

Shabbat Shalom! (Hello I am Daniel)

My twin sister, Eliana and I were born at 24 weeks! 4 months premature.

Many sadly do not make it!

Why was I granted this invaluable chance at life, but others may never get that chance? That is why I intend to live my life to the fullest! As a young boy I used to always ask myself, why was I born with Cerebral Palsy? Why G-d? Why? I spent my childhood asking questions no one could truly answer. I would ask rabbis why? Why did G-d place me in this situation? They did not know. Truly no one can understand G-d's reasoning.

But I know, believe and understand that everything happens for a reason. I used to ask Why me, automatically associating my struggle' negatively.

When in fact, the opposite is true. We have it backward. At times we believe our struggles are our greatest vulnerabilities, when in fact they are our greatest strengths. They can grant us an increased appreciation for life and how we see the world. It is to our advantage, not a disadvantage.. The

struggles ultimately make us who we are, but do not define us. They ultimately strengthen our will, determination, and character. They transform us, hopefully into greater individuals.

We all go through something. No one is exempt from a struggle of some sort! No one is perfect. The challenge I was faced with CP happens to be external and slightly more profound than the average person. But I will not let my 'disability' define me or how I live my life. You only get one, make the most of it. Dream big! I live by that, because I should not be here. ! I am so lucky to even have this chance at life!!!!!!

My entire life I've been seen as a kid in a walker, someone with a disability, labeled as disabled. And Put into a suffocating box. We will automatically judge, create labels and assumptions to place upon people whether that'd be the lonely "outcast. (Another label) kid in our class, a random Passerby on the street or one of our closest friends. I could recall these people off the top of my head, subsequently I can think of assumptions I've made about them, both negative and positive without even ever interacting with them! It is Crazy how that works! It is in our control to NOT assume, place

self created stereotypes upon someone you don't truly know. Whether they are a complete stranger or your closest friend, assumptions and stereotypes never feel good, and always take us down the wrong path. I am not YOUR STEREOTYPICAL "DISABLED" person. I AM SO MUCH MORE!

I would now like to share with you some obstacles I overcame.

I always wanted to go to a mainstream sleepaway camp (not a special needs camp). My parents found a Jewish sleepaway camp that was fully accessible, and I would be mainstreamed in with everybody else. I was so happy, I said, sign me up!

When I first arrived at camp, I wasn't completely sure of what I was walking into, I was excited walking in with an open mind, but having fears of being labeled. Would I fit in with these kids? Would they just treat me like they had known me their whole lives? That was exactly the case. Not only was I welcomed with open arms, but I was treated as if these kids knew me

forever within a day of meeting them. I cannot believe it happened but it did and I was speechless. I didn't know what to think. I guess all I could think was: *Wow*.

This past summer at camp, a friend said to me, "Daniel, we don't see your walker, we treat you just like anyone else, it means nothing to us.' I felt like crying. To know that people simply do not see something that is clearly visible to them and for them to so beautifully say that, it was something I will never forget and I can only be so thankful that I have such loving people in my corner.

Camp has truly taught me to live life to the fullest.. When I am there, I almost forgot that I have physical limitations because I do anything that anyone else does. Let me put it this way: For that split second, or in that moment , I truly just feel like I can fly and have no limitations.

For as long as I can remember I had an aide in school. When I got into high school, I advocated for myself and told the school that I no longer needed

an aide. At the beginning of freshman year, the school agreed to eliminate the aide.

It always used to bother me, adults who had not been a part of my life, thought that was perfectly acceptable to assume my ability. As a young child, they would hold me back from certain activities because they thought it was not safe. . It is truly fascinating. As if they knew my limits. That is laughable to me. It should be to everyone in this room. The old saying You know yourself best is one hundred percent accurate. I've had my peers, and fellow adults assume my physical ability, without even knowing who I am. As I've matured I realize that this is sadly a natural occurrence. As a young child, you are meant to follow any and everything authority places upon you, if not you are seen as rebellious or argumentative. Now I've learned there is a balance. You can advocate for yourself, and maybe say something that will turn some heads along the way, but what else can you do? Stay quiet, and allow the same behavior to continue. Or stand up for yourself and how you deserve to be treated. When we used to play kickball I distinctly remember when I was up to bat I'd make my best attempt to hit

it, but usually, my walker would propel the ball forward. As I began sprinting, I could tell the kids were letting me run around the bases and score. While you would think that this is positive it is actually incredibly negative. I am no different than any other kid and my parents instilled that in me, and I will always love them for everything they have done for me. They never once made me feel like my disability was a barrier. I partook in everything everyone else did and if not, the activity we would do would be modified so I could enjoy the same as anyone else.

Speaking of modifications, I just recently went adaptive skiing. Modern technology( not our smart phones) is a blessing and never ceases to amaze us. I have been able to swim, ride a zipline and complete an upper ropes course just to name a few. In the past when I skied though, I used a device that was a sit down chair with skis and in order to ski, I would shift my body weight back and forth to go down the mountain. It is an indescribable feeling. You just feel free, on top of the world for those few minutes or hours. But this past weekend I had the opportunity to do something, I never thought possible Ski standing up. Imagine my walker attached to a platform on skis. For the first time ever I had to fit into my own pair of boots and skis. I was having a blast. An activity I already enjoyed just

became even more incredible. Being upright and working my body out, enjoying the scenery and a feeling I had not known, I was enjoying every minute of an even greater experience. To conclude, I don't feel we go through obstacles. This is just every day life. No one has a perfect life, there will always be speed bumps to drive over. But in the end, we embrace all of our all of the scratches on our car, our imperfections, the situations, experiences that make us who we are.

Shabbat Shalom!