

Daniel the Overcomer

Daniel was tired, but he took another step toward the top of the mountain. If there was one characteristic he was known for, it was fortitude. Daniel could always be counted on to just keep moving on! He didn't know where this drive came from, he just had it. Right now, for example, he and his dad were climbing Cowell's Mountain, a local peak in San Diego county that hikers and runners used to stay in shape or tone up their muscles for bigger challenges.

Daniel's dad had suggested earlier in the week that they hike the mountain today. He hadn't indicated any special reason but seemed unusually intent on the climb this Saturday morning. He and his dad had hiked together occasionally before, but not up Cowell's Mountain or this early in the day. They had taken short hikes into the San Diego River Canyon a couple of miles from their house and down the Noble Canyon trail near Julian, Californian about thirty miles east of San Diego, not far from the Mexican border near Tecate. But, this morning his dad was quiet and seemed to be concentrating hard on reaching the top of the mountain.

As they approached the summit the sun broke through a layer in the clouds and bathed the eastern side of the mountain in a light. It was comfortable now but would get hot later in the day. In Southern California when the clouds are thin enough for the sun to break through at eight in the morning, it means the day will warm rapidly. It's a good thing they got an early start.

Daniel and his dad found a couple of rocky outcrops looking northeastwards and sat looking toward the low mountains near Julian, the highest elevations of San Diego county. "It's pretty up here this time of the day," dad said. "Can you smell the sage? It's humid enough from the dew early this morning that you can get a slight aroma."

"Yeah, I do," Daniel replied. They sat there awhile contemplating the view of Santee below them and the early morning traffic winding its way westward up the hill on Mission Gorge Boulevard. It was Saturday, so the traffic was light.

After a few minutes of silence, Daniel said, "Did you want to talk about something this morning? Why did we have to come all the way up here? Couldn't we have done it back home?"

Dad said, "Yeah, we could have, but I thought maybe we could gain more perspective from up here. I wanted to explain a little about the learning disability you have, and why it won't prevent you from succeeding in anything you may want to do in life."

Daniel didn't reply. He didn't really want to talk about it. He had been having a very difficult time in school for the past couple of years. He couldn't seem to get the trick to reading and writing. His teachers had been marking him down on writing assignments. He couldn't spell, and he was constantly turning his words around. It was very difficult expressing himself because it was so hard trying to organize his thoughts.

Daniel was about to start seventh grade and he had recently been evaluated as reading at the fifth-grade level. Multiple doctors and teachers had assessed his word skills and declared he had a severe case of dyslexia, a brain disfunction that caused him to reverse the letters in a word and words in a sentence. He had seen numerous doctors who had prescribed eye exercises to help him overcome the problem.

None of the exercises seemed to help much. He had continued to become more and more frustrated, particularly as the classwork became more challenging. One school psychologist even said he would be fortunate if were able to read a newspaper and would probably not be able to graduate from high school or go on to college.

Only one activity seemed to produce any improvement at all; playing Pac Man. Daniel owned a personal, yellow, electronic version of the game, and played it continually. His dad and mom could hear him playing the game at night. An eerie yellow glow and a ticking sound would emanate from beneath his bed covers at all hours of the night.

The hand-eye coordination of moving the little red blips in the game to avoid being eaten by Pac Man, seemed to help unscramble the wiring in his head. And,

he enjoyed the game. But, something more was needed to deal with the loss of progress and confidence over the past few years.

As the sun warmed their faces and arms, dad began to speak. "Daniel, I need to explain to you why it's been so difficult for you in school, why it's been so hard for you to learn to read and write. You have a learning disability. Your brain is wired in such a way that the left side of your brain seems to be fighting with your right side. This is the reason it's so hard for you to spell and put words together in sentences.

Some of the doctors you've been seeing say that you be handicapped and never be able to read properly. Others say you may eventually grow out of it and have an easier time reading when you are older. I think if we provide some additional help for you in school and you continue to play Pac Man a lot, we might be able to help you become successful. You are not dumb, you just have a temporary injury to your brain that I think we'll be able to fix."

"Did you know that Albert Einstein had the same problem you have? And, he was one of the smartest men who ever lived? That's right. He also had trouble reading when he was young, but later as he matured, he was able to begin reading and became a scientist. When he was young people thought he was dumb, but they were wrong. Later, he developed the theory of relativity and helped develop a whole new idea of the universe. You are like him. You are not dumb, you just need to wait a little longer for your brain to grow up!"

Daniel didn't say anything. He just listened and thought deeply about what his dad was saying. He thought to himself, "Maybe that's why it's been so hard to put words together. It would sure be nice to not have to work so hard at school. And, if playing Pac Mac helps, that's great! I'll just play the game even more. It's fun anyway."

Dad continued, "And, your mother and I have decided we're going to pay extra tuition at Christian Junior High School for the next two years for you to receive special tutoring for your dyslexia. We've arranged for a Mrs. ____ to tutor you one extra period each day by yourself for the next two years. You are about two grade levels behind where you should be and she's going to help you catch up. Do you think you can work a little extra to fix your problem?"

" Yeah, I guess so, " Daniel replied.

That morning on the top of Cowell's Mountain was the start of an entirely new phase of Daniel's life. He had been failing in school and none of us could figure out why. He was also becoming discouraged. But, after our conversation that morning, he developed an entirely new outlook on life. He wasn't dumb, he just had a brain injury that could be fixed over time and he had a plan!

Daniel was so convinced that he was going to be successful that he started bragging how smart he was. He misunderstood part of dad's pep talk. He misunderstood his dad to say that he was as smart as Albert Einstein, and began telling that to all his friends!

After two years of special tutoring, a renewed outlook on life, and additional growth and development, Daniel began high school at grade level. He was no Albert Einstein, but he had a fully enjoyable and successful high school experience. He even excelled in track and field, setting the school pole vaulting record.

Daniel continued to overcome his limitation by graduating from Christian Heritage College, which one of his school counselors said would never happen and becoming an intelligence officer for the U.S. Navy. He expects to be promoted to Commander in August of 2018 and may continue to flag rank in the future.

God has been good to my son, Daniel, and has made him an overcomer. He is a great husband, father, and protector of his country. All because he chose to believe his personal challenge would be solved in due time!