There is a first for everything and this was my first hackathon. As with many firsts, this experience was extremely memorable and enlightening. This could be said about your first kiss, impression, and hackathon. My hackaton experience can be summed up by my actions when I arrived home; I googled for upcoming hackathons.

The Nasa Space Apps is a global hackathon that is running simultaneously in locations all over the world. I was a small piece of the puzzle here at communitech. With over 30 different challenges in a variety of categories, such as Mars and aeronautics, we utilized real data from Nasa to solve real problems. What was cool about this hackathon was that there were real Nasa scientists and engineers monitoring each of the challenges, where they were available to answer any questions and provide extra support. Despite it being my first hackathon coupled with the fact that I did not know anyone, finding a team was a lot easier than expected. Everyone was excited to get started; some of participants had great ideas already, others were looking for a team that they could contribute to. I somehow found myself in a five-man team, four of which are Waterloo students. I loved the friendly and cheery atmosphere and made friends really fast. At the end of the first night, cheeky jokes were already been thrown around. This really shows how liked minded people who rally under the same banner can always make magic happen.

For our challenge we choose to tackle “Low Boom”. This challenge uses noise data from flight tests conducted at NASA Armstrong Flight Research Center to construct a visualization of a low boom compared to a sonic boom. To help us visualize the data we decided to create an interactive Android app that uses the Google Maps api. A sonic boom has different impacts depending on the geographical location of where it occurs and we felt that an amazing way to demo this is to use Google maps to draw an overlay showing the affected areas. This way we can have a side by side comparison of the low boom vs. the sonic boom. Creating this app, I have learnt a lot about mobile developing and protecting user privacy. Since our app requested the user’s current location, we needed to work with Google Play services and all the permissions that came with it. I feel that Google is doing a great job keeping the privacy of its users. The number of steps and permissions that I needed to request was not negotiable. With this experience I feel people should not be pointing at Google regarding their privacy issues, but look at the apps that they are downloading instead. With the introduction of Android Marshmallow and the new permission system, users have gained a lot of control over their privacy and control over what their apps can do. I must say this is a step in the right direction.

Unfortunately, we didn’t win any awards such as a trip to NASA, but I feel that the experience gained working with the Android system was more than valuable. I myself always had a stigma against mobile developing but with this hackathon it has definitely taken a change. Furthermore, learning to work with a new team and getting up to speed fast will help me in future co-op terms, I’m sure of it!