Girl Power is so much more than just encouraging females into the STEM field. It is encouraging anyone who has doubts in their minds, people who place themselves in the "norm" and stay there. Girl Power is throwing away the labels of the past, throwing away the "norm". It doesn't see you as a nerd, jock, poor, rich, male, or female. It sees you as a programmer, engineer, inventor. It sees you as the future and so much more than what you see.

For me, it saw more than a hopeless cause. My freshman year of highschool I had just transferred to a new school, I was the new student who knew no one. I was part of the cross country team. I also had some interest in the robotics club. I showed up to a robotics practice about 3 weeks into the season. I asked the coach at the time, Mr. Leete, what I could do to be a part of the team. When I told him about my cross country schedule he pointed out it conflicted with every robotics practice for the next 2 months. It was not going to work. I walked out of that room thinking that it was an interest that was not meant to be. There was no point in chasing after it now. The interest died out.

A couple weeks later Mr. Leete contacted me asking if I would like to go to a competition that was not far away. I figured why not, I've got nothing to lose, so I went. At that competition I saw the hype of the students. All of the hard work they put in paying off during those matches. I saw the pits and how teams would help each other. My interest sparked again.

After that competition one of the students from the team told me about how they also had unofficial meetings in the morning before school. The small spark in me was yearning for a little more, so I decided to check those out. It was to late in the year for me to join a team, but at those unofficial meetings I started to feel like I belonged. Those students took me in and treated me like one of them without a question. As I said I was the new student in school, but now I had a place I belonged in. Somewhere that became familiar to me.

The next competition came around and I volunteered at it. I just worked the queueing stations, but it made me want more. I managed to be able to go to one of the afternoon practices and the team did not ignore me. One of the girls explained the game to me. She showed me how everything worked. Another person took their time to show me how to code. They explained the importance of a single semicolon they were missing. A small fire was starting in me.

The next year happened and I was still on the cross country team, but I went to every competition I could make it to and I would volunteer at them. I worked the skills field at the first competition and I was intrigued. The fact that people would somehow make their robot do something without a driver for a minute was new to me. I took an Intro to Robotics class and Advanced Robotics throughout the school year. I knew at this point that robotics was something I need to go into. Something was telling me to chase after the interest I thought was dead and everyone was helping me along.

This year, I am on 3767A and I love it. The first week or so was just me learning the names of various parts, like the standoff. After that I was placed on a team and we started creating. The first couple of weeks of learning the game and brainstorming was amazing. So much was new to me, but that fire in me was growing, it was being constantly fueled. I learned how to code and I am now the main programmer on 3767A. I am now one of those people who can make their robot do things for minute without be driven and it is amazing. My team way not have qualified for regionals or states through normal competition, but I am ppushing for us to do

well in a skills competition. I do not want to give up something that I now hold very dear to my heart.

I have also done a lot more volunteering in the community. I have gone out and volunteered at various Vex IQ events. It is the most wonderful feeling to be able to help the little ones or even just to sit there and see what they've been working on. To see the fire in them already fully ablaze at ages of 8 to 12, knowing that they are the future is amazing. I am also now going to the Manufacturing Technology Academy during the first half of my school day. The fire is finally blazing in me.

Girl Power could have just been this saying for allowing girls into STEM, but to me it is so much more. It is the ability to push away labels and push away the stigma of STEM. It is something everyone has in them that allows them to chase after a spark someone thought had died. It is the spark in everyone. Girl Power pushes past the barriers people think they see to being a part of a STEM activity. It is those around us, helping people join. It is the spark each young person has in them. It is the ability to see each person as a change in the future. As the next generation of inventors and innovators.

Had I walked away freshman year and Mr. Leete never contacted me, I would be doing something completely different than what I am today. I wouldn't be considering engineer as a career. I wouldn't have found a place that I belonged to my first year at new school. I wouldn't be striving for worlds my first year on the team. I wouldn't be at an engineering specific school my junior year. Girl Power is something that has been pushing me on since freshman year, even though I did not know it. Girl Power is much more than what everyone sees it has, because it sees more than we do.

Credits:
      Entrant: Grace Kolbusz
      Team: 3767A
      Title: My Path Through Girl Power