KK Comments: Very well written and highly engaging. You have a great “voice” for writing essays. Excellent use of phrases and building on ideas, etc.

* Mechanics: formatting, grammar and spelling: 1
* Clarity of writing, structure/organization of document: 2
* Development of narrative: 2

5/5

As someone born just two years before the first iPhone and seven years after Google’s release, life without constant access to information seems so distant and unimaginable. I’ve grown up in an era of democratized information; anything I could want to know is accessible. I know every little detail about NFL teams’ rosters that I don’t even care about because apps on my phone send me notifications about them. Protests, bombings, and shootings across the world are injected straight into my consciousness through Instagram, TikTok, and my news app. Not having this constant stream of updates, changes, and news constantly vibrating in my pocket seems impossible; it has always been my normal. Although this flow of information can feel overwhelming, it has been defining for me. At a point in my life when I felt unsure of who I was or what I cared about, the internet and all its information gave me the chance to discover a passion that has shaped my identity.

In eighth grade, just a couple of months before Covid-19 hit, my English teacher had us do what seemed like a silly exercise that somehow related to whatever book we were reading. She gave us all a piece of paper and told us to draw ourselves and then, in some way, draw the different pieces of our identities on or around ourselves. I quickly sketched myself and then sat there; I had no idea what to draw. I scanned the classroom and saw everyone else effortlessly adding to their pictures while I felt lost. I eventually drew a football, a video game controller, and some music notes, but none felt like identities; they were just something to draw. At the time, it felt like everyone around me knew who they were, what they loved, and what they wanted to do with their lives. I know now that many, if not all, of my classmates were feeling the same way. They were also just drawing to look busy; however, at the time, 14 year old Max felt alone and lost in this identity crisis, which was probably dramatic for someone my age, but the feeling was intense. I sat with this feeling for a while, letting myself get swept up in the distractions of everyday life.

However, I could only avoid my mini-crisis for so long when, a few weeks later, we went into lockdown, and suddenly, I was stuck at home without school or friends to distract me, and I had to find something to keep me occupied. I had always been interested in computers and technology; when I was younger, I would take old, broken printers and RC cars into our basement and take them apart. I wanted to know what was happening inside and what made them tick. Of course, seeing the inside didn’t explain anything to me; if anything, I was only more confused but also more curious. Eventually, my curiosity shifted from hardware to software as I played online games and began using the internet. I no longer wanted to know how the physical machines worked but rather how somebody wrote some words and got a game to appear on my phone. Despite my interest, I had always been intimidated by learning to code; there seemed like so many steps just to get started that I had never tried. But, after a few weeks of doing nothing during the lockdown, a mixture of boredom, lots of time, and years of pent-up interest, I decided to google the easiest coding languages to learn. The answer online seemed to be unanimous: Python. So, I promptly got on YouTube, searched for a Python tutorial, and received hundreds of results. I clicked the most viewed one and got started.

The video was great, and Python seemed to click for me. I quickly fell down the rabbit hole; I watched tutorial after tutorial, learning more and more until I felt confident enough to try doing a project without a video guide. I decided to make a text-based blackjack game. I struggled, but luckily, with every hurdle I encountered, I could either overcome them myself or find resources online to help me. Finishing that first little game, getting it to work exactly as I had imagined it in my head, filled me with a sense of satisfaction and pride I had never gotten before. I knew then that I had at least found a piece of my identity, an interest I felt connected to. Through coding, I also learned more about myself, like how meaningful it is to translate an idea in my head into something tangible and that I need to try things no matter how intimidating they seem.

Looking back on this discovery of my love of coding, one detail stands out: how easy it was to dive in. I can’t help but imagine if I had that same burst of motivation to learn just 20 years earlier, I would have had to find a book on coding or someone willing to teach me; there would have been some significant time and monetary commitment. It all seems more intimidating than just turning on my laptop and following some free videos. Without YouTube, I may have remained put off by trying to learn something completely new by myself, but the readily available access to just about all of human knowledge allowed me to pursue and discover a passion. Additionally, over the years, I’ve grown my understanding through YouTube tutorials on new languages, machine learning, and philosophical lectures about technology.

The immense access we possess is a gift but also a burden. I feel forever grateful to it for allowing me to find a true passion. Still, I can’t help but notice how there seem to be ten harmful pieces of misinformation for every valuable piece of information. Understanding this is vital to responsibility in using the internet as a society because pure unregulated access to all kinds of information isn’t wholly good, especially when much of it is deceivingly false.