A New Beginning

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It was the beginning of the coding lesson in robotics class. I had always had a passion for it, constantly creating games on scratch and hopscotch. However, I had never been faced with a graded class like this before, where a select few knew so much about something, whereas I felt a contrasting difference. A group of boys were already huddled together with their computers, talking about the answer to a small coding problem. I had wanted to join, and even had some words of advice to contribute myself, but I was too afraid. "I didn't belong in that group, nor would they want me," I thought to myself. From my limited experience in this class, I had understood that I could never be a part of that group without showing them that I deserved it. I could prove my worth and knowledge in this classroom, and then I might be able to fit in. But that wasn't my goal. I wanted respect from my peers but I was unaware of how to achieve it.

My thoughts were swiftly interrupted as the teacher entered the class. As the class urgently dropped silent, the teacher explained today's challenge, where I had to collect 70 points by coding the movements of a robot. So far, I have only been building in class. How was I supposed to complete this challenge all on my own? Anxiously, I began working, trying to figure out an adequate solution. "It's impossible!", the thought loomed in my head like an eagle eyeing its prey.. No matter how hard I tried, I just couldn't get it. Coding just wasn't my role. Or so I had made myself believe.

Suddenly, a thought clicked in my head. I had placed the final piece of the troubling puzzle I had found myself in. "If I create that loop, that statement, it should work!", I thought aloud. I played around with the code, testing out all the possible theories circulating in my brain. Maybe I didn't need anyone else to help me, and I could figure it out myself. Just because I was a girl didn't mean I couldn't have the aptitude to solve this kind of problem. I just had to

empower myself in a different way than others did. The numbers kept on increasing on my bright white screen; "40, 50, 63!" I was almost there. I edit, problem solve and do what I do best--not give up. "40, 50, 60, 65…"

"82.5!" I jump up in the air, eyeing my screen. I had done it! I had won the challenge and completed it before anyone else. Instantly, the whole class crowded my laptop, watching with awe as I proudly showed them my work. My success was unexpected, especially by the contradicting group of boys, but I watched something inside them change when they studied my screen. I was able to show them that I was just as capable of being a part of their group, and show them a new perspective on the difficult challenges we are often placed with. I could tell that they were now open to having those conversations with me. I showed them through my struggle and ultimate success, that by including others they could help not only others succeed, but have themselves succeed as well. I continued watching as their

eyes widened at the explanation of my code, hearing things that they had not expected to make sense, let alone be successful. It was amazing how people could suddenly turn on the light in their brains, and view the world through a brighter lens. This would lead people to see what the world really is: a diverse society filled with all sorts of ideas.

This experience taught me that equality has nothing to do with separation. Isolation is not the answer. Instead it is important to embrace the differences of those around you, and use your strengths together to lift others up and boost morale. Regardless of the topic, everybody

has something to contribute. As a society, we need to look past simple differences like someone's gender. Ideas are non gender-specific, and should not be treated as such. This lesson is something I take with me to school every day, and have taught my team over the months we have been working together. As long as we are inclusive of our diverse robotics society, we can change the program for a brightly illuminated future. For everyone.