

My heart pounded and my hands were sweaty, even I couldn't tell if I was more nervous or excited. I watched breathlessly as my team-mates set up our robot on the field in the proper position. Finally, they fled the field and the buzzer rang, indicating the start of our first practice match. Our robot took off smoothly, moving through the fifteen second autonomous period without a glitch, and then it was the drivers' turn, and my partner and I took control of the robot. It was only a practice match at the small Long Island Regional Competition in the FIRST robotics program, but that moment was the culmination of our six weeks of hard work. A month and a half earlier, all we had were a few rough sketches and a vague idea of what to do, and now we had before us a working machine. Granted, it was far from flawless, but just seeing our robot work at all was one of the best experiences I have ever had.

The entire experience of being involved in the robotics program over the last four years has had the most influence on my life and my decisions concerning my future. When I first started robotics, I did not even understand what an engineer was, and I had some vague idea of wanting to become a pediatrician in the distant future. However, the more involved I became in the robotics program, the more interested I grew in the whole concept. It is an amazing experience to be presented with a problem and limitations, such as time constraints, budget constraints, and size and weight constraints, and then have to come up with a feasible design that fits the limitations. However, the process did not end at coming up with a design; in fact, that was just the beginning of a very long road. After the initial design was decided on, construction began and as we learned more about the problem and our own limitations, we were forced to perform small alterations to our design; adapting it to fit the ever changing requirements.

Throughout this entire process, we were not only rushed to complete our robot in the allotted six-week time period, we also had to learn to work together. There were many distinct tasks that needed to be completed, from rebuilding the drive train to writing essays and filling out applications for various awards and organizing fundraisers and community awareness events. Our team was required to raise a large part of the money we needed and to convince sponsors to support us. We were also charged with the task of getting younger students involved in the program in order to ensure its survival for years to come. More than once was the program threatened with budget cuts and low membership, but through a team effort to become a part of the community, the robotics program survived. The final clincher in my decision to become an engineer was the competition. The competition was an exhilarating experience; I found myself among hundreds of students the same age as me with the same interest in finding out how things work and how to create. As I worked with other teams and students from all over the world, I finally realized what I wanted to do with the rest of my life.

The years I spent involved in the robotics program were, without a doubt, some of the most influential experiences in my life. Robotics taught me what it means to be an engineer and awakened my own desire to become one. Not only did I learn how things work and how challenging it is to design a machine, but I also learned about public relations and working within the set limitations. The robotics program not only awakened in me a passion and love for engineering, but also created many memories upon which I will fondly reflect for many years to come.