Table of Lamei:

Chapter 1: The YMCA Times

Chapter 2: Elementary Changes

Chapter 3: Stability and the Teenage Years

Chapter 4: Changing Tides, High School Chronicles

Part 1: Adjustment and Adaptation

Part 2: The Crest and Peaks

Part 3: Unpredicted

Chapter 5: In the Works

Chapter 6: Life Before Life, Prologue to Lamei

Chapter 4, Part 2:

Throughout the beginning of my high school lifetime, I strongly felt that the academic and social stresses of high school would avoid me, like a stone in the river; no matter how strong the current, I was capable of not being influenced by it. Freshmen year went by without too many casualties. Rather, freshmen year was refreshing and one of the peaks during high school. I made new friends and made stronger bonds with old ones. I maintained an above decent grade, marked up with A’s and B’s. I was joining every club I had even the slightest interest in, and I enjoyed the freedom I was receiving because I was in high school; teacher’s gave you more respect and we could somewhat freely choose what we wanted to take.

As freshmen year finishing up and sophomore year was about to begin, I was confident in my abilities as a student. This confidence probably stemmed from my non-honors classes, aside from English, which weren’t too much of a challenge. My confidence and a constant nagging in my soul that I should live up to the stereotypes about being Asian, fueled my ambitions to take two honors math classes for my sophomore year. My Algebra teacher at the time knew of my skills, but she saw this math venture as a bit of a risk. She asked me three times to reconsider this; instead of taking both honors Geometry and Algebra II, maybe I should only have one honors math class, leaving the other a normal class. I seriously thought this plan before and after her recommendation, but I remember even now how much I wanted to prove to others, especially my classmates who were advanced since their elementary years that I was academically capable of standing on the same level as them. I was completely unsure of how I was going to handle this task, but I was sure that I would come out of it alive and mostly intact as that was how I had survived school up until then.

During the first few weeks of the new semester of sophomore year, I had unknowingly fallen into an academic mess. To me, I was unsure of almost all of the material I had learned in Geometry and Algebra II, but this didn’t worry me until my guidance counselor had called me down to his office. He had told me that maybe this wasn’t a good idea, me taking more honors classes than I could handle. Once he finished talking, I felt an incredible amount of embarrassment. Never in my life had I felt like such a letdown, such a stubborn, ridiculous fool. His suggestion proved how much trouble I was in.

It evades me now how my parents found out about this. It was either my counselor had told them or I had simply given in in front of them. One way or another, I had sentenced myself to a tortuous set of months. What once had been a source of fun and socialization, school and clubs now became my haven. It was a haven not in the way that it provided me joy as it once did, but rather a place for me to take shelter from daily scuffles with my parents. We would argue over how I could do better, until the unthinkable option popped up: a tutor. Right then and there, I had discovered a pride that I never acknowledged; a silly pride, but something that I would hold tightly onto for several weeks. Somehow, through my lifetime, I had developed stubbornness toward help. Aside from simple or tedious tasks, my studies became my own business. This stubbornness would come and go depending on my situation, but me agreeing to have a tutor translated into me being incapable for me. I strongly disagreed, even thinking that failing would be better than dropping to my knees and asking for help from a third party. We would argue almost every day and that exhausted all of us. It was like a constant fight between two sides; me and my tag-teaming parents. Their words weren’t inaccurate nor were they derogatory. I had just developed a seemingly impenetrable wall around my mind.

After weeks of fighting, I finally gave in. The once heavy mood seemed to lighten just a bit, but I was still nonetheless bitter about my admittance to defeat. I showed up at the tutoring sessions with nothing but resentment. However, after each week, I felt less pressured. With the tutoring, I was three to four days ahead of my classes in school, giving me ample time to ask questions and understand the reason behind the logic of the problems. The process wasn’t a one-time fix, especially when I was placed with other students a year younger than I was. That was probably the salt on my slowly healing wound. However, about two or three months later, I was able to see this help not so much only as a cure but also as a set of crutches for my outlook on myself. This painful and exposing experience along with it’s even worse solution was able to let me be exposed to the truth of my unreasonable pride and my fears. This experience was probably the most educating experience in my current lifetime. Just as John Dewey explained in his book *Experience and Education*, there is something about learning from an experience that surpasses what can be learned through a textbook. He speaks about the differences between progressive learning and traditional learning, saying “learning from texts and teachers” compared to “learning through experience”, suggesting the lack of knowledge that can be learned through only reading books. An experience in this case, is a memorable lesson that books can introduce but never successfully teach. Only through a meaningful experience can one admit to having learned something. In my situation, a book could not have touched onto something so personal. Had I ended up just getting C’s and D’s in my math classes, I would have been limiting myself on the experience aspect, as is what Dewey explains in his principle of continuity of experience.