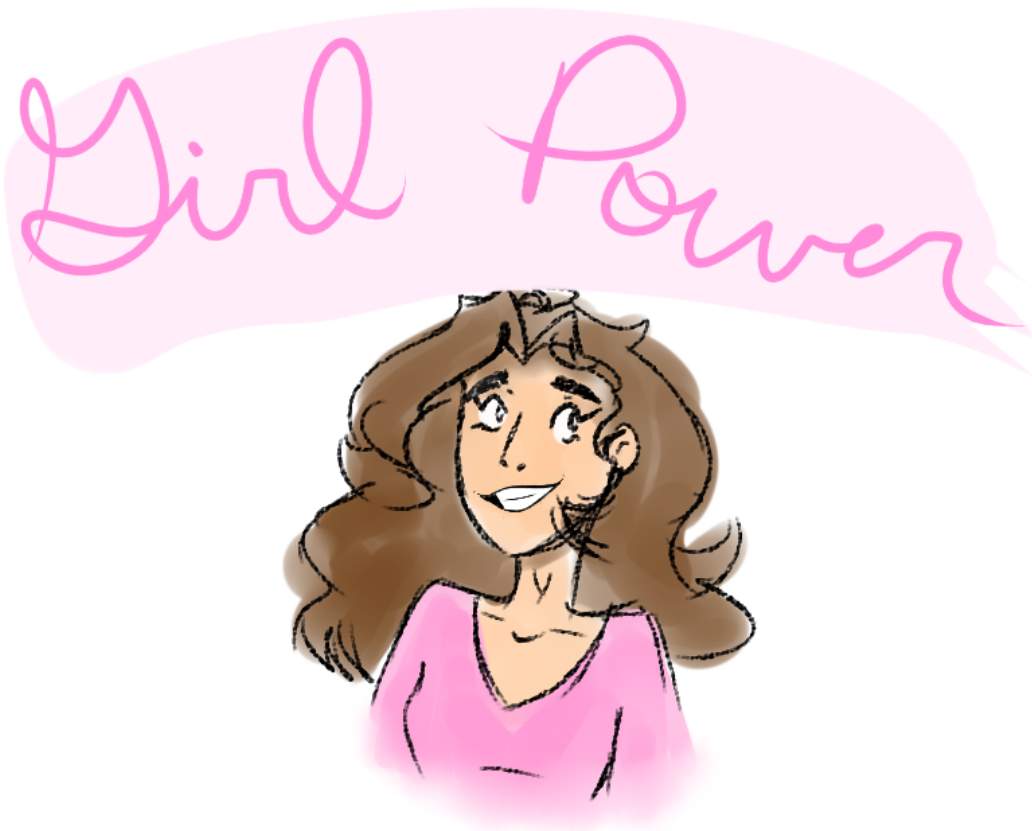


# Odd one out



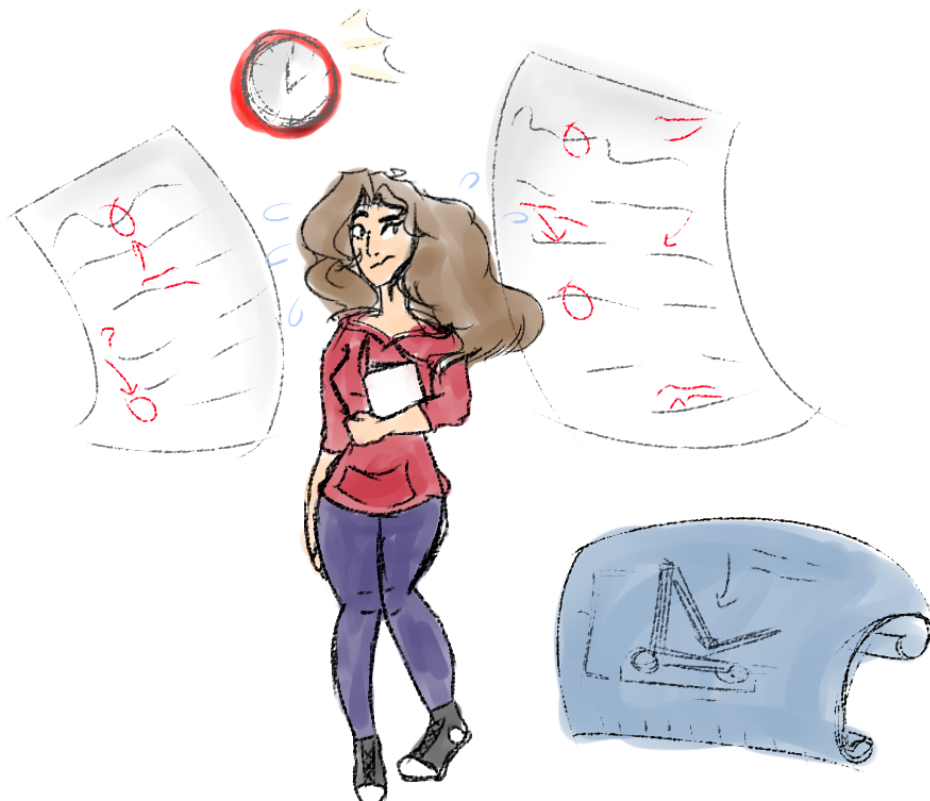
“Girl Power: used in reference to an attitude of independence, confidence, and empowerment among young women. - Cambridge Dictionary ” This is what Girl Power is described as in the dictionary, a feeling of empowerment and independence over a goal or obstacle. As anyone would know a word may be defined as something such as this in the dictionary, but may have some sort of emotional meaning to someone else. These two words do have a special meaning to me when I hear them, the true meaning giving me a bit of a pick up, but what gives this word its true light is the achievements one can accomplish when given inspiration by this phrase. I wouldn't know this without of course having to experience this myself.



My first year, I was inexperienced, surrounded by people who had done this time and time again. I soon found I was not alone in this, being placed on a team of people who had also never done this before. Our captain was a girl, at first I thought this would mean leniency on me and a bit of respect from a girl, but I soon found being the same gender does not mean instant respect or leniency. The rest of the team was made up of girls and boys evenly. I did, however, get to chose to be a notebook writer, because I thought it'd be the easiest job, something I also soon found to be false. I'm glad I didn't quit, because my teacher, Mr. Richardson, told me I was good at what I did and gave me the choice on whether to quit or try again. It was a hard choice but after thinking it over I made a decision. I joined the next year on 7536B, a team that was all boys except for me.

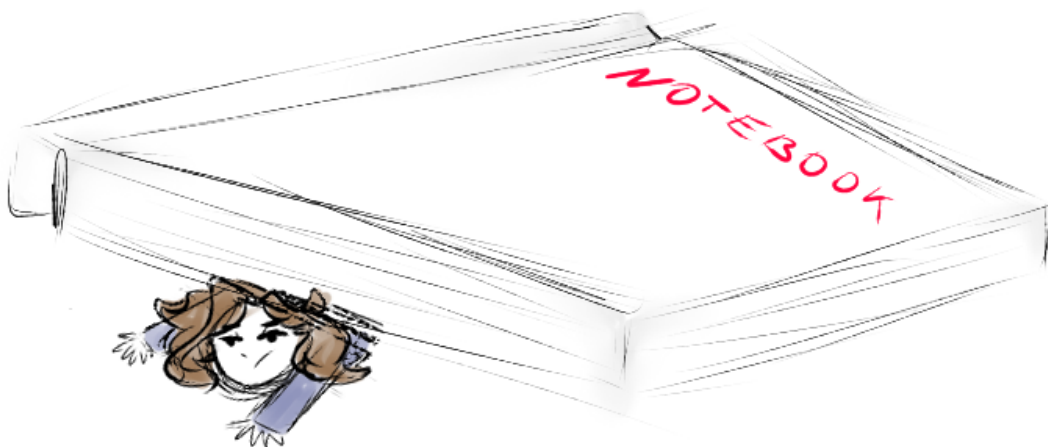
My mother soon heard about me being the only female and was not too fond of the idea. I reassured her I was fine with it, and was able to get my work done either way. She insisted on other things, but I wanted to prove that it didn't matter if it was an all girls team or not. This conversation frequently came up when I'd mention the hypothetical of going to the World's Championships, at the time it didn't seem like something that'd actually happen. She didn't want me to go on a long trip like World's being the only girl. I felt like I was being undermined or like she didn't trust that I'd be a responsible person. This would often get to me and as we strived to go to state I'd hear her in the back of my head, reminding me that even if we did get that far, I couldn't go. The thing that kept me going was knowing I could do it myself and show I was going to help my team go, that my hard work would get them that far whether or not I would go.

In my freshman year of high school I wasn't very ecstatic to be revisiting the robotics environment. At our first meeting I was asked questions on what I already knew about robotics, and was given the same job that I was the first year, notebook writer. This discouraged me a bit, but I soon grew to like it as I was reminded how important my role was. I also got to work along side with a teammate to help carry a bit of the weight. The environment soon became something I'd look forward to going to, I'd love going to meetings and laughing at the jokes and being a part of a team instead of being isolated to do my work. A big part of this changed my view on "playing my part", instead of just sitting away in a corner I was able to ask questions and actually get answers the same day.



The first month was probably the best of the times spent working on the notebook, because I got to just observe how everyone worked on the team, giving me a lot to work with when it came to documenting what I needed for the notebook, but I also asked for advice on what everyone else thought I needed to put in the notebook. This was something that also differed from my first year's experience. I was reminded to keep everything updated and as we drew closer and closer to our first competition, I felt anxiety starting to engulf me. It effected my actions, how I thought and the way I functioned around my teammates. I grew a bot quieter and avoided sitting in the circle my team would form during meetings. At the time I didn't know why this was my initial reaction when coming to meetings. I thought maybe it was because I knew how much notebook meant when it came to winning, and unlike any cliché movie about a team, the teams were formed to win. I didn't know if our notebook was good enough to beat out other teams'. I told myself that what ever I made was good as long as I knew I worked as hard as I could on it.

The day of the first competition came, and after a long night of editing, finishing, and printing the final product was ready. We all met in the wee hours of the morning, and everyone signed the notebook to show that they'd not only read it, but also approved what was written in it. On the ride there I slept to take my mind off the competition, I became less anxious as I dosed off. When we'd arrived everyone got off and took their part in carrying in the boxes or parts and tools, one of which held our notebook. Competitions were the usually the easiest yet at the same time, most unnerving hours of robotics for me. Having to sit and do almost nothing while watching what conspires in the competition rings was tedious, not only this but wondering if those hours spent typing away would prove worthy for our teams victory and assurance of a place at the state competition. Waiting for the completion to be over as I see my teammate's emotions changing over the course of each round we went into that ring, from hopeful to anxious to spiteful and then back to hopeful. It's a lot of pressure to be put on someone, that their work could determine the victory for a team, knowing that if they're work didn't hold up to it's expectations that the blame would solely be placed on them, meaning reworking all the progress they'd made so far to try again and again in an endless trial and error cycle, but with the possible consequence of not being given another chance to try and improve meaning not learning from their mistakes and not growing as a person, meaning quitting without knowing what was wrong.



My worries soon became hushed as the awards were to be announced after the final round of the competition, but I noticed my team was one of the teams competing in the last round. I realized that I'd let my worries get to me to such an extreme degree that I didn't even notice how my team was doing in the competition. I watched quietly as the game started and it unraveled before my eyes. The final bell rang and the robots ceased. As I counted up the balls and it was certain that we'd won, but I contained my excitement before the judges announced their official findings for who the victor was. As they came over the speakers with their results that'd our alliance had won we were ecstatic, but this was not the end of our excitement. The rest of the awards were still to be announced and as they called out the awards for the middle school teams I felt my earlier worries lift off my shoulders, seeing that it's not the end of the world if our notebook doesn't win, this relief is what I needed this whole time and ironically it hits me right as they announce our notebook won.



Now I could go through the next few competitions knowing that we had a secured place in the State competition. I was also reassured by our captain that this didn't mean that I was to be more lenient with my work, that just as much was expected of me now than before. I wish I'd done just that. The next few months' things seemed to run together, meeting after meeting leading up to the next competition and after each one I'd have to go back and consolidate with my teammates on what they thought needed change. Everything after the first competition was just practice to us so it made it all become one big blur in my memory of night after night typing and then competition after the next in the morning. I was ready for State, the competition that was everyone's drive at first, but as we grew closer to the date it became our impending moment of judgment. We were drilled on what to do when a judge would come to our table and ask questions, what would answer with and who would answer.



I remember one question I wasn't prepared for, yet feel stupid for not thinking of was one I still get to this day, "What's it like being the only girl on the team?" As if they wanted me to answer with, "Oh it's so hard" or rather "I feel like I'm not appreciated for being the only girl." These questions were the things that made me feel like the odd one out of the bunch. These were the questions that'd single me out, as if I stuck out like a sore thumb, and it's like they wanted me to write an essay to answer them sometimes, coming to me and sitting down at the table while my team would be away competing. I wasn't annoyed, if anything it humored me most of the time, with them usually leaving it for the last question.



When the day finally came for state, it felt like the days leading to it stretched as long as possible, but the judgment day finally here. The team packed up the necessities and we set out for the trip ahead. Everyone was too tired on the way to show any excitement, and I was no exception being one of the first to drift off to sleep. When I awoke to a teammate nudging me to get up and carry something into the building I felt the anxiousness already sneaking its way towards me. When I got my first glimpse of the rows of tables lined up for the numerous high schools competing I felt myself start to sink into my shoes. I was nervous seeing the number of people we had to compete with. I snapped out of this trance when I stumble into our table and set the box of tools I'd carried from the bus down. Instead of unpacking random things out of the box I searched for our team notebook and upon finding it I started comparing the size of it to the one's of other teams that were visible. The notebooks I saw looked much larger in size and had many more dividing tabs than ours did. I felt my throat tighten with dread. The rest of the time I spent watching the table, yet there's not much to watch if you ask me, and drawing on my laptop. This helped me get my mind off what waited for us. The first day ever so slowly, but surly ended and we hid our boxes under the tables to return to them tomorrow. I made sure to hide the notebook well, but was more focused on going home at the time.

As we followed the same routine as the morning previous to this, we filed into the bus, slept the way there, and unpacked on arrival. I still remember the measly breakfast I had that morning, being in such a rush; a snickers and a little cup of coffee creamer to substitute as milk. This day we were able to climb our way to the top or the rankings, getting our hopes up. We were so happy to be doing well, but when three people showed up to our table with clipboards we stood up in a line and silenced ourselves. They were, as suspected, judges there to ask us about our robot. One question after another they asked, not specifically addressing anyone in particular but rather the whole team, writing small statements down after each answer. I waited for the age-old "only girl" question, but to my surprise did not hear it. They'd moved on to another team before I noticed.

As the competition came to an end we grabbed a few seats near the front for the rewards session. They called each category and as they came to the notebook award my heart suck as they called another team's number. The next two awards were called, excellence and judges award, which would cause my team to jump up in excitement, but what struck me was when they



said, “these qualify 7536B for nationals...and worlds.” I couldn’t believe it. I was going to get to see The World’s Championships.

When I got home I ran to my mother and told her the joyous news, “We’re going to World’s we did it!”, but her response would cause me to break. “You mean *they’re* going, you’re not going as the only girl.” I felt myself switch emotions on a dime and ran to father to tell him “It’s not fair. I worked hard too. I’m being punished for something I can’t control” as I yelled my father went to try and get my mother to change her mind. As I waited in the other room, thinking over and over “it’s not fair, it’s not my fault, why?” I have had to face this kind of situation before, but never have left me as heart broken. I still believe I was in the right, I was being given unfair treatment for being a girl, and it wasn’t even from an outside source, but my mother. As my father stepped out of the room he informed me that they’d have to come and I’d have to stay with them in a whole other hotel. I just wanted to go so I agreed, if this was the best I could get then so be it.



Preparing for worlds was a never ending list of things to bring, what team shirt to wear on what day, where to be at this time, where to meet up at what landmark along the way. Endless planning for a trip that seemed to be timeless. The days of preparing on the robot and notebook seemed the same, editing this and that. Making sure to include this and that. We all knew it wasn't a vacation, but we still wanted it to be fun.

I remember the first day arriving on the lot of the enormous convention center and wondering how the upcoming week would play out. We had more competition than ever and of a wider variety as well. That's what we found unique about world's, getting to interact with people from different areas of the world and different mid sets. We had fun the first day taking in the scenery and preparing for the upcoming week. Everyone was being exposed to so much at once it was overwhelming.



I can only describe the whole week as a long series of experiences. From witnessing other cultures to trying to communicate the best we could. The times we would go and eat out as a team and enjoy the environment. The activities never seemed to end; we were almost always busy with the tournament or trying to amuse one another. The competition was a bit more than we'd accounted for, but we gained experience along the way. We didn't get to the semi-finals; we did have fun watching though, taking in the excitement and cheering on people from our hometown. We didn't win but got to witness the happiness of others doing so. What I fondly remember was when a woman walked on the stage and pointed out how far women have gotten since the early 1900's, we now can enter the same career fields as men such as engineering and robotics. At the end of her speech she said, "I want you all to clap for the girls out there!" to which my team responded with, "Yeah, Isabella!" as they clapped sincerely. I was very happy to seem that and hear someone mention how it is a big achievement with how far we've gotten in society where women join men in the engineering field.

After that trip, I was inspired to join robotics again, even if I would be the only girl. The up coming year another girl joined our team, and though I can't say I'll miss the questions asked by the judges, I will say I'll miss the experience gained and memories made along the way. Learning that failure is an option, that learning along the way is just a part of the experience, even if you may be singled out by people outside your team, it's ok. Growing as a person and bettering your work is what you gain. That's what I think real Girl Power is.



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Team number: 7536B

Citations:

Software used, Paint SAI

Qotev.com

Additional Information: All writing and art work is original and was created by the entrant