**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 life-changing experience happened in middle school. I had the fortunate opportunity of being bullied. Yes, you read that right, I’m glad I got bullied. Until the end of middle school, 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 walking disease-ridden monster that roamed the school hall. So, you ask why I’m glad? Well, it was a blessing in disguise. I’ve had to put up with this most of my life. I was a regular girl by all standards. I was average in looks, grades, and attitude. It would have been fine if I was a jerk and this was all some sort of payback. But I guess some people don’t need a reason to be mean to others. I dreaded waking up on a school day and cherished the drive home from school. But, all these allowed me to learn one important thing: compassion.

Since then, I’ve learned that most people have experiences of drawing the short straw of life, and it has allowed me to empathize and connect with them. I remember once while I was telling a friend about what’s happening in school, pouring my heart out to her, and she told me to ignore the bullies as they are in fact the ones who have trouble socializing outside of their circles. Of course, dealing with bullying was not as easy as they thought. It wasn’t easy to just ignore them, and it definitely wasn’t easy to just tell the teachers. The bullies get their kicks from their victims’ reactions, and that is exactly what I shouldn’t give them. Thinking about what my friend said to me, I started to understand what she meant. I thought to myself, “She’s not wrong. Maybe the bullies think that their worth is defined by how popular they are and how much power they have which is why they treat others this way.” I realized that they too may be going through a tough time and needed help.

As an attempt to ignore the bullies, I looked for ways to help others who are also facing difficulties in life. Participating in volunteering activities has allowed me to focus on helping others and has given me a distraction from the things happening in school. These activities have given me a chance to befriend many new people outside of school. Most importantly, it made me realize that my self-worth and value are not defined by what others think, but by my actions. It has allowed me to experience the joy of helping others and 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 help home industries promote their products, and developing a device to prevent riverbank erosion using old materials. I wasn’t able to stop the bullying, but I was able to make something out of it. I truly learned what it means to make lemonades when life gives you lemons.

These experiences have helped me build who I am today. All the bullying I experienced in middle school has taught me to view my problems through a different lens; to sympathize with my “enemies”; and to use my setbacks as a fuel to do something good. Engaging in volunteer activities have allowed me to relieve the stress I experienced in school and helped me regain my confidence. I am now better equipped in handling stressful situations, accepting and facing life problems, and have better endurance when it comes to dealing with others. Although I wouldn’t want to go through it again, I'm grateful I did. In the future, I would love to be involved in contributing to a healthy and safe environment for my peers wherever I am.