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Grade level: 12

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My Driving Force

As a senior in high school, I have taken time to go on a drive down memory lane. Starting from my earliest memory to the most recent I have realized the impact every single one of my academic experiences have had on me, good or bad.

I was sitting in my Kindergarten class coloring with some of my friends. I do not remember what the coloring page was but I know it was related to what we were learning at the time. As my teacher walked by my table she stopped and grabbed my paper. I was so excited because this usually meant she was going to compliment my work. She held up the paper in the front of the class and said, "This paper is an example of what not to do; please color inside the lines so it doesn't look messy like this paper." I looked down at my feet and held back my tears as all my friends observed my imperfect coloring page, and my disapproving teacher handing back my paper. Even though this instance was almost 13 years ago, it has stuck with me and motivated me to constantly seek approval from those around me.

In 2020, my school was shut down due to the Coronavirus. This was also the first year I had obtained straight A's. Ever since that singular report card I have been addicted to getting perfect grades and having a perfect GPA. As soon as a grade dropped from an A to a B, I went

into panic mode, all because seeing that letter “A” made me feel happy. After four years of constantly being obsessed with my grades I realized that my dependency on academic success was not healthy. While my good grades had provided me with so many amazing opportunities, my mental health had deteriorated because the level of perfection I was seeking had been impossible. I have realized that academic validation is a mindset, not a reality. Happiness from academics comes from the work you put in, not the grade you receive.

When someone asks me why I want to become an elementary teacher, I usually answer with something along the lines of “ I love children” or “ I know it’s my calling,” but deep down I know it is because I don’t want any student to have to feel that same shame and embarrassment for their work. I want them to realize validation should come from the process, not the product. Seeing my younger siblings experience the fear of judgment from their peers and mentors has driven me to become an advocate for children. Listening to the parents of young children feel lost in helping their children who are struggling in school drives me to become part of the support system. Being a student who strived for academic perfection even when it hurt me, drives me now to become a teacher.