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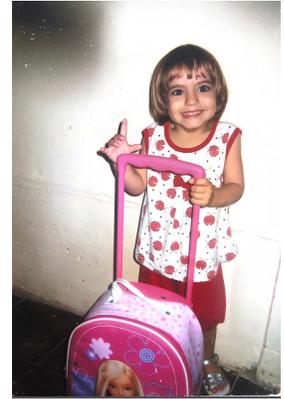
Mater Academy Charter High School

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“Redefining the Norms”



When I was just 3 years of age, my family and I packed up and immigrated to the United States. My mom was a single mother of two wishing for a better life and opportunities for her family and most importantly her kids, as a result, she made the hefty decision to move from Cuba to the United States. To go from a country we've been in our whole lives, with our friends, family, and neighbors, to a foreign place, we knew nothing about, fearing the decision she had made would be a costly one for the rest of our lives.



My mother would go to school in the morning and then after she would work until the late hours of the night just to have enough to provide for my brother and me. Seeing the dedication toward making sure to have a better life inspired me to not take it for granted, always following my dreams with the utmost dedication and work ethic. Even in Cuba, my mother worked in finance at a male-dominated office. This never discouraged her drive to work ten times harder than everyone else did to prove that she was an equal, regardless of her gender. In my house, gender discrimination was never presented as something I should accept. Rather, I was encouraged to be persistent in my passions and drive, regardless of what others think I should be or the norms of a Hispanic girl.



When I was looking over the questions to keep in mind, and I read over “STEM role model” without a doubt my mother was the only one in my head, even though there have been some teachers that encouraged me, no one compares to what my mother has taught me. From an early age, I loved making things, and my mom always supported me in all my crazy ideas, whether it was doing my own at home “experiments” or constructing something new out of the things I had, she was always by my side telling me I could achieve anything.

Once I started elementary, reality set in, I was not like everyone else. Being from a different country, talking “funny” and struggling to perfect my English led to unfortunate incidents of getting picked on and bullied by my peers. Due to this, I started secluding myself. I would do school work by

myself when we were given the option to work with a group. I started to dislike school, which was very frustrating and peculiar as I have always been an eager learner and usually was excited to attend school. This would continue for most of the year. Then, one of my teachers mentioned to our class about a robotics team my school was starting; I wasn't sure if I was even going to go to the first meeting of the year, I was petrified of being the “odd one of the bunch” as it had been for every other aspect in school thus



far in the United States. For reasons I am forever grateful for, however, I worked up the courage to go. Little did I know this would later be one of the best decisions I had made. By joining my school's robotics team I made a handful of new friends, and I found something I loved. Even though my fellow teammates did not care about where I was born or how I talked, I still had many challenges ahead of me. The stigma of being a girl in a male orientated world/activity alone brought many obstacles. Many people did not believe that a girl could flourish in a “male profession” but this did not stop me. Throughout the years I was given the opportunity to take upon different roles for my team like the builder and driver. This taught me many skills.

Years later I came to Mater Academy High School and was excited to hear they had a robotics team! I was only a middle schooler at the time unfortunately so I could not be a part of it just yet. I did



not let this stop me from continuing my love and knowledge of robotics, as I took as many robotics and engineering courses so that when I was finally in 9th grade I would be ready to contribute. Even though I was still quite skeptical of joining at first because I feared being excluded

as a result of my gender, I did not let my fears get in the way. My fears were shot down as I got to know the boys in the team, as they were very supportive of me regardless of how I spoke or my gender. They did not pick on me, or disregard my skills because I'm a girl. We agreed the best way to; learn about the

team was to be the lead documentor, which allowed me to get the experience of the design process, programming, and driving. As the year went on my team and I decided it was best for us to switch or learn other roles. We would stay one day after school and implement the new skills we had learned and decided what we wanted to do going forward. I was even able to learn c++ with the help of our lead coder. This all took place last year, and it was



one of the best experiences I have ever had. Going to numerous competitions and thriving in almost all of them. We ended up winning 7 awards at the end of the year, 3 of which were awarded to us at the South Florida State Championship, qualifying us for the VEX Worlds Competition! I was also blessed enough to experience all this amongst the fellow girls in my club, being supported by our club and school the whole time. This past year showed my school and team the benefits of implementing a female and just how hard we can work, bringing in a new point of view to the team. Nonetheless, we were still a male-dominated team. Having this in mind we were determined to show the fellow girls at our school the importance of having confidence in oneself, through the Girl Power Initiative, and not being afraid of doing something that was “meant for boys”.



In our pursuit of promoting Inclusiveness in our robotics program, we hosted many events to promote the STEM field to girls. One activity we had was a “Noche de Ciencias” where myself and a group of girls in the team mentored a group of student to learn about different STEM programs at our school and showed them different ways to be a part of STEM, such as an hour of code, building mousetrap cars, learning what it means to be Girl Powered, and much more. In addition, we also held an event where we had a group of elementary kids from the neighboring elementary schools come over and we participated in activities that represented each aspect of STEAM. By doing so, we hoped to start building their motivation at an early age, something I wished I could’ve had as a little girl with my passions. In addition, we started offering a buddy program in robotics where one of our experienced

females can show all the cool stuff we do in robotics to an upcoming female middle schooler. Our school has also partnered with girl empowerment groups, such as the Society of Women Engineers, where we took a group of girls from our school to a local university to learn all things STEAM. For this upcoming year, we want to be able to implement and provide more opportunities for girls to get involved in STEM and showing them the vast career opportunities and benefits in STEAM. Starting off our plan with administering our first-ever Robotics International Honor Society Chapter at our school, by doing this we can use it as a platform to reach more girls across south Florida, through workshops and community service projects.



When I think of Girl Power, it's not saying one gender is better than the other, but a way where girls can be a part of something and not have to feel the pressure of society dictating their actions. A safe environment where we can engage in our passions freely. Our team does not in any way relegate me as a teammate simply for my gender, and they understand I am an equal member of our team. This was possible by holding weekly discussions amongst each other where we all shared our views and ways we could improve our team. Through these team meetings, we grew closer as a team and a club. All in all, girl power in our program is progressing for the better..



Redefining the norms of society, one girl at a time...