The night sky. The atmosphere and beyond. The universe. A dream about space. Ever since I picked up a book about the solar system at a kindergarten book fair, I've been captivated by the mysteries of space and space technology. That moment sparked a fascination that was not just a passing phase, it became the driving force for my actions.

As a high school junior, I have already laid the foundation for my aerospace engineering path. I've always sought to maximize my learning by taking the most challenging science and engineering courses available: Freshman Honors Biology, Intro to Engineering, Principles of Engineering, Sophomore Honors Chemistry, and AP Physics 1. Each challenge of each course felt worthwhile because it opens doors to understanding and connecting concepts about the universe. Beyond science, I take every subject seriously—math, history, and English—at the highest level I can. These courses strengthen my analytical, literacy, and writing skills. One course that seemed to be an outlier: AP Studio Art & Design class. This course emphasizes my precision, technical skill, and the ability to visualize ideas. Which to me is very vital for the engineering aspect of aerospace technology.

Outside of school, I embraced opportunities with my extracurriculars. I've participated in non-profit organizations and school clubs that allow me to develop leadership, advertising, and communication skills. From tutoring Vietnamese students in English and science to serving as a freelance graphic designer, outreach manager, and club presidents both at my school and the community. Language and communication became a skill I developed over time and I proudly advocate myself, whether it's communicating in my native tongue or English. In every instance, I felt connected to everyone, with goals to achieve and gain experience in STEM and diversity. I want to pledge myself to a high standard.

One of my most valuable opportunities has been an internship with an astronomy university professor. The role led to me conducting academic research; specifically analyzing the characteristics of star compositions, and designing experimental procedures. It has given me first-hand experience with academic STEM research. And this great opportunity will not be my last.

Throughout this journey, I've also faced personal obstacles. I was naturally shy and introverted, the kid that whenever they answered a question a teacher would ask to speak up or the kid that rarely participated despite doing academically well. It felt so shameful whenever my soft-spokenness got in the way. So I put myself out there: raising my hand in class, and volunteering to present to superintiendent for club proposals. I had pushed myself to step out of my comfort zone, because I felt like I would miss out and fall behind. It felt vulnerable and scary, but I soon realized the value of seeing my contributions make an impact. Whether big or small. It took time to develop my confidence but I pushed through, even if it felt too uncomfortable.

For me, astronomy and aerospace engineering aren't just career paths, they pushed me to my potential and be my best self. It's a field that's pushed me to grow as a learner, a leader, and a communicator. Every step I've taken, from academic pursuits to personal growth, brings me closer to this dream. And I know my younger kindergartener self at that book fair would be proud.