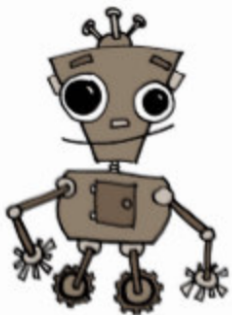
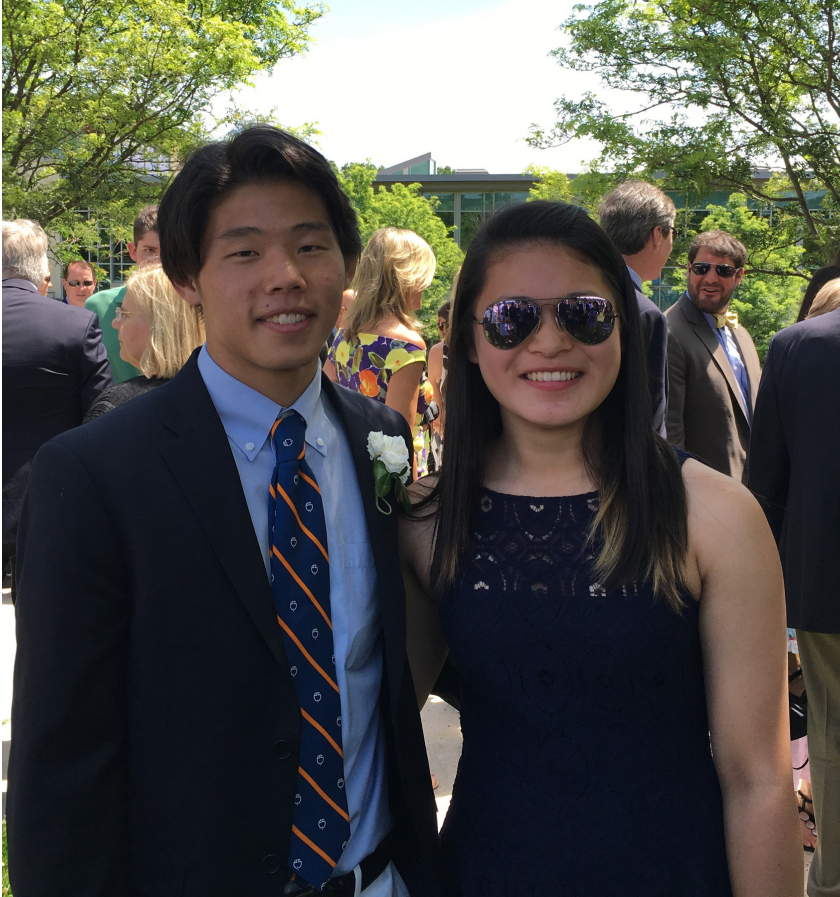


STEPPING UP TO THE PLATE

A YOUNG GIRL'S JOURNEY THROUGH VEX ROBOTICS

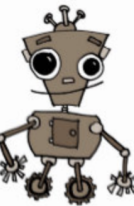




ONCE UPON A TIME...

There was a young girl who dreamt not of another life in a fairy tale, but of a future life as an engineer. She did not want the pretty jewels that shined atop a crown nor did she long to be adorned in a magnificent ball gown. While Jodie's friends fantasized a make believe life, she wished to push the boundaries of human knowledge and possibly innovation.

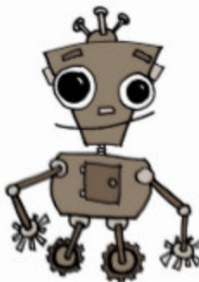
Jodie imagined what it would be like to be a part of the school's robotics program, but her fear of change and of failure held her back. Although she was something of a science enthusiast, Jodie had never ventured into this field of engineering. She kept making excuses for herself until she finally decided to face her fears.



SHE SIGNED UP FOR ROBOTICS AND AS THE DATE OF THEIR FIRST MEETING LOOMED OVER HER SHE STEADILY GREW MORE NERVOUS...



On the first day, she walked in. Confused, she thought to herself, “What am I doing here?” She stood awkwardly near the door until the head coach, Mr. Gillespie, asked everyone to group into four teams. Quickly the other students drifted into teams based on who they had worked with the year before. Jodie tried to join her friends, but found there was no spot for her. Flustered, Jodie was pushed towards an all boy team. She and her new teammates became fast friends, but Jodie was still far from comfortable in this new environment, feeling isolated, marginalized, and skeptical.



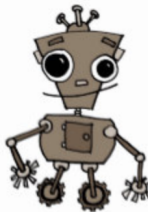


With Jodie and the boys, gender did not seem to matter. There were three strong female leaders in the robotics program, one teacher and two older, experienced roboticists, who reached out to make sure everyone felt included and learned something. Jodie looked up to Mrs. Jarratt, one of the robotics coaches. Mrs. Jarratt, who was a female engineer herself and worked in a male dominated field all her life, showed her that anybody can do anything if they set their mind to it.

Jodie's first season of robotics passed with little conflict because she chose to not take risks, remaining in her comfort zone. She was still scared to step up and take on roles like being a driver. She was just fine sitting behind the scenes, building, and making sure everything went smoothly.

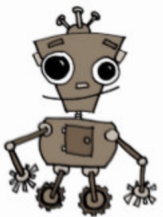


Top: Jodie and her team working on their STEM Project
Bottom: two of the VEX IQ robotics teams

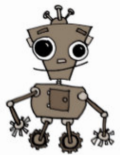




The next year, Jodie moved on to VEX robotics. Since everyone on Jodie's team felt out of their element, Jodie decided to take on a more responsibility. This year Jodie became a leader, not a follower. Jodie's team welcomed her in her new role as team captain, and the Starstruck season looked promising for "Jodie and the Boys." For this team of freshmen, it became evident that each member was respected and none were superior to another. Although Jodie was outnumbered by the boys on her team, she never felt lesser than them. They were like one family that looked out for each other and wanted the best for themselves as a whole.

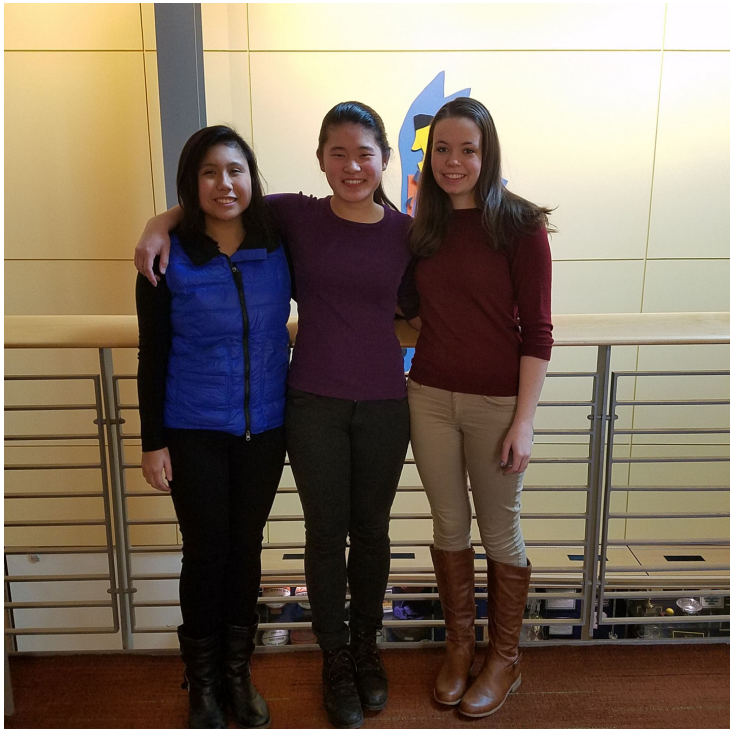
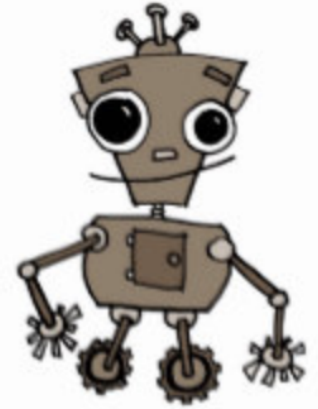


Although Jodie felt safe in her own robotics community, the tournament environment was a whole new story. Other teams approached Jodie's teammates while ignoring her. She was seen as an inferior member of the team. Unfortunately, some of these individuals believed that Jodie, as a girl, lacked the robotics competency to lead her robotics team. While Jodie didn't believe that her gender affected her aptitude for robotics, it still remains the only defining characteristic in the eyes of others. Jodie's teammates, however, stood by her side and made sure she was included and heard.

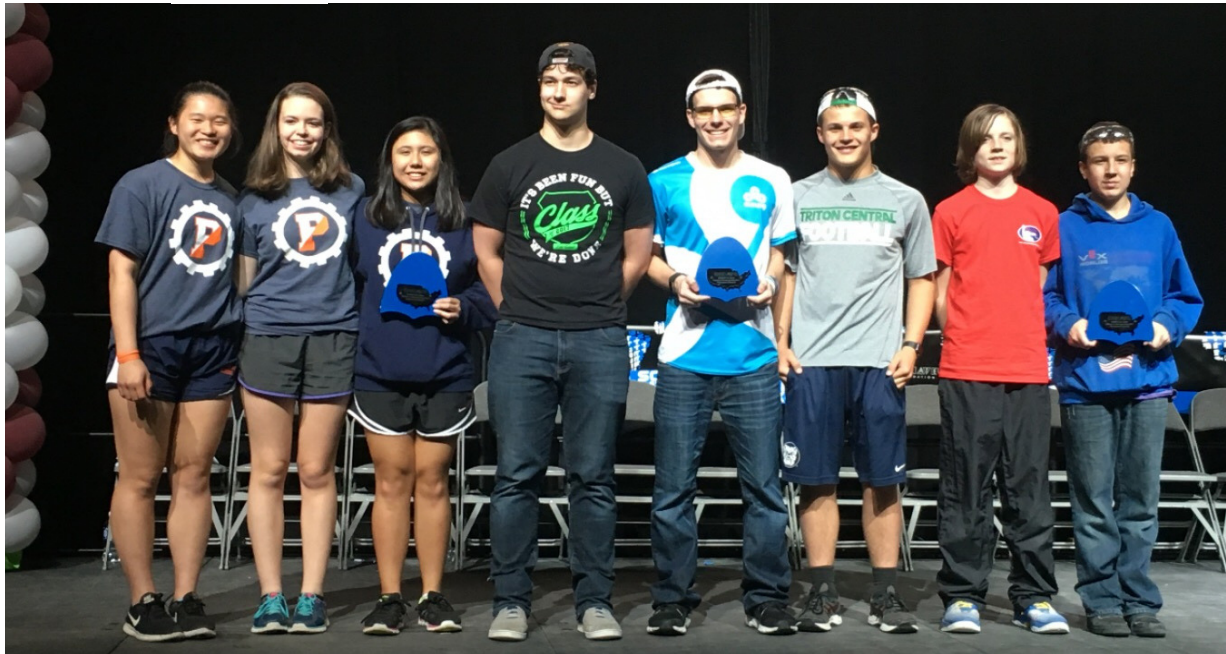
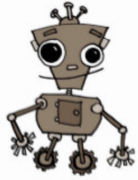


Jodie taking on new responsibilities as driver

Sadly, Jodie's journey with Jodie and the Boys came to an early end because another team was in desperate need for another teammate. Jodie was a freshman at the time, but she was placed on a team with two junior girls. At first, the age gap made it weird for Jodie, but the two other girls, Becca and Jasmine, made Jodie feel at home. They acted as her mentors and fostered Jodie's interest in robotics. These three girls quickly bonded and took to the field, the robotics field—ready to compete!



Although Jodie missed being with “her boys,” she was excited for the opportunity to learn under these veteran roboticists, further developing her skills and interests within VEX. It also was empowering for Jodie to be surrounded and inspired by two confident young women as her mentors, demonstrating the strength and power of women in STEM. That season her team performed incredibly well at States and continued to become tournament finalists in the US Open OPEN Division. Proving that despite conflicts of gender and disrespectful situations, they were a competent and talented team with the power to create change in the discipline. This empowered Jodie, Jasmine, and Becca to inspire other girls as well.

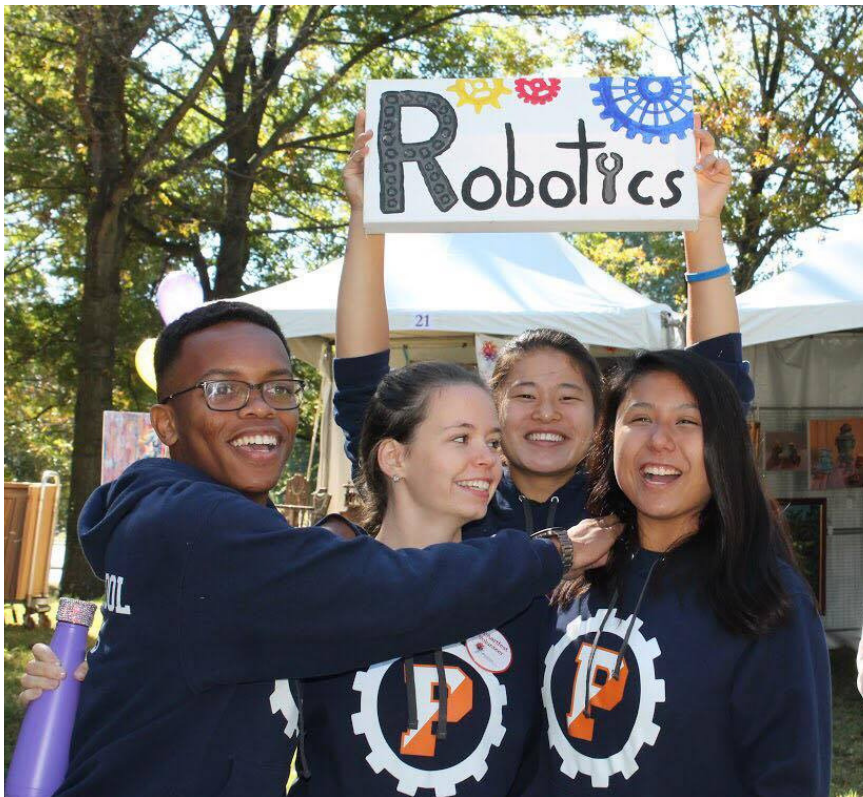


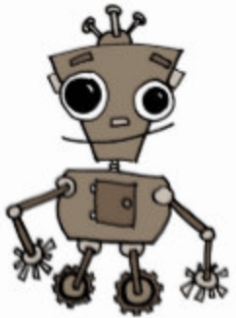


Jodie, Becca, and Jasmine were invited to be panelists at the Girls in Technology Conference that spring, where they talked to a room full of girls interested in STEM about robotics. Afterwards, parents and other high school students thanked the girls for sharing and commended them for their perseverance. By talking about her experiences, Jodie hoped she inspired others to follow their interests regardless of the obstacles.



As the Starstruck season began to wind down, Jodie was able to reflect on how much she has grown in the past two years. Within the Potomac robotics community, Jodie found a support network that has helped her foster a love of engineering. After learning and cultivating her love of robotics from knowing nothing, Jodie felt confident in her continuation in VEX in the years to come.





As anticipation for the upcoming season built, Jodie and her teammates began preparing to continue to pass down knowledge to the new members they would soon welcome to the team. Jodie, Becca, and Jasmine have recently welcomed four new members into their robotics family, two of which are girls, and are excited to see how they will learn and grow together. Jodie developed a more confident sense of herself and is no longer held back by fear. Jodie hopes that as more women develop a passion for STEM, people will begin to let go of their preconceived notions and see that women are just as capable as men. Jodie successfully found her happily ever after in the robotics lab, surrounded by an environment of support and inspiration to change the world in hopes of complete parity.

CREDITS

CONTRIBUTORS

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TEAM

12A Greased Lightning

ENTRY TITLE

Stepping Up to the Plate

SPECIAL THANKS TO

The coaches, mentors, and friends who have helped us throughout our time in the Potomac robotics program

