, I allowed the music to consume me.**

**As the final, resounding note vibrated against my fingertips, a fog clears.**

**I learned, that day, that regardless of how hard I try to brute force my way through my problems, I won’t be able to move on until I take a step back to read the sign on the door that clearly says “pull”. My teacher taught me that my impossibly destructive, blind rage can be silenced by a symphony. Unexplainably, music subdues me as nothing else can.**

**During especially challenging days, when I feel the anger start to bubble and brew, I seek the comfort of Brahms’ unnecessarily complicated symphonies and Beethoven’s gripping sonatas. There are times it feels as if music is the only language I am capable of speaking.**

**My piano teacher, an unsuspecting force of nature, was strangely the only person able to get through to me during that wayward period of my life. And although my dearest friend has since passed, his words still remain in my heart always.**

**I was no longer bothered by the up-and-down glances I received from the people I once considered my closest friends. I was hardly fazed by their antics anymore, so long as I knew that I had my dusty, beaten 2009 Yamaha Kreutzer waiting for me back at home.**