

Deep in the heart of Hawaii's Volcanoes National Park is a massive crater. Stretching miles in all directions, the vast emptiness rang throughout the barren landscape. It felt freeing, yet constrained—impressive, yet dull. At that moment, I was awestruck by the feeling of simply existing in such a strange place.

Now, I stand in my own digital crater, gazing into a clear sky of endless possibilities. I could be a traveler through the virtual world rather than the physical, whether I'm coding a data structure or modeling with Blender. Exploring volcanic remains or visiting ancient temples have always brought out that curious part of me hungry for new experiences and unique perspectives, a feeling that I have only experienced elsewhere through computer science.

My departure began when I was in elementary school. I've always been keen with computers ever since the first Scratch project I made a decade ago. Even though I would just copy other people's code and make random adjustments (like change everything in a platforming level to lava), it enabled me to learn quickly from other user's projects.

So when I started learning Python, I nearly quit coding. It wasn't what I was expecting coming from Scratch—to me, it felt like writing an essay but with unnecessary conventions. I felt frustrated more often, the clear sky above me hazing over to a dull gray. Despite my reservations, I decided to take AP Computer Science in Freshman year, hoping to reverse my pessimistic perspective. Many days, I sat down at my desk and embraced the monospace words that danced across the monitor. *Could a HashTable work here? Or a Binary Tree there?* The long hours of coding had made me analytical and flexible to current circumstances.

No trip would be complete without a little surprise, though. I've always considered myself to be a rather technical person, rarely ever voluntarily picking up a pen to draw even a simple stick figure. However, that all changed when I participated in my first Hackathon with my friends. Together, we developed websites, something I had little experience with at the time. But the very moment I saw what could be made with HTML and CSS, I was hooked. The elegant way a block of text fades in and out, the fluorescent glow of a backlit button—each of these tiny details spoke to me, urging me out of my comfort zone. I had obtained a key that unlocked an entirely new side of me, except it was already in my hands. So, I dedicated my time to polishing even the most minute elements that would normally be glossed over, ensuring that not even one pixel was misaligned. With this newfound spark, a whole new world of possibilities had opened up in front of me, with brand new places to visit and appreciate.

However, I struggled to connect with my group members at times, longing for solitude and a chance to reflect alone. I wanted to produce something that represented me as a person, unaffected by my peers, and game development allowed me to do that. With Unity, I learned how to script in C# and work with the interface, teaching myself through YouTube tutorials and online guides. The prospect of building entire worlds and programming custom physics made me feel like I could be everywhere at once—barren desert or lush jungle, medieval castle or dystopian city. All of the skills I had gained thus far drove me further towards self-sufficiency and a desire to improve upon myself, a goal I aspire to achieve to this day.

The volcano stopped erupting mere weeks before I arrived. But once it resumes its fierce display of fire, the crater will fill with molten lava, pushing me upwards towards the sky and lending me a helping hand towards new heights. But all I can do for now is wait, pondering where my future travels may take me.