

Technology is hard to *not* become obsessed with in the modern world. From mobile applications to the internet, we can spend hours plugged in. We become an extension of the machines we use. So it should come as no surprise that since childhood, the idea that these sleek machines power our world day in and day out has always captivated me. Fascinated by the way minute gadgets could silently project onto computer screens, I began to study engineering in high school.

As a child, I didn't have much access to technology. Growing up with a single mother and grandparents who immigrated from Mexico, my family didn't have the resources or support to gain technological literacy. Due to cultural and generational differences, school was my only opportunity to use computers. As my family saw my passion for computers grow, my mom gifted me my first desktop parts once I became a teenager.

Those small, seemingly disconnected parts changed the direction of my life. As a child, I spent days visualizing myself working through it, memorizing each step, and now it was a dream come true. When I began building the desktop, it was 8 am. I can still remember opening the boxes up on my kitchen table. For hours I worked without rest. When I finished, it felt like no time had passed. I nervously plugged in the rig and saw light glow across the screen; success on my first try! I used to watch videos and dream of the day I could build my own computer; finally doing so was one of the most exhilarating experiences of my life.

As I have grown to reflect on my life thus far, I see the computers I build as a manifestation of my very being. The central processing unit (CPU) represents my brain, the motherboard is my skeleton, and the Power Supply Unit (PSU) acts as my motivation. The hard drive is my personality and the case is the care and effort my mom had imbued in me over the years, holding everything together. Much like the computers I build, take apart, and rebuild, I've had to go through numerous trials that molded my parts. Through academics, my CPU has learned to process information faster. Growing up between cultures and finding like-minded peers has shaped my hard drive. While all parts of my being have been altered, my motherboard and PSU received the most significant upgrades.

When I began high school, I lost most of my friends because I disagreed with their newfound substance abuse habit. Then as the COVID-19 pandemic began, my feelings of isolation grew. Becoming depressed, I realized I needed a system reset. Acting as the case that kept my hardware safe, my mom helped me identify behaviors holding me back. As the depression faded, my resilience strengthened and my Power Supply Units grew until my own motherboard malfunctioned in December 2020. Dislocating my left kneecap was the worst pain I'd ever experienced and left me disabled until the new year. Even when I was back on my feet, it wasn't the same; lingering aches forced me to rest and sit out from activities.

Riddled with physical pain, I felt my PSU drop. My motivation became non-existent through sitting in bed all day, lacking the necessary physical and mental stimulation. When a second dislocation happened 9 months later, I decided it was finally time to fix the root cause. In March of 2022, I underwent surgery to repair it. After months of mental and physical rehabilitation, I'm proud to say that I'm still standing tall. With a new and improved motherboard, my PSU has grown exponentially. While each of these upgrades has come with a cost, be it paid through my health, friendships lost, or familial sacrifices, I wouldn't change my journey of resilience for the world. Like the flickering lights of a new desktop, my future glows brightly.