“Aroo—...” “Aroonrassamee... Wong—” Mr. Wade read. “Here.” I stopped the teacher before he could complete my surname saving myself from embarrassment and increasing stares from my classmates. I thought if only the name that appeared on the registration form was as short as “Kate” or as sweet as “Emily”. That was the first day of eighth grade, the first class I attended in Ohio, the very opportunity to make an approachable impression, and to build a new character; yet I failed.

Six months beforehand, I had left Thailand where I was born and raised equipped with a British accent, high expectations, and tears in my eyes as I boarded the hostile plane. The people who had an unending impact on me, the food that grazed my untrained lips, the monks that sang tranquil prayers in unison, the genuine smile of the children who ran recklessly on the street, did not take off with me the night of August 16th, 2017.

Six months later, I was sitting at a desk in the back of the humid classroom, an American flag hanging on the top right corner of the wall, the delayed clock’s second hand ticking, the eyes of my new peers studying the new girl who came in the middle of the year. I said nothing else, and looked down at my unchanging syllabus for the twenty sixth time. I never said much at all, in fact, I counted how many times I said something in the third week and did not pass three sentences. I found that it was not because I was shy but it was because I did not find it necessary. People’s judgement did not lay in my words, but rather my dialect.

The rest of eighth grade, I did not manage to communicate much to my peers, my teachers, or my counselor. When the teacher asked a question, I implored them in my mind not to call on me. I kept to myself and bottled up the endless frustration and disappointment, that each night I would imagine walking down the street in Bangkok, the scenery and the conversations that would have surrounded me had I been there; the very thing I am missing out on. During the course of 5 months I had lost an abundant amount of weight. My problems got the better of me, everything was beyond the control of a thirteen years-old, crestfallen, teenager.

The following summer I decided that I would email my 5th grade teacher who told me to stay in contact after I left the school. In the lengthy email I described to her the daily nuisance I faced, the difficulty of joining a new community, the presumptions that people had of me, the wholesomeness that a small town in Ohio lacked, and everything else I had thought of as I wrote her the email. Mrs. Andrews, who was now living in France, started off her letter by congratulating me on how much my English had improved, as well as reminiscing about the smiling, sensitive, innocent girl who was ever-so keen to participate in any given activities. “I sincerely believe that, one way or the other, you will be able to find her inside you again.” she explained to me, and it reminded me why she was the teacher who I always ran to when I had a problem with friends, family, or other teachers. She continued to comfort me, telling me that expectations are the worst thing to have, and, if possible, do not hold any at all. It was true that it was disappointing to see how different everything was compared to what I had wished for. As I boarded the plane my vision of America still seemed like a distant reality, the reality that I saw in the dubbed movies where girls did not dress in uniforms, where gossip spread as quickly as fire, where the new students were always a celebrity of the school. Mrs. Andrews recalled a quote that was buried deep in my preconscious, “We cannot direct the wind, but we can adjust the sails”, the quote hung on the wall of my fifth grade classroom, one of the comfort places I’d surrender to in my head. After receiving her email I felt content to have shared my emotions to someone who I know I can trust and whose judgement did not interfere with her perception of me.

All in all, perseverance is a vital value to hold because without it, one will easily give up when experiencing something mentally and emotionally arduous. Moving to a new country was a challenge; the abrupt change in culture, environment, climate, manners, were almost waiting to weaken me. Soon, I discovered the ease of controlling my emotions, thoughts, and becoming more social amongst friends and teachers. From the beginning of high school I have achieved academic success as well as displayed exceptional maturation, therefore it is safe to say that I have overcome the obstacles that laid between my eighth grader-self and the majority of my high school career.

Aroonrassamee Wongkeaitaroon
11th Grade Essay Winner
Boardman High School, Boardman
Randy Nord, Teacher
Cynthia Fernback, Principal

Keep Moving