**Submit an essay on a topic of your choice**

How do you achieve extraordinary goals as an ordinary person? How do you become a math champion when you compete against a living calculator? This is my story of achieving my big goal of winning an international piano competition in foreign land when my competitors were practically a music box.

“Livia is a capable young girl if only she would stay focused and concentrate,” said Ms Alice as she handed mom my piano exam result. I failed, no surprise there. From pre-beginner class all the way through early intermediate, I was always a barely passing student. All my teachers advised me to stay focused when practicing, but I just couldn’t. Sitting down with a piano and practicing for hours were painstakingly difficult to say the least. For me, it required a lot of energy and high level of concentration.

All my piano exams results came with mediocre grades noting lack of focus as my main weakness. Until I decided to call it a stop, “Something must be changed,” I thought. When my mid-term exam was coming up that year, instead of pretending to sit nicely and practice, I decided to put my best effort to break the practices down and stay focused for ten minutes at a time.

Every time I practiced, I would concentrate for ten minutes, playing the note one by one, bar per bar, then stop to take a break. I would play games, have a little chit-chat with mom, and when I’m done, I would get up and come back for next round of ten minutes. Every time I lay in bed, I reminded myself about my big goal, I got up, and started practicing.

“You’re an advanced student now, let’s do a Rachmaninoff piece”. Before I realized it, I was already among one of the highly skilled players. I laid on my bed and asked myself how it had happened. It wasn’t only about breaking down tasks to smaller parts, it was about facing a challenge one day at a time. I realized that an accomplishment or a big change doesn’t come from a giant leap, it comes from the little steps we take every day. I began to apply that rule to all form of challenges I faced in life: focusing on what’s in front of me, one at a time.

One day, I had a big goal. Too big for a girl who couldn’t stay focused on anything for more than ten minutes at a time: to win an international piano competition. Winning that competition had been my dream ever since I started playing piano. I was scared by the thought, but I kept in mind to just focus on my next step, be persistent, and forget about how big the dream is. I had one month left to practice. So for the next 30 days, no matter what time, I was always on the piano. Bar per bar, pages per pages at a time.

In 2018 I received the gold award in Ars Nova Piano Competition in Singapore. Competing with hundreds of talented teenagers around the world seemed impossible when we look at it from where I was sitting a few years ago, but this ordinary girl made it. Of course, I couldn’t control the judges to win me, but I could control the tiny little decisions I made correctly along the way in order to increase the probability in favor of me achieving that goal.

I am still the same girl who failed those piano exams, who possesses no extraordinary talent or skill. But I learned to do big things and goals by working with what I have. I focus on what’s in front of me, break them down to the simplest forms, and work through it. Little by little, everyday.