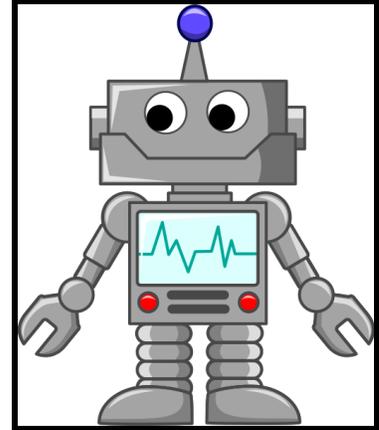


Cataclysm Girl Power

First of all, to tell the truth, I originally did not have any thought of entering robotics, nor did I believe myself having any talent or interest in the field.

Although I knew some basics of programming code, I had somehow not thought of robotics and programming as things that should fit together, despite knowing what programming was primarily for. In addition, when I have thought of the robotics club, I must admit that the phrase drew up images of a group of little middle school boys all huddled around a plastic contraption



of the standard cartoonish robot, complete with googly eyes, bolts and nuts, and vaguely humanoid shape. Or a complete factory of mechanical parts, a sci-fi laboratory, and various high school boys in mechanics uniforms finishing the last touches on a car-sized contraption of monstrous complexity. I was vastly wrong on both accounts, as I discovered later.

In truth, robots are not all humanoid, as the shape of a human is very hard to build with any proficiency, as well as being a highly inefficient shape for many actions. High schoolers do not have access to state of the art labs in which to build large, expensive machines. And there *are* girls who involve themselves in robotics. Far more now than a few years ago, I believe. Now many girls involve themselves in robotics as it is no longer a social taboo and rather, encouraged.

I found out more about VEX robotics as one of my friends joined our school robotics club in her freshman year. She convinced me to go to the first explanatory meeting of 2019. From there I found that the common stereotypes about robotics are not true, whether it be about

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the type of machines made or the gender discrepancy. In fact, within my team alone, around a



third are girls, including my friend and me, although I do know that some teams are made up of only boys. We have never been discriminated against, either for being female or any other reason. The VEX team of Cataclysm has been exceedingly accepting and inclusive. I have tried out many roles, such as hardware, notebook, and

software, and I am currently working on our team notebook and helping with the software on the side (Well, I say helping but in truth my team members are basically teaching me). My friend is currently working on hardware and also working on the notebook and outreach.

There is no such thing as gender discrimination within our group. Since our team is rather smaller than the teams of some other robotics competitions in our school Hagerty's robotics club, we know each other well. We all work together in order to accomplish the goal of creating a robot worthy of competing in Worlds. Although the men in STEM fields still outnumber the women, now many of the newer generations of girls at least have an interest in the subject, and I have confidence that in the very near future, the gender difference will become less pronounced, as more women find their calling in the various fields that STEM encompasses. Our Hagerty Robotics program will also influence this transition.

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In fact, our program has recently been trying to influence our community in terms of girls in Robotics, and other STEM activities in general. For example, I myself participated in the Outreach (community service) event

“Girls in Aviation”, designed to influence young girls in finding a passion for aircraft. It was a very interesting and fun experience. We were able to bring some of our VEX robots and allow the girls to program them, as well as engaging them in a fun



hands-on activity of designing a robot to go through a series of trials. I believe that many of the girls who participated are now interested in pursuing a robotics career.

I have found a STEM role model in Katie, one of the members of our sister VEX team, Cybershock. The reason I find her to be so inspiring is that she helps to lead her team along, and has dabbled in every field of Robotics, becoming at least somewhat competent in all. She never shies away from helping her fellow team members or anyone else from our robotics program. She is also friendly and not afraid of public speaking (as I am), which is shown by how she notes the agenda for team meetings. She is a jack of all trades. The fact that she is a leader along with others in our program shows our inclusive environment.

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In conclusion, the phrase Girl Powered for me is linked very closely with Robotics. Many of the older girls in our program I see as role models. We do not shy away from hard work, we work together to complete our tasks, and we include everyone. The diversity in our team is sometimes a challenge, due to the clashing of views and such. However, overall, we put aside any differences and work together to build a better robot, a better program, and a more inclusive world.

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