

# The Palm Beach Post

Sunday, July 3, 2005

Final Edition • [PalmBeachPost.com](http://PalmBeachPost.com)

3

## Teen's voice captures young readers

*A 17-year-old creates books on tape to help improve literacy.*

By NIRVI SHAH  
Palm Beach Post Staff Writer

When Sam Silverman was little, his favorite book was *Go, Dog. Go!*, the classic tale of dogs who spend their days discovering that it is hot here in the sun and that they do not like that hat.

His mom read it to him, and before he knew it, he was reading it on his own.

About four years ago, when Silverman was an eighth-grader, his mom, Nina, came home from an education class at Florida Atlantic University, lamenting that the struggling grade-school readers she was encountering had no one to work with them at home. Either their parents didn't speak English, there weren't any books around or they had trouble reading and didn't enjoy it.

FAU Professor Deborah



LANNIS WATERS/Staff Photographer

Sam Silverman stocks a books-on-tape center at West Gate Elementary School in West Palm Beach as part of his project to help young readers.

Harris suggested books on tape. Silverman was looking for a community service project.

Four years later, Silverman has recorded dozens of children's books on tape, in his own voice, and donated them to Warfield and Port Salerno elementaries in Martin County.

"If they have a question, they could rewind and it would be like having their own little personal storyteller, either in the classroom or outside of the classroom," Silverman said.

Once upon a time, Silverman scoured garage sales and

See BOOKS, 4C ►

# Books taped to help adults, too

## ► BOOKS from 1C

library giveaways for cheap children's books in good condition. He wrote titles in pencil right onto the blank tapes. He packaged each book and tape in gallon-sized Ziploc bags. He and his sister, Faren, invested about an hour in each 20-minute story. In a few years, they had recorded about 100 books.

"The person who's going to be reading is going to be learning from you, so you have to make sure you do it exactly right," said Silverman, a 17-year-old rising senior at The Benjamin School.

At the beginning of each tale, he tells what the story is about and tells the kids to relax and enjoy the story. When he visited Warfield recently, he was an instant celebrity with the kids who recognized his voice.

Last year, Silverman won a \$5,000 grant from the Community Foundation of Palm Beach and Martin counties, and Wachovia donated 1,500 kids' books to his cause that are waiting to be matched with a reader in the garage of his parents' Jupiter home. Harris now requires every student in her classes at FAU to record one book as an assignment.

The windfall of money and recorded books means Silverman is expanding his project. He is working to make Children's Books on Tape corporation a nonprofit and hopes to manage a nonprofit after college. Although he's outgrown *Go, Dog. Go!*, he's still reading. Lately, it's been *Freakonomics* and *The Da Vinci Code*.

He has donated sets of 50 books, complete with special,

## Audio report

Listen to *Post* report on this story, hear Silverman read book excerpts, discuss his business. [PalmBeachPost.com](http://PalmBeachPost.com)

more durable plastic bags and a library-style rack, to three schools with many poor students and kids who don't speak English in Palm Beach County. Silverman spends about \$200 in grant money per rack, but the books alone, from a bookstore, would cost \$350.

Besides helping kids learn to read, recording the books is helping future teachers learn to teach, said Harris of, FAU.

"The first book that they do — the only one they're required to do for an assignment — they understand the importance of reading out loud. Some of them have never done this before, unless they have children or baby-sat before," Harris said. "It gives them an opportunity to practice reading with expression, using their voice effectively."

For each additional book they record, Harris rewards her students with a children's book that will one day be a part of their classrooms.

The project is growing in other ways, too. Silverman recently started recording short books more suitable for adults for his students at Corn Maya Inc., a nonprofit Hispanic outreach organization in Jupiter, where he teaches English. And ultimately, Silverman would love to provide so many books to public schools that many classrooms would be equipped with one of the 50-book stands.

Last week, he made a delivery of recorded books at West Gate Elementary near West Palm Beach, a school with many poor students, about half of whom don't speak English as their native language.

"One way we work on fluency is by repeated reading," said Kelli Roads, a reading coach at West Gate who is thrilled with the donation. "We say 'Read like you're talking.' With books on tape, they can go back and forth and hear how it's supposed to sound. They can go back when they don't understand. They can mimic what they hear."

The schools that have benefited from Silverman's project are making sure it will grow at their schools. Port Salerno and Warfield won grants from the Mary and Robert Pew Public Education Fund to pay for tape recorders and headsets to complement Silverman's donations.

"It's a way to have a storyteller go home with the kids," said Loreen Francesceni, principal of Warfield in Indiantown. "There certainly is a difference in children over time. Exposure to the English language at home has to be helpful in particular in families where there is no English spoken at home. My gut tells me that it's a good thing."

© nirvi\_shah@pbpost.com