This is the most difficult jigsaw puzzle I’ve ever seen.

It didn’t even come with a box. I started out with almost zero piece, and once the game starts, there’ s no way back.

I think the first piece has always kind of been there ever since I was born. I was a maverick even before elementary school. I had a pony tail in kindergarten, regardless of the rule that all boys should have short hair. How boring! I thought. I refused to fit in by pretending that I liked to play war with the boys, and most of the time, I would just lose myself in the math books covered in a thin dust, which Ms. Chan got for me from the top of the shelf. When I was 5, one day, I was left home alone with the new nanny, who apparently had a problem with me drawing the grass blue, and tried to persuade me to change it back the “right” color, which was green, of course. Considering her demand ridiculous, I just ignored her as I usually did. She ended up erasing my whole painting. I still have the memory of how angry and shaky I was when I came back from the bathroom, only to find that my drawing was gone. I was so humiliated, and called the police. Now, this has become a joke that my dad tells at the Chinese New Year’s dinner with the whole family, and it never gets old.

When I was in the 5th grade, grandpa was diagnosed with Alzheimer's. This was the man who used to tell me bedtime stories~~, drive me to and from school~~, teach me how play Ping-pong, beat me and later get beaten by me at Chinese chess, and all he could do after getting sick was looking at me blankly and asking repeatedly who I was. At the age of 11, I felt I was running out of time. I decided to visit grandpa twice a week, and I would read poems to him, sang old songs for him, went through photos of us with him, and as his illness worsened later, even taught him how to count. Grandpa was the one who gave me patience and companionship when I was little, and then it was my turn to pay him back. I lost grandpa 2 years later, but found the second puzzle piece, with which I started to see that I was more than the kid that only cared about if he was able to do what he liked to, but was also part of a family, where he received love, and in the meantime contributed love.

I don’t remember when I got the third piece, but the picture on it had always been a blur, until I participated in the HIMCM during my freshman year in high school. I was assigned to a three-people group because of late registration, and the only task left for me was computer simulation, about which I barely knew anything. However, to make the deadline, I didn’t have time to be frustrated, and started learning MATLAB immediately in order to run the simulation. At the group meeting, I reported a mistake found by simulation in an equation proposed by the other members on the change of speed when cars merged into traffic. The advisor was very satisfied with my performance, and thus suggested that I be the group lead and take charge in the modelling task, which was what I was good at and originally aimed to do. But I said no. I wanted to capture this chance of shining so badly, but I was also crystal clear that it was going to be a disaster to the team. I knew from the shame and disappointment on the leader’s face that if I said yes, then things would for sure get awkward between me, the old leader, and the other two members, who had been friends with the leader. If this awkwardness turned into bitterness, then our team wouldn’t even stand a chance to win. In that 10 seconds that it took for me to gratefully decline the promote, I suddenly was able to see what was on that piece. It was not me being the maverick, or being the very much loved child of the family, it was me being a team member, and putting the team’s goal first. The leader was obviously shocked and moved to find out that I would still stick to my old job, and thus offered later in the competition all the help I needed from him. Eventually, we finished first. In the loud cheering, the leader came up to me, and extended his hand. He looked at me in the eyes, and said “Thank you” while shanking my hand. I felt it was the most exciting moment during the whole competition.

The three puzzle pieces are not complete yet, but they each stands for a part of me. And now, if I get accepted by undergraduate school, it will be the new beginning of a journey for gathering more puzzle pieces of my life. Cultural shock, living far away from parents, learning more knowledge, meeting new people, even developing a career… It makes my hands sweat even thinking about these. I’m so looking forward to an opportunity to continue the journey on the other side of the ocean. I have no idea where it’s going to end, but getting on the road is satisfying enough.