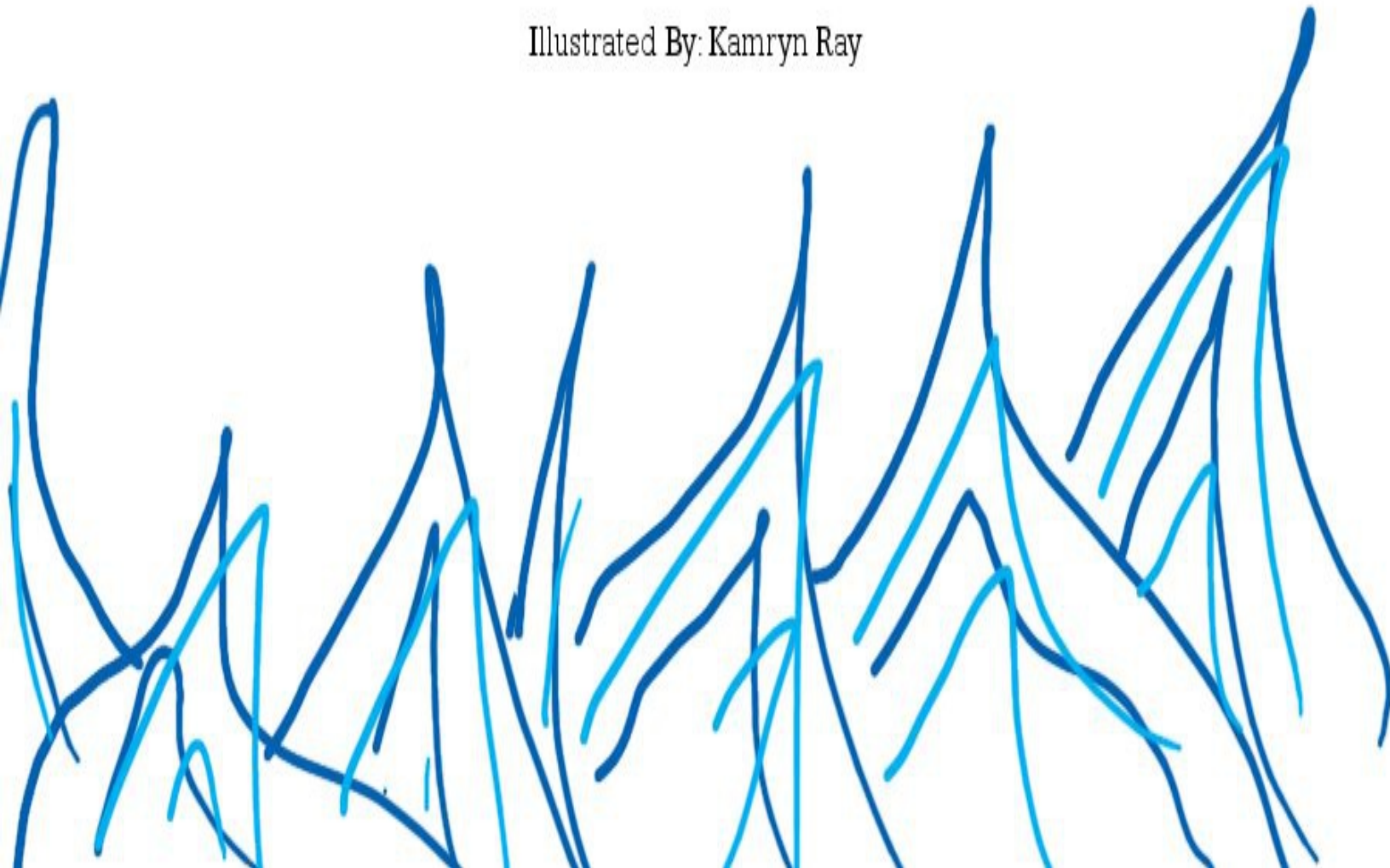


The Creation of Athena

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Ali's Beginning

I was first introduced to engineering and robotics in the eighth grade when I was selected to be on the robotics team. When it came time to pick jobs, Hope and I had the same interest. We both wanted to program.

We realized that the other team's programmers were both guys. With us being both girls, we got underestimated and told we couldn't be as good as the guys. It seemed like the harder we tried, the more criticism we received from everyone else. If we made one mistake everyone would say that the guys could have done better, but when the guys would make a mistake they would just ignore it. It was hard being girl programmers with the other two being guys. As the year progressed, the hateful comments seemed to come more frequently.

Then the team I was in made it to worlds, while the other didn't. The other programmers started criticizing us even more. They then thought if they helped us they could go with us to worlds, but this wasn't the case. We told them we didn't want their help because we could do it ourselves. Then they were upset with us, and even threatened to delete all of the programming.

Afterwards, it became more difficult because the hateful comments continued to progress. This didn't stop us from doing the thing we loved, programming. We stayed strong and continued to program. Finally, we were done and we were at worlds. It was a great experience that neither of us would have been able to participate in if we had not stuck together.

Now being a freshman with Hope once again, and with other females who have shared similar experiences, it is easier to be comfortable in doing what I love. It's been more enjoyable, and I am glad I stayed in robotics, otherwise I wouldn't have the skills and life lessons I have now.

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Faith's Beginning

When I first joined the eighth grade robotics team, I didn't know what to expect. It was only two weeks since the beginning of my eighth grade year. There were three girls and seven boys on my team. How were we supposed to do anything with a majority of the team consisting of males? At first, I was afraid to stand up and speak for not only myself, but also for the good of the group. But as time went on, a few weeks into the school year, I spoke up. Come to find out, I was giving more positive ideas and feedback than almost everybody else. I chose the position of builder, knowing that I could lead more and go farther in the program if I had the task of working hands-on.

It was October when we competed in our first competition. I was afraid and began to depend on the boys again to get us through our first major interactive challenge between our team and one after another. We were halfway through the day when I realized that I needed to step up again. If it wasn't for my realization at that moment, I wouldn't have been the head leader of the group by the end of the year.

Trying to prove mine and my fellow female teammates position of leadership was the hardest struggle throughout the year. It took meeting after meeting for the boys to finally realize that we were equally, if not more, able to accomplish our jobs than they were. We took our time, and made everything neat and orderly. By December, we all realized that we had to see each other equally to work together. From then on, we accomplished more, worked faster, worked harder, and worked as a team.

My ninth grade year has begun, and I am now in an all girls robotics team. It takes struggle and failure to accomplish something, and if I never would have been as stressed as I was at some points last year, I wouldn't have gotten as far as I am right now. I want to thank all of the those boys for giving me the hard time they did. If it wasn't for them, I would've never accomplished what I did in the STEM program. This experience has changed my life and has left a dark, positive mark on my future.



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Hope's Beginning

I was introduced to engineering and robotics in the eighth grade, where I ended up being one of two programmers on the team. Both of us were girls and were underestimated throughout the whole year. With both of the programmers on the other team being boys, we were determined to show we were just as capable as anyone else on the team. As we went through the season, we became closer as friends and better as programmers.

Even though all we did throughout the year was improve and work harder, we still weren't good enough according to other members on the team. They still critiqued Ali and I, saying they could have done twice the work we both did in the same amount of time. They judged if there was a small problem in the program. They didn't understand the pressure of what we were doing and how much extra pressure they were adding. With the number of boys on the team being equal to the number of girls, one would think the pressure wouldn't be as high as it was. The boys on our team didn't understand how much pressure we already felt to prove ourselves. When they critiqued our work and were angry at us for messing up, it didn't help the quality of our work. Their hateful criticism only made it harder to accomplish our tasks.

With this pressure being there, I looked forward to joining the high school team. I knew there were more girls on this team and the environment would be more accepting towards us. Now being a part of the team and seeing the environment around me, I'm glad I didn't give up throughout the year. If I would have quit the middle school team, I wouldn't be a part of the team I am on now. I'm now meeting freshman from Bethel and high schoolers that can give advice and help from their past experiences. I am now in a better environment to continue being a part of the robotics team and gaining experiences I will never forget.

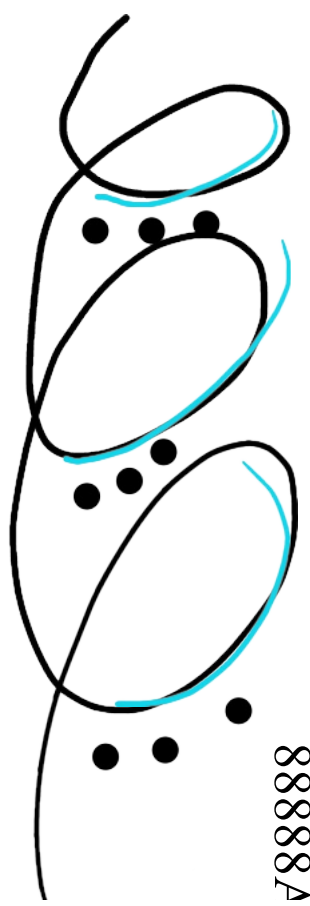
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Kamryn's Beginning

I started my engineering journey in the seventh grade when I signed up for the offered class. There were 28 kids in that class, but only two other girls. Project after project, I was the only girl in my group, and project after project, the boys in my group ignored me and my ideas. They only let me do menial tasks, like doing the worksheet once we finished the building or coloring the background for a pull-toy. We never received top marks, always lacking points in some of the areas I suggested we change.

In 8th grade, I joined my middle school's robotics team. I started off being one of two girls on the 15 people team. The other girl quit within two weeks along with three of the boys, leaving me as the sole girl on a team with ten boys. The same thing happened as in seventh grade; the boys mostly ignored my ideas and input. I also heard many sexist jokes against women in STEM and women in general. I ended up basically being a supervisor, trying to get my team to do things like plan and log what they are doing in our notebook, but they didn't listen.

Now, in my freshman year of high school, I am part of an all girls robotics team within our much larger school team. I'm awful at opening up to people and connecting to them, but I clicked immediately with my new team mates. It is extremely exciting to be working with other girls who are accepting of my skills and know the challenges of being a girl in STEM.



Maddie's Beginning



Nerves were high going into my 8th grade year at Bryant Middle School, and I was out to rise to the top in any way I could. At the time, my plans for the future were to earn a scholarship playing college basketball and pursue a career in elementary education; engineering had never even crossed my mind.

One of the most vivid memories of my last year as a middle schooler is walking into my Engineering and Technology class on the first day of school. Truthfully, I only requested the class because it was Bryant School District's first year to host a course of such curriculum at the middle school level, and I wanted to be a part of something big. I never expected to really connect with the world of engineering or take away much from the class. Much to my surprise, excitement and an overwhelming sense of belonging consumed me as soon as I walked through the classroom door. My world was about to flip upside down as I embarked on my journey as a female pursuing a career in the STEM field.

After the first week of class, I was one of 9 students chosen to be on a competitive robotics team. When the time came for our first meeting, I was overcome with anticipation but also fear. I had never been a part of an organization of the sort and was definitely not knowledgeable in the world of robotic engineering; how was I supposed to play a significant role? Nevertheless, after a few brainstorming sessions and workshops, I had totally fallen in love with VEX Robotics and the world of engineering. Everything was smooth sailing until our team was divided in two: a boy's team and a girl's team.

The separation created tension and heavy competition between our teams throughout the season. The boys complained that we got special attention and more help from our teacher; the girls insisted that the boys cheated in every match. We were always head to head with each other, finishing right next to one another at the end of every tournament we attended. To close out the season, we both qualified to compete in the Arkansas State Tournament for VEX Robotics, the last chance to determine the real champion of Bryant Middle School robotics. However, as the tournament progressed, both of our teams came to a realization: in order to succeed and make a name for our school's program, we had to work together.

Our divided teams united again and worked side by side for the remainder of the tournament. Though we were not the overall VEX champions for the state of Arkansas, we won the attention of Bryant Middle School which helped accel the new engineering program. It has been growing to great extents ever since, and I take great pride in being a part of the first robotics team to come from the program.

I am currently a 3rd year member of Bryant High School's robotics team, through which I have made lasting friendships and found what I am passionate about. Though I am still having to overcome obstacles as a female in the STEM field, I would not trade my experiences for anything. I am optimistic about our upcoming VEX season and plan to continue to set the precedent for young girls interested in the world of engineering.



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