

Robotics Surrender

The roar of cheers and the stomping of feet echo in my ears, a tumultuous avalanche of energy- a symphony of excitement and nervousness that embodies my current state of mind. The constant thump of my heart, dancing to the beat of my anxiety is louder than the announcer inside the stadium. My stomach twists in a frenzy of butterflies as I force my legs into motion. Before I can look up into the packed stands the spotlights turn on, and the crowd quiets in a deafening silence that resonates throughout the gymnasium. This is it, everything we've worked for. I adjust my safety glasses and narrow my eyes in concentration. As the referee yells and the light turns green, we take our places. I step forward and flip the on switch; suddenly my anxiety disappears, and I am filled instead with calm determination. My mind mutes out the vociferous cheering; all I am focused on is the match in front of me. I am firmly planted in this dazzling world of science and innovation, and all I can see is our robot zooming around the track. Let the games begin.

It was a twist of fate and irony that led me to Robotics; I was sitting quietly in math tutorial minding my own logarithms when all of a sudden the lights turned off. Confused by the interruption I looked up at the board. "Welcome to Robotics" was written in messy, energetic print as if the author had been filled with a rush of enthusiasm and couldn't pen the words fast enough. I had lost track of time and found myself in the midst of a Robotics meeting. I contemplated relocating to the library, but curiosity got the best of me and I told myself I could watch a ten minute PowerPoint. But 10 minutes transformed into twenty and then an hour passed and I had completely forgotten about leaving. I found this new world of science and technology oddly engrossing. I had always defined myself as an artist, a free thinker, a girl who would read Jane Eyre fifty times before attempting her Calculus homework. My love for the arts fostered this self-concept; as early as kindergarten I found myself earning praise for my imaginative thinking. I took this label to heart and started seeing myself as a "right brained" thinker. Believing that you were either one or the other, I built a wall between

myself and numbers, deciding that my creativity could not be confined by matrices or quadratic equations. But now, in the midst of my numerical war, I found myself captivated by the enemy. With a heavy heart, I held up a white flag and signed my name on the Robotics Team roster.

As the year went on I learned more about the FIRST organization, which holds the robotics competitions. Teams across the nation would be given the description of this year's game simultaneously, and, supplied with only a basic tool kit of materials, they would need to build, program and complete a functioning robot within six weeks. Unlike a straightforward homework problem (read instructions and produce answer) this was volatile and exciting, a journey with destination unknown. But more importantly it was tangible. We weren't just building - we were creating. I quickly became enamored by the ingenuity behind the science; this wasn't simply power tools and theorized calculations. It was conceptualized reality. I had never witnessed such a beautiful blend of arts and science. We were using carefully calculated logic to bring our imagined dreams to life. Applying my knowledge of the law of cosines, equations that had once seemed so irrelevant, I was able to create blueprints for our design. My newfound alliance was surprisingly empowering. Math homework turned into numerical puzzles; instead of being intimidated by differential equations, I embraced the challenge, finding pleasure in the process.

Robotics opened my eyes to a world I had avoided for almost my entire life, and surprisingly, absorbed my interests for the next three years of high school. Being part of the Robotics team was my chance to break away from the label I had created for myself. I came to meetings early and full of ideas, talking openly in group discussions just like I would have in an English class. Handling power tools as if they were my beloved paintbrushes, I constructed the base of our robot; soldering metal and drilling in bolts became routine. Even more valuable than my newfound skill with power tools was how I changed my self perception. Yes I'm an artist, and a free thinker. Yes, I'm a girl who devours books with a ravenous hunger. But I'm also a proud member of Robotics,

a valuable teammate who helped her team get to semi-finals and win “Rookie Team of the Year.”

I learned that embracing my creativity didn't require denying my logical nature. No longer limited by my own self-concept, I gained the confidence necessary to step out of my comfort zone. Even if the solutions to hyperbolic trigonometric equations may not come to me as naturally as thematic patterns in poetry do, I am now free to embrace the world with open arms, numbers and all.