I avoided her stare as tears slowly went down my cheeks. I tried to look at the whitewashed walls around me, perhaps to find a gateway to reality camouflaged in a world of dreams I somehow meticulously made asleep. I wanted to escape, I remember thinking. This could not have happened to me, happened to the one of the very few people I genuinely love in this world. My heart swelled with despair and my thoughts were a whirlwind of tumultuous emotions, of panic, fear, and desolation. I could not help but let out a small cry as my mother asked me a question. The same question she has been asking a few hours before. The same question that dragged me into this nightmare I realized all too well was reality. “August 10\textsuperscript{th}, I replied, still avoiding her confused eyes. “A Sunday.”

It was a reality I was about to give up on. I remember hearing how my grandaunt, much to the dismay of the family, was struck with Alzheimer’s. I remember telling myself that it must have been genetically passed down to my mother, a woman only in her late 40s, who was now lying on the hospital bed for dementia. As she asked me once more what day it was, I thought about nature’s cruel joke as I replied. Just the day before that, she was telling me how she and I only had each other in the world. Now this happened, I thought to myself. I felt unbelievable anguish inside, and I slumped my shoulders even more despondently as I realized how truly alone I was now. Her memories will disappear, I thought, bit by bit, day by day, and it would be my duty as her son to watch her mind wither away into the void of nothingness. Then I too would follow. It was then I heard my mother cry. I lost track of the number of times she cried that day, but every time she did I remember my heart ringing with bitter pain. I could not bear to see those tears again, so I buried my eyes on the palm of my hand. It was then that something caught me off guard. She called my name, as tenderly as any mother would. It seemed that but for a moment that day, her mind was lucid, and I looked up at her in surprise. “Son,” I remember her saying, “Always follow what you think is best. Always follow your dreams”.

It was then that my eyes went wide open. It was then I realized how truly selfish I had been. I remembered why she came to this country from the Philippines in the first place, all to provide her
family the opportunity of success and education. She had been working hard all these years for her family’s sake, and even now in times of turmoil, that was still the first thing in her mind. I remembered all those shifts she had to work as a nurse, and that in fact may have played a critical role in her mental status. She was working for the sake of her family’s education, working so hard that she could not get enough sleep, and hence part of her mind did not work as it should. It was then I felt truly ashamed. To think I would give up on my education, my future, and my career just because times were going to be hard – I truly hated myself at that moment for thinking so. I realized that just with those words of hers, what education truly meant to me completely changed. From the very first day she set foot on this land, she worked so her children could find success in a world of opportunities. That was, in essence, her dream, a dream I was about to throw away. It was at that moment I looked at things with renewed vigor. A flame lit up in my heart, a flame I would use to press onward in times of difficulty. What education means to me is not only a crucial step to the fulfillment of my dreams – that is success, but also the embodiment of her hard work, work I decided I will not waste. That, I believe, is my true duty as her son, to use every opportunity available for her dream, my family, and mine to intertwine and surface for all the world to see. With that vigor, I stepped into Bergen Community College in the second year of my fall semester. My mother had completely recovered by then – a few days rest was all she needed, and the tests thankfully showed nothing that indicated my worst fears. Rallying myself, I decided I would uphold her and my family’s dreams, and that in order to do so, I would keep in my heart my own meaning of education.