

*“The end of a matter is better than its beginning,  
and patience is better than pride.*

*Do not be quickly provoked in your spirit,  
for anger resides in the lap of fools.*

*Do not say, “Why were the old days better than these?”  
For it is not wise to ask such questions.*

*Wisdom, like an inheritance, is a good thing  
and benefits all those who walk under the sun. (Ecclesiastes 7: 8 - 11)”*

Do you know that Coldplay song “Fix You?” The first line says: “when you try your best but you don’t succeed...” After being at Iolani for 13 years, the mindset of “even if I try my best I will probably not succeed” has sometimes plagued my thoughts. At Iolani School, a place where everyone is extremely talented in volleyball, physics, and every other extracurricular you can think of, it’s easy to fall into the trap of trying to be perfect. Perfectionism. Not perfectionism in the sense that everything you do is perfect, but perfectionism in the sense that everything needs to be attempted with utmost effort and that successful results should always reflect that effort.

I always considered myself decent at English, breezing through the so-called “hard” teachers with ease. Well, I was atrociously humbled Junior Year in British Literature. Now, you might be wondering why I even signed up for a class with a tough reputation; well I honestly thought I was up for it. Now my first red flag was when I walked into the classroom, there were only juniors in that class. Okay, no problem, not too big of a deal. I turned in my first paper, a personal essay, and I scored an A. Easy Peasy lemon squeezy. I made it a routine to turn in all my papers two days before they were due in order to have them checked. This revision made all the writing assignments a minimum 4 day effort, but again, no big deal. When the writing became more analytical, my results faltered, and I started to become more

nervous. Whenever I would see the showbie notification on my iPad, my palms would start to sweat and I would do anything but look at my grade and the comments that came with it:

*“Somewhat improved, but the same areas for improvement remain.”*

*“See my comment on your draft”*

*“Confused....”*

*“Unconvincing”*

By January, I began to feel as if I were stuck. Stuck in a headspace that made it painful to read those comments. Stuck in a cycle of perfectionism and wanting my own efforts to be enough for an A. And I was stuck, glued to my chair, trying to do any other subject of homework before even attempting to start my draft corrections or look at why I received the grade I did. It hurt to see that my best was not as good as I expected, and it was hard to accept that sometimes even my revisions could use revisions. My building frustrations at my performance, mixed with feelings of resentment towards reading the comments and having to fix 30+ grammatical errors finally culminated one night when I got an essay back that read B-. Now, I had been working on this essay for a total of 5 days, and even revised it per comments the day before. I felt the tears brimming my eyes and the tingling of my nose starting to run. I cried for half an hour, and then the rage came. Was my writing really that bad to begin with? I had all of the components my teacher was looking for. Are colleges really going to be that nitpicky about grammar like this? No they aren't. I'm never going to need to do this again. I put off looking at the comments about my drafts more and more, and in turn my grade in that class continued to go down.

Then it hit me: you are getting these grades FOR A REASON; you need to get GET OVER YOURSELF. Receiving critiques on my work, even with a growth mindset, had become personal to me and I had begun to feel like they were an attack to my character. How could I be getting these grades when I was working so hard? How could this be me? So...I was stuck. Stuck in a perfectionist mindset that built its wall around me, not allowing any useful criticism to break through, while

simultaneously blocking all the good suggestions that were offered to me from my teacher. Hitting that low, I realized that I just had to get out of myself and into a less trapped frame of mind.

There was another time in my life I was stuck, but instead of being stuck in my head, I was stuck in a hospital bed. When I was in first grade, I went to Indonesia to visit my dad's side of the family. Now, if you don't know anything about Indonesia, it is a country filled with some of the most ecologically diverse forests, and home to unique tourist attractions from riding elephants to parasailing. However, behind the facade, there is a high amount of poverty, and many people do not have access to clean water. Due to the high amount of disease contaminated water, citizens often become sick in their youth but gain immunity to the bacteria in the water. I did not have this immunity...

One day, my dad and I went to a shaved ice store. It was a small store, with three little tables and stool-like chairs. I remember not thinking anything of it, for I ate desserts like this all the time back home in Hawaii. My dad also ate shaved ice all the time growing up in Indonesia. Somehow neither of us remembered that.... shaved ice is JUST frozen water and sugar. My dad and I finished our cool, refreshing shaved ice and we returned to Hawaii the next day. I remember feeling weak on the plane, but then again the exhaustion could have been due to the over 12 hours of travel. That night, I woke up freezing. A chill ran down my spine as sweat coated my skin and glued my clothes to my body. My mom then took my temperature and it read 104 degrees. I was then taken to the emergency room and admitted into the hospital. I didn't really know what was happening but I could feel my body struggling to fight against some sort of bacteria, some disease.

The next day I woke up physically stuck...I was stuck in a room by myself with only a TV to pass the time. The bare white walls seemed to amplify the "hospital" smell of hand sanitizer and disinfectant. My bed faced the door to my room, so whenever I heard the click of the door handle I would hoist myself up in bed as much as I could in anticipation for some company. Then, after a week in the hospital, my mom told me that my friend Grace and her mom were praying for me. Although I am not particularly religious, her words struck me: there are people *thinking* of me. The power of someone

taking time out of their day to pray for me touched me, even at that young age. My friends and family visited me, with my most memorable visit being from my friend Mari. I don't think she knew what to expect because she showed up in a kind of a hazmat suit. I eventually recovered after two weeks in the hospital, but what I remember most is the relief that kind words of support brought me. In that hospital, I was stuck and vulnerable, and my family and friends' kindness brought me out of myself.

And English? Oh yea...That English class my junior year was undoubtedly the hardest class I have ever taken, yet it is the class I have grown the most from. While it was suffering at times, combing through my papers to find every "so" "society" and "towards" that I had to replace, I learned to be thoughtful with my writing instead of trying to write as much as I could. I also learned to be patient, patient in fixing my numerous mistakes, and patient with myself when I could not find a solution immediately.

While I was busy drowning myself in negativity, feeling bad for myself that I took such a hard class, I wasn't paying attention to what was so great about it – The meaningful class periods and information packed lessons. A passionate and knowledgeable teacher who wanted us to become better writers. As painfully challenging as that class was, it drew me out of my perfectionism and forced me to take a good look at the controlling mindset I had always had for myself. Looking at those constructive criticisms was difficult, but it moved me into a new way of thinking.

Perfectionism is controlling. Now don't get me wrong, it is awesome if you put in 5 hours to study for a math test, but I learned there is a difference between putting those 5 hours in for an A and putting those 5 hours in to learn and become a better mathematician. Grades don't define you. Really. Do not waste your time on comparisons, nor should you waste your time caring about your standing in comparison to everyone else. If you ever find yourself stuck - stuck in a situation where you feel as though there is just no winning, try to remember the times in your life when people cared for you...when they offered you help.. For a long time here at school, I was offered, but did not truly receive the help from people around me, trying to convince myself that I could do it alone. But by opening myself up to help in all forms, my problems seemed fightable.

We have all gone through ups and downs the past year, from getting waitlisted at our safety schools to not having many of the key events that each grade typically has. As you juniors finish up high school, try to remember that there will be many times when you lie awake wishing you had circled A instead of B on your test. Try not to dwell on it, for one, there will be many more times like that, and two, you probably won't make that same mistake twice. I remember a year ago when I was in your chairs listening to senior speeches in the chapel. As much as you have heard it, time will truly fly by and before you know it, you too will be experiencing your last prom, last fair, and last chapel services together. For the seniors moving on to college, next year we are going to meet many great and talented people with skills unlike anything we have encountered before. While their abilities may be intimidating, remember that you are a culmination of your own experiences and the guidance of your families and teachers, and that means something!

As I am ending my high school career, I can truly see that Iolani is filled with some of the most talented people I am ever going to meet. Instead of letting myself feel intimidated, I now feel proud to call myself a fellow Iolani student. So even though a boy in a biology class might see your quiz score and yell out "54!" for the whole class to hear, just know that your grades truly don't define you. Don't let perfectionism or shame keep you from growing and accepting help and advice. And if you do become stuck, know that you can rely on friends and teachers to help you – because oftentimes, we won't know we need help until someone offers us a helping hand...and we accept it. Thank you.

Maya Jusuf '22, Iolani School, Honolulu

May 12, 2022