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My eyes meet the paintings that line my walls, and I see more than finished works. I see moments of becoming. A 16x20 frame that holds glimpses of me, fragments of my mind before resolution, remnants of ideas that compelled me to put brush to canvas before I fully understood what I was trying to say. Each piece is incomplete in isolation, yet together they trace a record of attention, hesitation, and growth.

Each canvas carries the memory of uncertainty, of choices made one brushstroke at a time, shaped as much by instinct as by deliberate thought. Painting has become my way of understanding the world, a lens through which I can parse complexity and translate fleeting impressions into something tangible. In many ways, it mirrors how I have come to understand my own journey toward medicine, a discipline that demands precision while asking its practitioners to remain comfortable in the absence of certainty.

Resilience, much like art, does not arrive fully formed. It is an accumulation of layers, each one forged in response to pressure. My understanding of resilience began long before I had the language to name it, seeded in the early experiences that shaped how I learned to see myself and how I believed the world would see me in return.

In my family, I occupied the smallest space. I was the youngest girl of seven children, raised by parents who had crossed oceans in search of opportunity. There was a word in Tagalog my family used for me often, *kawawa*, spoken lightly, almost affectionately. It sounded gentle, but its meaning carried more weight than I understood at the time: someone fragile, someone deserving of pity. Though it was never uttered with malice, it marked me early. It taught me a lesson many women in medicine come to recognize, how easily perceived gentleness is mistaken for weakness, and how readily others decide the limits of your potential before you are given the chance to assert it yourself. That word lingered as a quiet expectation, a reminder that the world would often perceive me as smaller than I was.

Life frequently reinforced the meaning behind that label. We moved often, pursuing the few opportunities available to my parents, and home became a word we could not afford. Stability was never assumed; it was negotiated, and often lost, contingent on circumstances beyond our control. I stopped waiting for it to appear and began adjusting to its absence. I developed an insistence. I would not allow circumstance, or a single word, to define the boundaries of my ambition. I found strength in small victories, sought spaces where my voice carried weight, and trusted my own capabilities even when others did not.

Through painting, I have come to learn that limitation is not a flaw. Thin paper warps under too much water. Brushes fray. Colors bleed when you do not expect them to.

These constraints demand attentiveness. They force the artist to slow down, to learn pressure and restraint, to work with what is available rather than what is ideal.

Resilience, as I have come to understand it, was never about enduring for the sake of endurance. It was about learning how to move within constraint, how to respond when pressure threatens to distort form. I saw this reflected in the women I admired in medicine, women who understood that survival without recognition is not equity.

Again and again, women are taught to soften their presence, to make themselves easier to overlook. The instruction is rarely explicit, but it is persistent. Work harder. Speak less. Be grateful for the opportunity. For women from marginalized backgrounds, this pressure is magnified, woven into training environments and reinforced by systems that reward compliance over confidence or even competency. Resilience is what allows women to resist that quiet erosion.

The embodiment of a resilient woman in medicine is a canvas in progress. No painting is finished in a single sitting. Meaning emerges through revision, through the willingness to remain with uncertainty long enough for something honest to take shape. Layers accumulate slowly. Some are bold, others barely visible, but each contributes to the whole. In the end, she is a vibrant, colorful painting mounted against a perfectly white wall. The colors bleed through, refusing containment. Even when the canvas is removed, traces remain, a permanent mark of presence and impact. She leaves evidence. She alters the space she occupies.

As I move forward in medicine, resilience remains with me not as armor or as a glass case, but as the nail in the wall, bearing weight even when unseen. It is what holds me upright and anchored, giving me orientation when the structure around me feels uncertain.