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

Although I stood still, my heart was racing as if I were running a marathon; I felt goose bumps rise on my forearms, yet I was sweating. A chill ran down my spine as I watched the queue of students slowly slithering towards the gymnasium to cast their vote. Each had a small pink paper in their hands that consisted of eight names next to empty tick-boxes of which one would be ticked. That name, the one which secured the most number of votes would be elected as the student representative council member of 2015; the girl who would lead her peers, be their voice and have the power to inflect positive change. I observed my peers lean and make a small hand movement so keenly that I could hear the pen strokes scrape against the paper and old wooden tables. The day had finally arrived and I reflected on my journey that led up to this bitter sweet day.

Two years ago, I remember standing the same way, gazing up at my new house, excited and positive about starting a new journey and felt the same sharp breeze encapsulate me, which seemed to inspect and disapprove of every inch of my crumpled t-shirt and misplaced strand of hair. I felt the same air of superiority around me when I walked in to a sixth grade classroom on my first day of school; heads turned, who glanced, smirked and snickered, soon making me realise that even my brand new starchy floral uniform seemed to be a shade different – a shade too brown.

I was shaken upon evaluating this word-less act that compelled me to look at myself differently, thought about the power of others’ perspective and my weaknesses and felt as if I was downing. But it was my father’s words “take it in your stride,” that pulled me out of water and resonated through the toughest years of my adolescence. I began to focus on myself, diverting my attention from self-doubt to introspection. With my father’s motivation, I focused on academics and experimented with new things and within a year I saw a radical change. I was doing well academically, was on top of my Afrikaans class and was a part of the squash team and the girls’ choir. Instead of building a wall against people, I learnt to build myself up - one brick, one weakness at a time.

Grade eight marked the first year of high school and I was now the small fish in the big pond which presented an opportunity to apply my strengths. Out of 122 girls, 8 ran for the election and after a lengthy process entailing a written essay, speech and a poster pinned on the notice board, it was up to those very girls to see what they had made me into; and they did. After each ballad was emptied, every last slip unfolded, counted and recounted, the whole school assembled in the courtyard and the principal announced my name as the representative. Once again heads turned but this time, not with scorn but with appreciation.

Being elected as the representative felt as if I had defied all odds and it was the event that sparked a period of personal growth. SRC meetings were held weekly, with the principal, head of departments and a representative of all grades. Being the youngest girl around the table was sometimes daunting and it took a while to gather courage to speak but when I finally did, my confidence skyrocketed. I believe that the journey that led up to being elected and serving as the representative for 9 months – a period where I believe I was metaphorically reborn – made me who I am today, until I move again, waiting to face challenges head on.