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## Girl Power Essay

Last year when I was a freshman, I was on a team by myself. At the time, a two person girls team also known as Valkyrie worked on a table next to me in our classroom. Sometimes they were loud but other times they focused and seemed more on task then the other teams in the room. From my point of view, they didn't seem as respected by the other teams at tournaments or even in the Sandy teams. I have to admit that I was surprised at how well they did in tournaments, they won a lot more than I thought. Over the season I grew more to respect them more. They were never fazed whenever someone thought less of their team, they only seemed to work harder. During all of our fundraisers and recruitment opportunities there was always at least one of them on every shift. It's like they knew more people would show up if they saw the girls were on the same level in a boy dominated club. The term "girl power" to me meant girls trying to be equal in robotics, but now it means so much more.



I would say that I am anti-social at times, so for me, there were benefits when I was on a team by myself. One of the reasons I ended up by myself was that the other freshman wouldn't really listen to my ideas. It was a little difficult to have to do everything by myself, but Valkyrie actually helped me a lot. They seemed to be able to tell when I was struggling and came over to me asking if I needed anything.

*From left to right: Lindsey, Ava, and Madison during one of our first meetings*

After the season was over, Valkyrie (along with a new female member) approached me, looking for a coder. I could do basic coding, but I thought it would be a little awkward being the only guy on the girls team, so I told them that I needed to think a bit more before joining them. I knew that they were a good team, they just weren't really in the spotlight. I was honestly a little uncomfortable whenever speaking to girls, and I didn't know any of them well. What finally convinced me to join was when I was talking to our teacher Mr. Rakos. He has always been a role model to



*Our very first meeting as a team before the Covid-19 outbreak talking*

me, he teaches all of the Engineering/STEM classes at Sandy High School. Mr. Rakos told me about the struggles Valkyrie has gone through, they were a two person team during their freshman year however gained a new freshman member the next year, then one of the
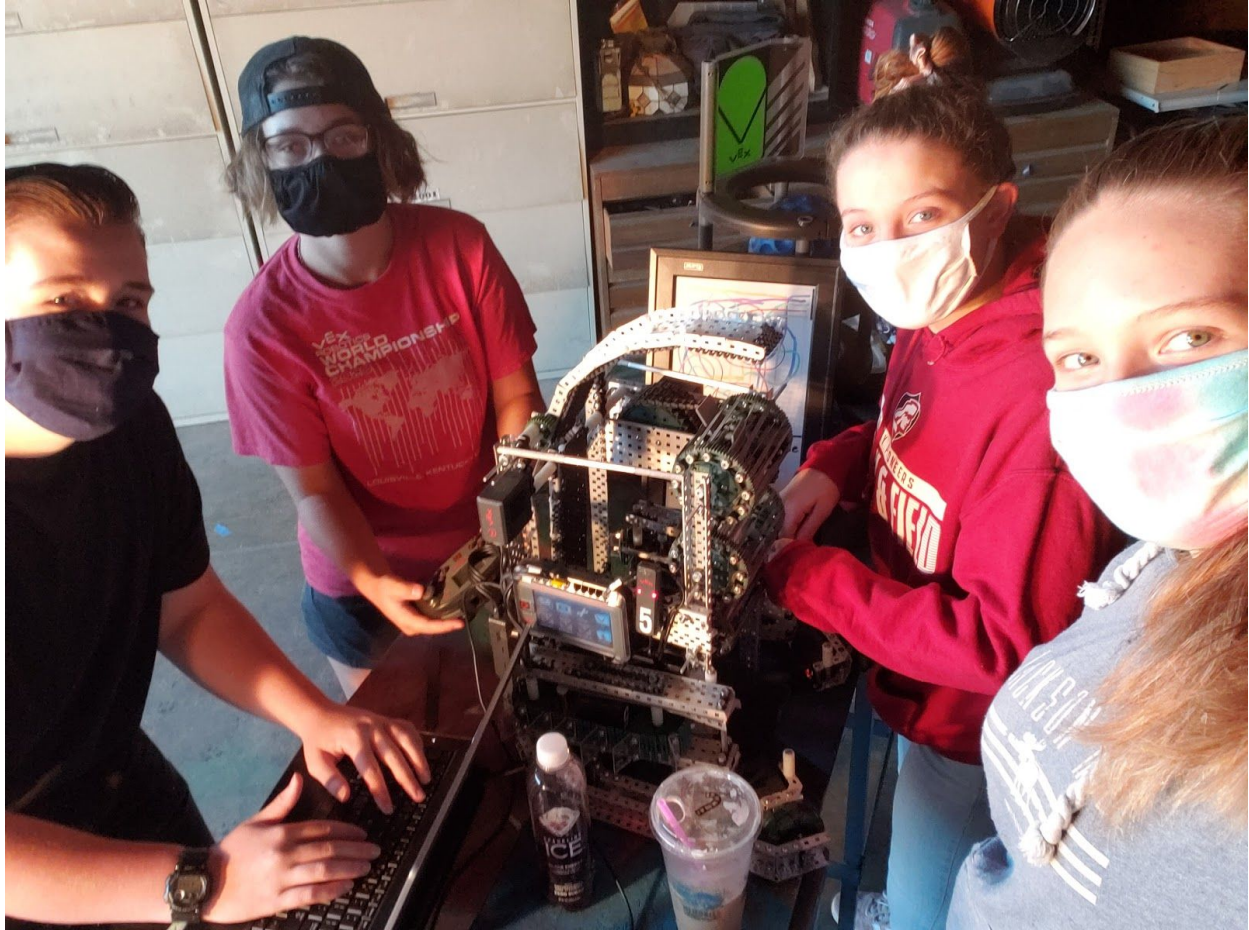
members left without saying anything. But even with that happening they just got stronger and made Platinum Division during their first tournament their sophomore year. Hearing him talk about Valkyrie I realized that they have gone through more than any of the other teams yet still had the highest energy and hope. After joining their team, I realized that they were a lot better


One of our many build days as a team before we got the robotics field

than I thought they were, besides the fact that they were intimidating from their high energy.

After spending more time and getting to know them, I am a lot more comfortable around my new team. The team captain, Madison works on the notebook and helps me to code when I am having trouble. Ava, our driver, was the other member who was on the team last year. She helps me come out of my cage by joking and even teasing me during build days. Then there was Lindsey, their other new member who is now one of my good friends and our liaison as well as our skills planner. I feel like they pulled me out of my shell in a way. I realized how independent the team is, and I could see that they were equal to the boys teams, if not better. I realized that it wasn't just a team to them, it was a family and right away they made me a part of it. By bringing me into their family I saw just how much effort they put into volunteering and scouting other students and making them comfortable in the new environment. They have also brought more attention from the teachers and other girls at Sandy, causing more girls to join next year once robotics is able to gain more teams. Valkyrie has also taken initiative in hosting a robotics field this year so other teams can prepare for tournaments. I have learned so much more this year, including coding and strategy. I have to say that I am super grateful to not have to do the work alone. Talking with the girls, and getting more comfortable around them, has helped me overall with talking to other people more. I respect women more, especially the ones in the STEM community, they shouldn't be looked down on. Before "girl power" was just a phrase that I would hear, now I know it is not being equal, but being recognized. Women in robotics shouldn't have to work twice as hard as the male teams. By being on Valkyrie I now recognize just how much work they put into bringing more females into the STEM community and making them feel comfortable without asking for anything in return. I hope with this essay I have brought recognition to my new team/family because they deserve so much more than what they get right now.

*My most recent build day with my new family and our fully built robot*