**My Academic Journey**  
 *Rivera, Faith Anne Joy, 13*  
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        If I were to meet my younger self, she wouldn't be able to recognize the person I am today. Growing up, I’ve always been a part of the honor roll. However, I lacked determination; I had always settled for an average score of 90, never any higher. Achieving honor was enough for me; I didn’t expect anything beyond that—I believed that I wasn’t “smart” enough to have that kind of expectation. Conversely, if you were to ask anyone to describe me in three words today, “goal-driven” is sure to be on the list.

        Back when I was little, I would spend my weekends leisurely playing games all day. Although I did my homework on time, I didn’t bother to study if it wasn’t necessary. Even before exams, I would merely take a glance at the textbook and call it a day. Childhood was fun and stress-free, but I wasn’t a very studious person, for sure.

        Unsurprisingly, I struggled with plenty of subjects, namely science, history, and especially mathematics. Science and history were manageable, as I mostly just needed memorization, but unfortunately for sloths like my younger self, mathematics needed a bit—no, a *lot* of practice. I feared math, to the point where I developed a fear of numbers. *I was in a battle with myself.*

        Day after day, I was starting to realize that I had to make a change. It was when the upcoming entrance exams for the STE-P curriculum were almost here, that my mom finally brought it to light—I was neglecting my education. That was my moment of realization that I needed to change my behavior. Every day, I studied long and hard for the examinations.

        Eventually, the results came in: I didn’t get accepted. Of course, I was dejected; who wouldn’t be? Nonetheless, that didn’t stop me from pursuing my will for academic success. During the first quarter, I studied just as hard. Tragically, despite my late nights of studying, I only got an average score of 92. I was discouraged and, above all, burned out. For the next three quarters, although I didn’t study as much, I carefully listened to each lecture. Unexpectedly, for the next three quarters, my grades significantly increased.

         This sheds light on a particularly crucial key: to truly learn, I must balance my responsibilities and well-being. Looking back on my journey, it prides me to know I’ve come this far. This 8th grade, now that I’ve acquired determination and the right approaches, I aim for not only academic honor but for my development as well.