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

The school bell rang at 2.45 p.m., as it does everyday. As per usual, I packed my bags and left the classroom with my friends. When I caught up to my swim teammates in the stairway, they yelled, “Bye Alysha!”

It was odd.

For the past 3 years, I had regularly walked down together with them to the swimming pool. This was the first time I had gone upstairs to the dance studio instead of going down with them. I laughed and waved goodbye. I would certainly miss the routine, but I looked forward to the new change.

I was the youngest in my K-pop dance collective and didn’t have the most experience in this field in comparison to my teammates. I had to play catch-up for quite a while to match their level of technique and expertise, but I didn’t mind; my love for performing drove me to constantly improve and grow. In grade 10, the IB MYP personal project provided me with the perfect opportunity to return to my roots and refine my dancing skills.

The journey to accomplish this goal was not an easy one. Up until this point, I had only done K-pop dance covers for the past 5 or 6 years. Sole focus was placed on replicating the original K-pop idol group exactly, rather than technique. I set forth and selected three choreographies made by three choreographers with distinct styles. “I want to step outside the bubble I’ve been confined in,” I thought, “and I want to apply my refined basics to these challenging choreographies.” The process entailed dedicating one to two hours to practice those three choreographies in the school studio everyday for six consecutive months. It was a huge commitment, but I’d do anything to get better at it.

However, taking this route made me realize that I had to sacrifice an aspect that had been ever-present in my life; competitive swimming. Beginning at the age of seven, I was signed up to compete at a community level, and continued to participate in inter-school competitions throughout primary school all the while constantly working to reduce my time and learning other styles like the butterfly and the backstroke. In middle and high school, I became a member of the school swimming team. We trained daily, and competed monthly. I loved every second of my time spent swimming — the exhilaration a 50 meter sprint gave me, the breaks of laughter shared between teammates, and the thrill that came when I broke a personal record.

The dance project meant that I could no longer attend these daily training sessions, and I practically had to leave the team altogether. Sure, I could attend swim training sessions after school first and then practice dance after that, but I would need to split my dedication and commitment between these two passions. That would stymie my ability to maximize my performances in both. I didn’t want to burden my swim team by my half-hearted participation, nor did I want to continue lagging behind in my dance collective. I was torn; swimming had been a defining trait of my identity for the longest time. I don’t know if I was just ready to sacrifice it yet. However, dance was something I had fallen in love with over the years. It was my medium for artistic self expression where my creative mind could run wild - let the rhythm of the music take over my body, and escape for a bit. I wanted to do better not just for myself, but for my team as well.

I couldn’t get the best of both worlds. Sometimes, things just don’t work that way, and that’s okay. Dance called my name, and it was time to prioritize and let go. To let go of swimming, and the negative thoughts that came with the idea of leaving. That doesn’t mean I don’t care about it anymore, of course; as my coach said: “Once a swimmer, always a swimmer.” As attached as I was to the sport, I deeply wanted to grow and explore my capabilities, strengths, and weaknesses as a dancer. Letting go meant creating space for fresh beginnings - this project would be a stepping stone for me, and open a new chapter in my journey to master the art of performing.