**Why This Award Means More to Me Than My Degrees**

Following the KonMari philosophy, I was cleaning out the documents in my apartment that I accumulated over the years when I came across an award that I received in high school:

Triumph Award: This award celebrates the outstanding spirit and determination of a graduating student (or students) who has overcome great personal challenges in order to achieve academic success.

Calling on my courage, I am writing today to explain why this award means more to me than my other awards or degrees.

In high school, I was an orphan and an immigrant. I had also transferred in the middle of the semester in grade 10, and I did not have any friends. I probably had the worst three years at that high school, the highlights of my week often being in the swim team or playing the worn out piano in the empty auditorium at lunch time alone.

One day, I found my locker had been broken into. At the time, me and my sisters were barely scraping by, the social checks we received from the government went straight to necessary amenities, including my metro pass. There was no way I could afford to get another one that month.

That day on fourth period in Chem, I did what I usually did, which was to not pay that much attention. But suddenly the sounds of laughter in the classroom felt eerily sinister. I stood up, and walked out of the classroom. It took me two hours in freezing Canadian winter to walk home that afternoon.

I do not remember what I did after I went home that day. But I do remember that on the next day at school, I was sitting in front of my guidance counsellor, sobbing.

Throughout the morning, the room filled with adults. I learned a valuable lesson that day, that sometimes there is no shame about sharing what you are going through with somebody else. My teachers made me apply for the Triumph Award. And I got it. They were nice enough to frame it and give it to me, all those years ago.

**[IMAGE]**

My masters cost me 25K, my bachelors 40K, but my Triumph Award means more to me. Like the description of the scholarship, I was able graduate despite my circumstances and even ended up going to university.

Of all the degrees that hang on my wall today, my Triumph Award, a small scholarship in the grand scheme of things that certainly came cheaper than my degrees, holds a special place in my heart.

To me, what makes someone special is not whether or not they went to a great college or won a lot of awards or was the top of their class or that they got into at Google. That is not how I measure success. What interests me about somebody’s story, is their perseverance and ability to keep holding on, even in the face of adversity. What someone does with no privilege and no access to resources is what truly shows character. That’s what I like about my Triumph award. It has character. Somehow this small award manages to make me smile and beam with pride, every time I look up.

UPDATE:

I sought after the amazing woman who set up the Triumph Award.