Two unique challenges have shaped me into who I am today: a severe eye disability I have had since birth and a stingray accident I had this summer. I was born with amblyopia which is an eye/brain condition. I was diagnosed legally blind in one eye when I was five years old, and over the years glasses and vision therapy improved my sight a little, but not as much as the doctors hoped. Some of the vision treatments caused me chronic migraines and made classroom work difficult. I had to be homeschooled for a while until the doctors and treatments stabilized my eyes. I could not do ball sports, so I was limited in group activities. There were times early on when this was hard, and I remember feeling sad sometimes. But all that changed when my parents started me in horse riding lessons. I love animals, and to be on a large beautiful animal like a horse was heaven for a girl like me. I often spent five days a week at the barn grooming my horse and helping feed, muck, water and groom other horses too. When I was older this turned into a way to make money.  I grew really confident as a rider and blossomed. I happened to excel at riding and rode both English and Western. When I entered high school, I competed in English and Western shows and often won first or placed. Having a challenge like this early on has helped me see that out of hard things great opportunities can arise.

     More recently, I was surfing last summer and I got stung by a stingray. It left pieces of barb in my foot and I wound up on crutches for three months after two painful surgeries to remove them. It was a difficult summer of endless doctor appointments, x-rays, MRIs, and sonograms. I thought the whole thing was a complete waste of my summer until I started physical therapy. Physical therapy was the positive thing that came out of the whole experience. I really learned a lot about the human body and healing. The physical therapists that treated me were knowledgeable and caring. They helped me slowly start to walk again and then run.  I was in PT for 5 months because I had a lot of damage to my foot. The first surgeon cut my toe muscle while in surgery and so I had to learn how to curl my toes again to walk. I loved the results and the progress I made, and I loved seeing other people recover around me. I am active and like to be around people and help others. Once again, out of hardship came direction and a calling. I think I will be able to really help others as a physical therapist because I know what it is like to be in pain and to recover and be well again!

My goals right now are to major in the sciences and get an equine minor. I hope to finish my degree in under four years because I have five dual enrollment community college classes. Then I hope to go on to get my doctorate in physical therapy. A huge long- term goal for me is to run a horse ranch where veterans can come and work and ride for free. I know my goals are achievable through hard work. 4H has taught me to be disciplined and work hard to achieve goals. Through projects like raising animals, showing animals, speech competitions and leadership positions I have learned that anything is achievable with hard work and determination.