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

“Aww that’s cute”, I heard while nervously holding my 16-inch soprano saxophone behind the stage curtains. Surrounded by 36-inch trombones and 24-inch euphoniums, I trembled onto the stage from the left wing, separated from all the other woodwinds on the right wing. My seat had been prepared right in the middle of the trumpets, complete with matching sheet music, *trumpet 1* written on the upper left hand corner. In front of us, Mr. Anthony waved his pencil up, gesturing the start of our first piece: ‘Puttin’ on the Ritz’. I raised my baby saxophone up together with the trumpets, and with the first staccato G note, the smooth, warm timbre of my saxophone drowned in the bright, tight timbre of the trumpets.

Overwhelmed by the trumpets, I couldn't help but question, ‘was my baby saxophone’s voice enough to contribute to the grand brass-woodwind harmony?’ However, after a year of playing at my school’s swing band, I was asked to play the tenor saxophone - the first and only one in the band. Initially, *no* was the obvious answer. The way I saw it, the tenor was to be played by ‘big old men’ with large lungs to blow sufficient air to resonate through the 6-inch diameter bell. As a 5’1 girl, I could have fallen over even just attempting to pick up the instrument. Nonetheless, I was up for the challenge; to have the chance to project my voice and finally contribute to the greater harmony of the band.

How different could it be? Same instrument, same fingering, same music… With my first blow however, it was clear that the larger mouthpiece meant that my embouchure was too firm, leading to frequent ear-piercing squeaks at the press of the octave key. Each bell key was ~2 inches apart, so my pinkie couldn’t reach the bottom C key. I felt like a beginner again, yet I was adamant to make my voice heard. My daily practice of the C major scale soon progressed to the notorious C# major scale, while my crochet tonguing developed into semiquavers.

3 months later, my seat stands on the right side of the stage, reunited with my woodwind family. *Tenor 1* replaces *trumpet 1* that once sat blatantly on top of my sheet music. Above all, I can now embrace the rich, round sound of my saxophone. I learned to make my musical voice heard, and I aim to continue raising my voice in other aspects of my life. I leave reviews at every other restaurant I eat at to express my opinions on their food, location, ambiance. I advocate for social issues I agree with by sharing them on social media. Most importantly, knowing that engineering is a stereotypically male-dominated world, I try to project my voice onto issues I care about that can be solved by technology, leading me to create Project Tech Talk (PTT).

As an online platform aimed to share technological ideas, I started PTT to make my voice matter in the engineering community. The frequent “really? I didn’t expect you to be into that kind of stuff” when speaking about the possibility of using the ‘smart grid’ to increase grid efficiency drove me to build a communal space to discuss our interests. While growth first started out slow, we now have a community of over 400 aspiring engineers. Now, I see PTT as a way to give others a medium to find their own voice in the engineering field. I hope to detach the ‘technical, mysterious’ label put on engineering and make it more accessible to inspire more students into the field.

My drive to pursue the field of engineering is undoubted, and with that I bring my drive to project not only my personal voice but others’ voices too. Ultimately, I want others in the field to be able to find their tenor saxophone, using PTT as their stage.