1. **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?**

*“Can you help me? I don’t understand this.”*

Were the words I wished I said to my seatmate who knew how to answer those 10 logarithmic questions. Instead, my mouth was shut tight by an imaginary chain. The defendant here pleads guilty: I confess, I was wrong and terrified. It was my responsibility to understand the topic, but I was clueless. So how could I ask someone who’s already busy for help? The case closed, with me, in my personal jail, getting all the answers wrong.

That day, I didn’t just redeem myself by studying logarithms for hours, I went further and studied the chapter after.

This process happened a lot of times with different situations and, eventually, I figured that if I did everything myself, I wouldn’t need to ask for help and be a hindrance. It’s tattooed onto my brain until it was my motto: “Do everything yourself”. So with school, extracurricular, family, friends, homework and self-studies, I placed them all within my hands. I was managing my time efficiently, challenging myself and placing every piece perfectly into my own puzzle.

But my supposedly bulletproof strategy didn’t work for everything. When my sister was diagnosed with cancer, she and my parents had to leave for treatment in Singapore. I stayed at home where I completed my responsibilities because I thought they would be back in a month, but I quickly learned that cancer is complex: every small step forward often came accompanied by one or two setbacks. My hope for this to end became limited and quickly diminished. I didn’t recognize words on the whiteboard, or scheduled meetings. I didn’t recognize the number of times I stayed past 3 a.m trying to do everything at once. I was a dying prisoner trying to hold everything together but myself.

It didn’t take long for me to notice that I can’t do it alone anymore; I couldn't focus. No matter how hard I tried to juggle school, clubs and households, I wasn’t able to catch up with time. No matter how hard I wanted to have 2 brains at once, I had to admit there was only one Shelby. So, I did the inevitable.

I asked for help.

I started with small things like “can you help me grab that?”. Then I went along with larger things. I asked my friends for a study group and I finally asked my math seatmate for help. I thought that I would be engulfed in guilt. I took a risk, and although I was prepared for the consequences, it still scared me. However, everyone around welcomed me with open arms, boosting my confidence. I felt relieved. I didn’t feel the need to bear all my responsibilities alone, I had support.

In a different universe, I might have tried doing everything myself, but even now, I don’t regret asking for help. It created a new world; I began to appreciate and connect with people. The times I asked for help to understand things, opened my mind to new perspectives and experiences.

Before, I cowered on the thought of asking for help, but now I’m interested to understand people’s views, encouraging me to collaborate more. Instead of preparing alone for math competitions, now I would study with friends, sharing new concepts to eventually winning medals. Even my organization, love.achelois, which actually started out as a personal blog grew to become an international community of youths helping one another thanks to the power of collaboration.

Don’t get me wrong, I still love to be independent, but now I feel like a released prisoner, free of the shackles that bound me to a lifetime of handling everything alone. I realized the great potential of different ideas and perspectives with collaboration, creating such a monumental outcome that it could outweigh what one does.