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English III

27 April 2022

David, Slayer of Giants: A Tale of Endurance and Growing Up

As he entered the suburban, American household, David Miller knew one thing: he was home. The six-year old Russian had lived most of his life at the local orphanage, and now here he was living the American Dream. David unpacks his things and is welcomed by his new parents and eight siblings. For the first time in little David's life, he truly had a place to call home. This boy, his right leg paralyzed by Polio, found himself far from the frigid Russian climate, beneath the sunny skies of California. His life would be what most would consider a struggle, but David simply endured through every challenge shot at him. Through many trials, David has pushed himself forward.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "Polio, or poliomyelitis, is a disabling and life-threatening disease caused by the poliovirus. The virus spreads from person to person and can infect a person's spinal cord, causing paralysis (can't move parts of the body)" ("What Is Polio?"). The CDC claims that in 1988, approximately 350,000 were affected by Polio; either they recovered to full health or ended up being paralyzed in one part of their body. David is an example of a Polio survivor with a paralyzed body part—his right leg—which left him with a permanent disability.

Born in Russia in 1993, David had contracted polio during his early childhood. While most Polio survivors are unable to participate in rigorous physical activities, David persisted on trying everything sports had to offer. "I did play tee ball for a year. It was hard. I'd actually run to base with my crutches because I can't run with my foot" he said, "As a kid, I don't think I ever really wanted to do sports, but to try it was definitely on the bucket list" (D. Miller). Other sports he listed included discus and shot put. It wasn't that he was interested in sports, it was rather he wanted to overcome his disability and live a normal-kind of life just like everyone else.

Despite his lame leg and life at the orphanage, David was always happy. He was positive to the core and always looked at the brighter side of things. He would be what most considered an older orphan due to his adoption at the age of six. His adoptive father, Michael Miller, always had seen David as an individual with boundless energy and an optimistic personality. “As a precursor of when we first met him face to face in Russia, and we had taken him to the apartment we were staying in and David, at six years old, jumped right in and was helping our host to set the table and do other things” (M. Miller).

According to David’s father, he had first met David when he and his wife were considering adopting a child in Russia. It was then that he and his wife learned of David’s condition (which explained why the boy had to use crutches to move around) and his background. David was orphaned at birth. No one knew when or how he contracted Polio, nor who his birth parents were (his mother was identified, but we are unable to give out her true name and occupation at this time), but David had always been a happy kid despite being an orphan. The orphanage themselves claimed he had never once been miserable under their care. He even had a childhood friend at the orphanage (they are confirmed to still be in contact with each other to this day). When he was finally adopted by the Millers, David soon found himself on a flight to America with a new family waiting for him. This new life would bring David’s happiest moments.

His path from childhood to independent adulthood would constantly test his leg brace and sense of resolve, but he would persevere and slay many giants that tried to keep him down. One example of this perseverance was one time when he took on a bully in arm wrestling and won, gaining him a sort of respect in his academic community. As he grew up, David started to transform into the strong-willed and humorous man he is known today. In 2012, David would become a devoted employee of TAP plastics where he would work on many projects, a homage to his time working with his father on different building projects as a young boy. Despite the pain he goes through, David always aims to get any project given to him one-hundred percent completed. Not even his disability hindered him.

Back to his childhood, it was no surprise that people mocked him for his disability. But for David, he just swept them aside and took things in stride. In fact, he is claimed to have beaten a kid who was teasing him in arm wrestling, proving he was still a strong person. Even when others would stare at him,

he would always see the good things in life. James Hoyt, one of David's friends, claims, "...he's always calm...he would always be there and it would be a lot of fun." He would eventually become a devoted Christian and a strong leader for high school youths.

Now, he has been plastic fabricator and shop manager at TAP Plastics for ten years, as well as a leader for the Christian youth group Young Life South Peninsula. Despite himself not having a full understanding of his condition, he can say to those in a similar situation to himself to keep their heads up high and to never let anything force them to just give up. He once said, "The best thing you can do for you is do it, try it, enjoy it. Do not worry about other people. Life is too short to care about what so-and-so is thinking about. You just gotta have fun, get it done, and you'll be much happier. Healthier. Nothing. Nothing! Can slow you down. There's no reason for it" (D. Miller).

Works Cited

Miller, David. Personal Interview. 20/03/2022.

Miller, Michael. Personal Interview. 27/03/2022.

Hoyt, James. Personal Interview. 05/04/2022.

"What Is Polio?" Edited by Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 28 Sept. 2021, <https://www.cdc.gov/polio/what-is-polio/index.htm#:~:text=Polio%2C%20or%20poliomyelitis%2C%20is%20a,move%20parts%20of%20the%20body>).