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 greatest 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.

Grade 8 had commenced a few months ago, which marked the first year of high school - which meant moving into a new building of the school campus, wearing pleated skirts and shirts instead of floral frocks and being the smallest fish in the big pond. I wanted this journey to be rewarding and seized every opportunity to do so, the first of which was the election. I saw it not as a position of power to dominate others but as a process of personal growth. Out of 122 girls, 8 ran for the election – a lengthy process, commencing with writing an essay on why one should be elected as the representative, which was an arduous task. After much thought, I wrote about an instance which showcased my strengths of perseverance, strategic thinking and my perspective of viewing all things logically – studying the local language of Afrikaans upon joining school in the middle of the sixth-grade academic year. This was the first hurdle that I encountered and was strong willed about succeeding, resulting in topping my class time and again and even airing live on an Afrikaans radio station; which I balanced with being a part of the squash team and the girls’ choir.

The next part of the election was to deliver a one-minute speech on the female servant leader that I admired the most. I stood in the empty drama room and watched it get filled with girls and noise within seconds. I was terrified to speak and froze upon looking into the merciless eyes of my peers which were topfull of direst pride of superiority, just like the ones that glared at me on my very first day of school. This intense diminutive feeling soon turned into determination about showing my true vibrant self and proving everyone that there is more to someone than what seems and that I was worthy of being their representative. This was my greatest takeback from becoming elected, that I had the gift of taking a challenge or demotivation in my stride and turning it into my driving force.

Yet, it was now 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. This achievement felt like I had defied all odds and truly sparked a period of personal growth as I grew to understand that true happiness lies in accomplishment. I learnt to focus on myself; instead of building a wall against people, I learnt to build myself up - one brick, one weakness at a time.

SRC meetings were held weekly, with the principal, head of departments and representatives of all grades. Being the youngest girl around the table was truly daunting and it took a while to gather courage to speak but the day I did, I felt my confidence sky rocket, just like it did while giving my speech. I formed the perspective that work is of paramount importance and satisfaction lies in succeeding in a set goal. I newly understood my strengths of having a good work ethic and hence understood the value of submerging myself in and the priority of fulfilling duties. I believe that the journey right from thinking about participating leading to being elected and fulfilling that duty for 9 months was one where I believe I was metaphorically reborn – until I moved again, waiting to face challenges head on.