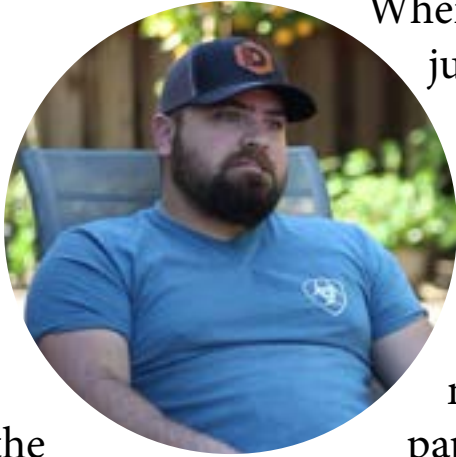


Fiona Lili

Nothing Can Slow You Down

By Fiona Liu

David Miller is a resilient young man with polio who finds no reason for anyone to give up.



When he was just a toddler living in Russia, David Miller's orphanage kept conveniently losing the paperwork to move him out of the infant unit. He was a child filled with such joy and such vibrance that the orphanage did not want to let go of him. Miller was diagnosed with a paralyzing disability between the ages of 1 and 2, and in Russia, disabled children often did not receive adequate care. However, he received education and care from the people who ran the orphanage. After a first adoption fell through, one American family with seven other

children came to his aid. He meshed so well in this large family, who sought to adopt children who were "less adoptable" (M. Miller). They met and adopted him when he was six years old. "We had taken him to the apartment we were staying in and...David...jumped right in and was...helping...our host to set the table and do other things...He was on crutches and, but he...still wanted to help"(M. Miller). This is despite a disability, which he does not let define him.

The disability that David Miller has lived with for nearly his entire life is poliomyelitis. The CDC defines poliomyelitis (also known as polio) as a "disabling and life-threatening disease caused by the poliovirus" ("What is Polio"). Only about 0.5% of those affected by polio experience paralysis ("What is Polio"). Miller is

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one of those cases, wearing a leg brace on his paralyzed right leg.

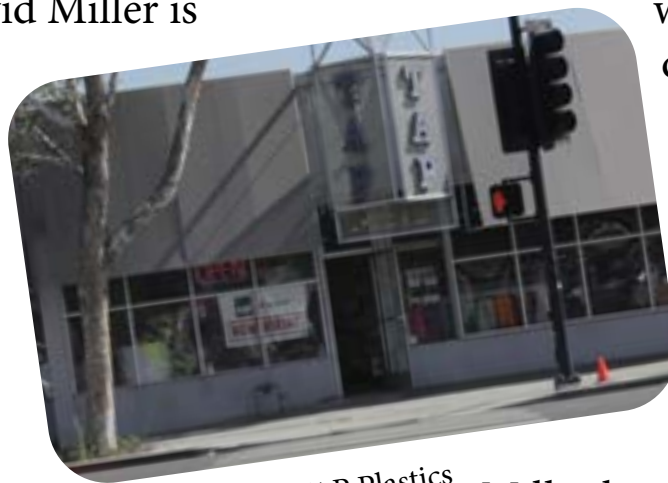
Polio has no cure, generally affecting people under the age of 5. The contagious disease affects the nervous system, which controls several different parts of the body. The only treatment for polio is prevention, with the polio vaccine. Polio has not touched the United States since the polio epidemic of the 1950s, when many children were paralyzed in their lungs and diaphragm (M. Miller). The United States and Russia, Miller's home country, developed an oral vaccine for polio as a joint effort (Demesko).

One adjective that people would use to describe David Miller is resilient. He is never afraid to try new things, and finds no reason to give up. These days, as acceptance of different bodies and abilities grows, representation increases. However, the discrimination has not been eradicated. Much of the time, disabled individuals are portrayed as weak, or unable to do the same things that able-bodied individuals can do. They are often portrayed as "objects of pity [or] opportunities for charity" (Cohen-Rottenberg). That, or

people try to dance around the topic. Some people try to advocate for visibility and education about topics relating to disability, especially those with physical deformities.

The "body positivity movement" is one movement that tries to represent different bodies and different levels of ability. It seems to mostly represent able-bodied individuals, however. Many people think that "disabilities are depressing" (Cohen-Rottenberg). Miller expresses a similar sentiment when he is asked whether he enjoys having a community of other disabled individuals. He says, "I do not like having a community of other people

with disabilities...I don't like seeing people suffer. [I] just feel odd staring at them" (D. Miller). Some people just don't want to feel different. It sucks being othered or being an outcast of sorts.



TAP Plastics

Miller hopes to one day own his own woodworking business. In fact, he has been working at creating one for years. His current job at TAP Plastics prepares him for this job. Miller has worked there for around ten years, and he has a good relationship with his co-workers and customers. Miller's boss, Blanca Quiterio, describes him as "en-

thusiastic about work.” People at work do not even notice his leg, and it does not hinder his ability to fabricate plastics. At work he’s very focused, walking all around the workshop with his limp, measuring and cutting up plastic. He began working at TAP Plastics as soon as he got out of high school, being a dedicated and hard-working individual. He is “very smart, very loyal, and very reliable” (Quiterio).

Growing up in the Bay Area, Miller never faced too much bullying, though he did have the occasional tease here or there. He never let it get to him, taking it in stride and standing up for himself. Sometimes he did feel like the circus freak however, catching the glances of curious children or other gawkers. He doesn’t like the attention, having felt more insecure about his leg brace in the past. Despite all his challenges, he was still a fairly happy child. With the bullying he did face, “he would just move on, go...right past it, and continue to engage with life in a positive way” (M. Miller).

Miller has always felt supported

by his family. He was always especially close with his father and wanted to do what he was doing. He would follow him around and help him out with tasks. This is how he learned things such as woodworking. Occasionally,

he will go over to his parents’ garage to complete his own woodworking projects. Sometimes he will work on constructing a guitar, or a chair, but even just creating a shelf is exciting.

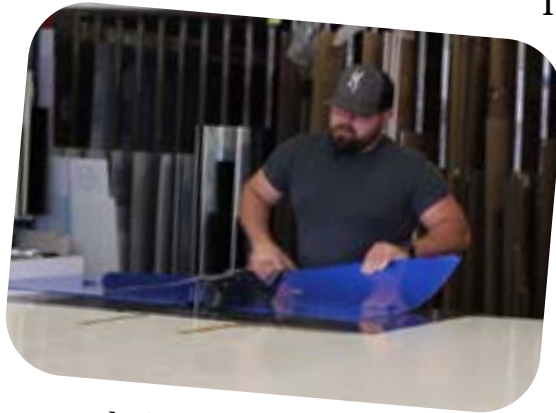
The sharp, piercing

sound of a saw rings through his father’s garage as Miller feeds wood through it. Taking the pieces, he meticulously measures them and puts together a shelf. He knows this place like the back of his hand and flows through it with ease, knowing exactly

where his tools are placed. The pieces fit together like a puzzle, and one can tell that a lot of planning and effort went into

it. Miller limps around the garage and grabs the tools required for the next steps of his project. He’s used to this limping, having lived like this his entire life.

When questioned about if polio still affects Miller to this day, he dis-



Miller working at TAP

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cusses the pain that his leg brace causes. He doesn't care too much about the paralyzed leg, being able to drive and do most other activities. After several hours of endless use of the leg brace, eventually the pain gets to him. At TAP Plastics, he walks 30-50 thousand steps per day, and "after a long day of physical activity,

[his] leg hurts. It hurts, it aches" (D. Miller). He acknowledges his shortcomings and knows his limitations. While polio doesn't affect Miller too much in

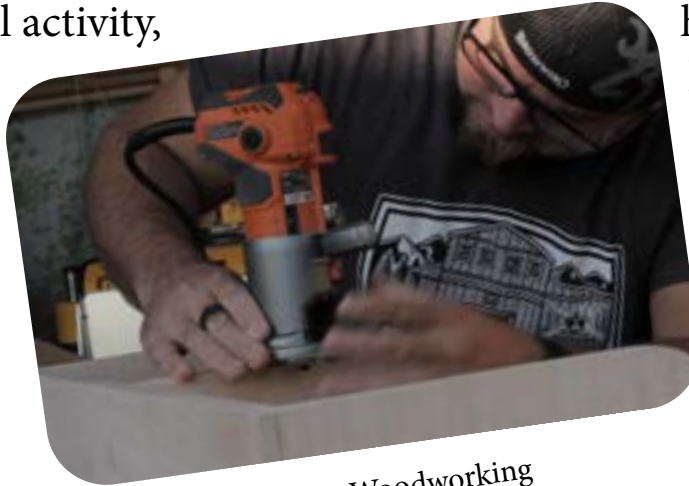
his daily life, one worry that he does have is post-polio syndrome, which the CDC defines as "a condition that can affect polio survivors decades after they recover from their initial poliovirus infection" ("Post-Polio

Syndrome"). It can cause muscles to weaken or affect other parts of the body even after polio has laid dormant (M. Miller). Miller's father fears for him because since he is a highly active person, he is at higher risk to develop post-polio syndrome. David asserts that "Nobody ever wants to be told,

'no, you can't'. I was always encouraged to do whatever I wanted to do" (D. Miller).

Miller doesn't want people to view him any differently. Much of the time, he forgets that he even has polio. It's not a defining trait. He receives some disability

benefits, such as the handicap placard, but he does not abuse it. He says that others are "way worse off than [him], and if [he] needs to walk farther, so be it" (D. Miller). Talking about his disabili-



Miller Woodworking

ty, Miller says, "I think I have lived my life with this idea that this is not a handicap to the point where I would call myself a normal, function-

ing person" (D. Miller).

Generally, Miller does not want others to pity him. He wants people to treat him the same as any of their other

friends (D. Miller). His message for other people with disabilities is, "Don't give up!... There's no reason for it. Do not worry about other people. Life is too short to care what so-and-so is thinking about you... Nothing can slow you down" (D. Miller).

"Life is too short to care what so-and-so is thinking about you... Nothing can slow you down"

About the Author



Fiona Liu is a junior at Mountain View High School. She loves cats, to the point that she makes them her entire personality. She claims to be a “Woman in STEM”, but doesn’t really enjoy doing anything in STEM. Her hobbies include filmmaking and sleeping(which she does not do a lot of these days. unfortunately). Currently enrolled in four AP classes, she is under a lot of stress.

