

Scholarship speech

Good evening, everyone.

My name is Steven Ramsey. I'm a kinesiology major here at Gavilan College... and this is my service dog, Harper.

Now, let's be honest. Most people don't come over to talk to me. They come over because they want to meet Harper. I'm just the guy holding the leash. I've accepted that. She's definitely the popular one between the two of us.

But Harper has taught me something. She has a way of bringing people together. People stop to pet her, and before long they're telling me about their lives, their struggles, or just how their day is going. She reminds me every day how important it is to connect with people.

If you had met me growing up, college probably would've been the last place you expected me to end up.

I hated school.

I was held back in first grade because of dyslexia, and from first grade all the way through high school I was in RSP. Every time I got pulled out of class, I felt different. I felt like I wasn't smart enough. After a while, I believed it. I quit trying because I figured, "What's the point?"

Funny enough, one of the things I hated the most ended up giving me something I'll always be grateful for. Being in RSP introduced me to people from all kinds of backgrounds, cultures, and languages. Looking back, I wouldn't trade those friendships for anything. They taught me how to see people for who they are, not where they come from or what they struggle with.

Then, in 2018, my life changed overnight. I suffered a traumatic brain injury that caused a hemorrhagic stroke. I spent the next five years in physical therapy, occupational therapy, speech therapy... pretty much every therapy you can think of.

Here's the funny part. I had already spent years in speech therapy growing up because of my dyslexia. So when I had to relearn how to speak after my brain injury, I remember thinking, "Well... at least I've done this before."

Life has a strange sense of humor sometimes.

One of the hardest things wasn't learning how to walk again.

It wasn't learning how to use my arm again.

It was learning how to ask for help.

I had been working since I was fifteen and a half years old. I loved the grind. I worked as a cook for years, led a kitchen, worked construction, did tile, landscape design, and before I got sick I was working three jobs at once. I loved waking up every day knowing I had somewhere to be and something to do.

Then one day... that was gone.

I didn't just lose my ability to work the way I used to.

I lost a big part of who I thought I was.

Through all of that, one person never stopped believing in me.

My mom.

She was my best friend, my biggest supporter, and without a doubt the strongest person I've ever known. She taught me that if I wanted something, I had to earn it. If I wanted money, there was always a lawn to mow, a trench to dig, a tree to plant, or dog poop to pick up. Trust me... there was always dog poop.

She taught me that nothing worth having comes easy.

When she passed away from lung cancer in 2024, I felt completely lost.

Then my friend Stephanie Barrientos stepped in.

She helped me apply to Gavilan. She helped me find programs like EOPS, AEC, Higher Aspirations, El Centro, and Fresh Success. She reminded me that asking for help wasn't giving up. It was how you keep moving forward.

When I came to Gavilan, I thought I was just signing up for classes.

I wasn't.

I found a community.

I found professors who cared.

I found staff who believed in me.

I found friends.

And, believe it or not...

I found out I actually love learning.

I know. That surprised me too.

Today I have a 4.0 GPA.

If you would've told the kid who hated school that one day he'd have a 4.0 and be standing here giving a speech, he would've laughed right in your face.

To every donor here tonight, thank you.

People think scholarships are about paying for tuition or buying books.

They do those things.

But they've done something even bigger for me.

They've reminded me that complete strangers believe in my future.

That's an incredible gift.

My goal is to become a physical therapist and work with people recovering from brain injuries. I want to help them get their lives back, because I know what that journey feels like.

One day, I hope I'm able to do for someone else what so many people in this room have done for me.

Thank you for believing in me.

And thank you for believing in students like me.