

Prompt 2

He turned it to the right and nothing happened. Then he twisted it to the left, and yet, still no water. He thought to himself “Back home in Tanzania it was never this complicated.”

My father uttered a cry of despair. From being unable to turn on the shower, to not knowing how to adjust the AC to keep warm, my parents were as clueless as me.

It was September 5, 2006, when I first stepped into the United States from Tanzania, Africa, where my family and I lived in a refugee camp to escape genocide. The Hutus were targeting the Tutsis (my people). I remember the confusion I felt, being thrust into a completely different world. I was intimidated by the huge bowl (toilet) because back home we used a hole in the ground. The stoves with a million buttons were far too complicated when compared to our fire bordered by stones. I needed help; this was just the beginning of my interaction with an alien world.

It was kindergarten, and I was suddenly surrounded by kids my own age. I had never seen a child with skin white as an albino's, who we believed ate human flesh. Needless to say, I feared the children. Making matters worse, I didn't speak a word of English. I had a translator but it wasn't the same. When jokes were cracked and everyone began to laugh, I was left confused, feeling even more excluded. I was a scrawny, bald, black girl wearing huge khaki pants and an oversized green shirt the school had donated to me. The white children called me “boy” and shoved me from the girls' to the boys' restrooms. In their eyes, my bald head defined my gender. The only

part of school I enjoyed was learning. As we all learned our colors, alphabet, and seasons together, I felt at peace and equal with the other students.

I struggled with things such as writing and reading, but math was always my strongest subject. In math class, I was no longer this "boy" who couldn't speak English. I transformed into a person who people could ask for help. Quickly, teachers identified my talent. I was tested and placed in high school algebra as a 7th grader. The little bald girl being pushed around in front of the restrooms had evolved to a young, confident teenager. This confidence inspired me to participate in many sports and clubs, leading me to become the captain of my track team during my 7th grade year.

I enjoyed my success in math classes until I enrolled in Calculus during my junior year of high school. Calculus broke me. Math was something I thought I knew, but in Calculus, I would stare at my homework as my headache crept around the corner of my eyes, slowly taking control of my brain. Heartbeat accelerating, I reached to cover my aching eyes with sweaty palms wishing my homework would complete itself. I felt like the younger me back in grade school--hopeless. After completing first semester with a C, I was devastated. However, I decided that I wouldn't give up on something that gave me the most rewarding peace. The next semester I became honest with myself when I didn't understand and began working with my teacher. This led me to complete the second semester with a high B of 87%. Through the struggles of Calculus, I learned that asking for help when necessary wasn't failure.

From being new in America to my struggles understanding Calculus, persistence has led me to accomplish my goals that were unattainable before. Because I've surpassed these struggles, the little girl I once was has become a woman capable of facing future challenges. The faucets that I struggled to turn on were preparation for the concepts I now struggle to understand. I realize now that I just need time, practice and guidance.