

Prompt: Reflect on something that someone has done for you that has made you happy or thankful in a surprising way. How has this gratitude affected or motivated you?

“Jessie graduated from take flit. No farw! I’m not happy mom! I wunt to graduated from take flite flight mom now! I do not wunt to go to take flight stop take flight for me!”

- Cassandra Segura 2012, 2nd Grade, age eight

That is a direct transcript from a note I wrote to my mom 9 years ago. I remember being so frustrated that I had to go to this special class and none of my friends did. I recall being embarrassed and dreading the extra work. I could not stand being pulled out of class everyday. Today, I couldn’t be more thankful to my parents for putting me in the Take Flight Program, a reading program for students with dyslexia. It changed my life.

In second grade, I struggled to read. I was tested and diagnosed with dyslexia. Luckily for me, my school had Take Flight where I was taught how to use a different part of my brain to read. It was a 2 year program with an hour of direct instruction and daily homework. As you could probably tell from the note, I did not enjoy it. It was hard, tedious work that I had to do in addition to regular school assignments. The worst part was that I was pulled out of class every day for an hour. It made me feel alienated from my classmates and friends, especially once my friend, Jessie, graduated from the same program 3 semesters before me. During this time, I hated reading. It was a constant struggle, it took me forever, and I was aware of how behind I was. Surprisingly, as time went by, I realized how lucky I was that a program existed to help people like me.

Today, I’m so thankful for the help. My weakness turned into a strength. I love to read and have enjoyed over 70 books in all genres since January this year. Participating in Take Flight has allowed me to enroll in high level, reading-intensive courses throughout school. Taking these high level classes has reminded me of something else important I learned from the experience. I learned you have to work hard to overcome adversity, something that would help me through last year.

In December of 2020, I tore my ACL and meniscus playing soccer. Club season was winding down and I was gearing up for high school soccer as the starting right back. Competitive soccer has been a part of my life since 3rd grade and I have a goal to play in college. I was devastated. It hurt to miss my entire high school season as well as the

spring season with my club team. In January, I had surgery and I'm just now getting to the end of 9 months of tough, daily, physical therapy. When I was hobbling around on crutches, I thought back to my time in elementary school and how working hard had such an amazing pay off. The Take Flight program not only helped me with reading, but it also instilled the drive to work hard and to overcome adversity.

I am so thankful for my parents, my Take Flight teacher, and others in my life who supported me. My gratitude has inspired me to take a look at my future. I want to help people who need it. I want to inspire kids to learn, grow and give them the support they need. I want to work with students who have learning disabilities like I do. I would be a completely different person today if not for the positive changes and important lessons that the Take Flight Program brought into my life, no matter how frustrated it made me all those years ago. I hope that someday I can help someone in the same way.