

Your life is a series of stories. Tell a story that has helped shape you or reflects who you are today, and how that will move you into the future. (Example: stories of relationships, events that have happened in your school or community, etc.)

(Please write an essay of up to 750 words using 1.5 spacing, and use additional white paper if required. Please have proofread before submitting.)

Soon after I began kindergarten I was assigned to speech therapy. Teachers and my classmates couldn't understand me half the time. Strangely, the result was it made me more independent. I couldn't explain to others that I needed help with a task so I just started doing it on my own. But there was one drawback to my speech difficulties; people made the assumption that I wasn't smart. This is a common perception of people with speech problems. Even when I was little I could sense that people made some assumptions about my intelligence based on my difficulty in pronouncing words. That spurred me on to get excellent grades in an attempt to prove others wrong. The other affect, it made me very shy in class. I seldom spoke but read like crazy. Books became a great solace to me.

Now anyone in my high school today would laugh if you asked if Savannah Rizzo was shy. I'm known for being an extrovert. So how did that happen? Two things really. The first is my family runs a community theatre and I've been commandeered into many play productions. Because diction is such an important part of the performing arts, I learned to slow down and worked hard to improve my articulation. Today, there are few things I love more than being on stage in front of hundreds of people playing someone very different from myself. I'm currently playing the Pirate King in the Pirates of Penzance and I love it. The other thing that helped bring me out of my shell was school leadership. I've always been ambitious but I knew if I was going to serve as the president of my class, I had to get out and talk with people. Today, as student body president, I can't be shy. I have to give speeches and run assemblies and do the morning announcements. But my early difficulties help me to be a real leader because I have great empathy for younger kids that are struggle with their own handicaps be they physical, mental or even social. This was one of the reasons I started an organization I call T-Books. Since books have always been such a comfort to me, I decided to get as many brand new books into the hands of disadvantage kids as I could.

When I first started T-Books, I had no idea that I would end up shipping thousands of books to flood victims in Louisiana. At the time, T-Books was just a way to make a difference in my own community. Every quarter, I visited middle schools and gave away brand new books to kids that needed them. The Kenai Peninsula school district is the size of West Virginia so reaching some small schools was difficult. One Saturday morning, a friend and I packed up 1,500 newly minted books into a pickup truck and drove the hundred miles to the little town of Hope.

The thing that was amazing to me is how little it takes to make people happy. As we carried novels into the school the secretary told us most of their library collection dated back to when she was a little girl. When we left, she was so touched by our service she started crying and hugged me. This just motivated me all the more to keeping going forward to help more kids. Next we helped Native and Russian villages by buying Battle of the Book novels but a bigger need was just on the horizon. This last summer floods destroyed many schools in Louisiana. One of those was Brookstown Middle. We shipped 1,500 brand new books to be given away to the 350 students. While they were waiting for their school to be repaired, I wanted each and every kid to keep on reading. I figured there were probably lots of kids who were just like I was in middle school, shy and trying to find their own voice. Raising \$3,000 and distributing over 4,000 books hasn't always been easy but the lesson of my life is no matter what difficulties you may have, you can change. You can become anyone you want to. I did.

I will pursue a career in animation because I know the power of a good story. It can change the world. I know from my own experience that it can inspire us to be more than others might think we can become. That's a message I want every child to take to heart.