**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.

Reflecting on those days gone by, I am trying to understand why this award means more to me than my other awards or degrees.

I guess in high school, I had a very tough time. I was an orphan and an immigrant, living with my sisters from check to check. I had also transferred in the middle of the semester in grade 10, and I did not have the friends that I once had from my previous neighborhood at Jane and Weston [one of the most prominent neighborhoods in Toronto with the lowest equity score https://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/toronto/140-toronto-neighbourhoods-ranked-by-new-equity-score/article17407725/] I probably had the worst three years at the Northern Secondary School. The highlights of my week were being in the swim team and 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, like my metro pass. There was no way I could afford to get another one that month.

That day on fourth period in Chem, 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 winter to walk home that afternoon.

The next day at school, I was sitting in front of my guidance counsellor, sobbing.

Throughout the morning, the room filled with adults, one by one. My guidance counsellor, Mr. Soloman enrolled me in the free bus ticket program [Mr. Solomon also displayed incredible support, he was brute man who was not very expressive, but I do remember ever since meeting him that day he would show up randomly on my first period to speak to my math teacher for about a month. Looking back, I think that was his way of making sure I made it to school okay and that I was alright.], and they made me apply for the Triumph Award. Which I ended up receiving. They were nice enough to frame it and give it to me, all those years ago. I learned a valuable lesson that day, that sometimes there is no shame about sharing what you are going through with somebody else.

**[IMAGE]**

My masters cost me 25K, my bachelors 40K, but my Triumph Award is a bigger accomplishment for me. Like the description of the scholarship states, 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.

I do not like to measure success by an amount of money or a great college or accolades. That is not how I measure success. How I measure success is the perseverance that took to keep moving forward, even in the face of adversity. That’s what I like about my Triumph award. It is a representation of grit, and hard times that now when I look back, I reflect upon fondly.

Somehow this small award manages to make me smile and beam with pride, every time I look up at it.

UPDATE:

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