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

I don’t know how many pieces there are or what they look like. I don’t know what the final image is. It didn’t even come with a box. And once the game starts, there’ s no way back.

It’s me.

The very first piece, I was born with it. Mom told me I was a maverick even before elementary school. I insisted on a pony tail in kindergarten, regardless of the rule that all boys should have short hair, because “same hair is boring”. I refused to fit in by pretending to like playing war with the boys. Most of the time, I would just lose myself in the math books, which Ms. Chan got for me from the top of the classroom shelf. I called the police because the new nanny was trying force me to change the grass in my drawing from blue to green, which was “the correct color”, and erased my drawing when her persuasion failed.

When I was 11, grandpa was diagnosed with Alzheimer's. The man who used to teach me how play Ping-pong, beat me and later get beaten by me at Chinese chess, after getting sick, could only stare blankly and ask repeatedly who I was. At 11, I felt I was running out of time. I started to visit grandpa more often, and I would read poems to him, go through photos of us with him, and as his condition worsened, teach him to count. Grandpa was the one who gave me patience and companionship when I was little, and I did the same thing for him when he got old.

I lost my grandpa 2 years later, but gained the second puzzle piece. Besides being an independent-minded individual, the second piece made me realize that I was also a part of a family. Family love is reciprocal. I receive the love, and give back the love.

The picture on the third piece had always been a blur, until I participated in the HIMCM in high school. I was assigned to a three-people team due to late registration, and the only task left for me was computer simulation, about which I barely knew anything. However, to make the deadline, I had to start learning MATLAB immediately and run the simulation with it. Later, I found a mistake via simulation in an equation proposed by the other members describing the speed change when cars merged into traffic. The advisor was impressed, and suggested that I be the new team leader and be in charge of the modelling task, which was what I was good at and originally aimed to do. But I said no. As badly as I wanted this chance to shine, it was crystal clear that accepting the offer would be a disaster to the team. The leader looked embarrassed and disappointed, and if I said yes, things would for sure get awkward between me and the other three, who were friends. And if this awkwardness turned into bitterness, our team wouldn’t even stand a chance. In that 10 seconds that it took for me to gratefully decline the promote, the third piece suddenly became clear. 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, shocked that I refused to replace him, later in the competition, along with other two members, tried his best to provide all the help I needed. Eventually, we finished first.

Now, if I get accepted by undergraduate school, it will be the beginning of a new journey for me to collect more puzzle pieces. Cultural shock, life away from parents, learning knowledge, meeting new people, developing a career… My palms sweat even thinking about these. I have no idea where this journey of discovering myself will end, but getting on the road is satisfying enough.