

“Uniquely Strong”

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As narrated by my parents...When I was a baby, and whenever I got polio shot doses, I'd get a very, very high fever, so after three shots of anti-polio, and for my last (4th) booster, my dad wouldn't allow my mom to take me to the hospital to get the shot (oral vaccines were not yet available). They argued. My dad believed that having the three shots was enough protection, and my dad is single minded and unreasonable, as my mom describes it. My mom didn't insist on it so that they wouldn't fight.

I was physically normal and didn't contract polio until I was 4 years old (1988, born in 1984). My mom told me that one day I was sitting and playing, and when she said it was ok for me to get up and run around, an activity that I usually enjoyed as a child. I told her that I couldn't stand because my legs were weak. That day I developed a high fever and I went to the hospital. I was treated by a neurologist and rehabilitation doctor. We had little money but my aunt who was working in that hospital helped a lot. I also contracted a urinary tract infection. They ran tests and got some cerebrospinal fluid and density scans. The doctors labeled it as a disease “close to polio,” but did not really label it as polio.

Therapies / Braces / Ortho shoes - I've done therapies, such as electro-stimulation and water therapy stretches, and started wearing leg braces Knee-Ankle-Foot-Ortho (KAFO). I got a shoe lift in grade school, because my left leg was almost an inch shorter than my normal right leg. I got to take off my braces only when it was bath or sleeping time, and that is true even today.

In high school, I was allowed to have a brace footplate (braces that are not connected directly to an orthopaedic shoe). I used to rebel and to conform to current fashion by wearing high heels or whatever shoe style I wanted that didn't have the additional lifts. I wasn't until I was limping badly that I was allowed to wear a different shoe - mostly boots.

I stopped therapy in high school, as my parents could no longer afford it. By college, I had saved a little money to buy braces and pay for therapy, but my doctor told me that I should not waste my energy and push my body like that.



I was in school full-time studying for a BS in Psychology as a pre-med course. My goal was to go to medical school, but we couldn't afford that and scholarships didn't happen. I got my BS degree and was hired for contractual jobs in human resources. When my American boss transferred to Utah, the replacement appeared to have a vendetta against disabled people and found a way to get me out of the job by transferring me to a night shift schedule that made it impossible for me to go to therapy sessions. He told me that he understood my case but "we are not a charity here." I did not pursue taking him to court because the justice system here in the Philippines is weak and slow. I would be old and life would have passed me by before I would get justice.

But the blessing is that I got a chance to rest and slow down. I also realized by slowing down that I don't want a job in human resources. My passion is counseling.

Lifestyle and family support – I was "normal" in everything. I attended regular schools. One good thing is that Filipinos are not bullies at school. Whenever there was a problem, I took the advice of my cousins who told me to fight back with humor and sarcasm. That helped.



The biggest challenge for me is handling gawkers. I am shy and detested the attention and curiosity of other people. They gawk as if you are sprouting additional legs. Some call me Robocop, and others tease by saying "Run, Forrest, Run."

My mom told me during grade school to just view myself as unique and, if ever I received attention and questions about my leg brace or my limping, just tell them honestly what I have, and people will decide if they like me or not. She said that even if they didn't like me, it didn't matter because I had my family who loves me very much. She said that would be enough.

I am also a Catholic and I have my faith in God. Faith to me is whatever I don't understand or whatever it is that can't be proven or explained. I'm blessed to have been born into a family-oriented culture, and it is good that I have a huge family who loves me. I can come through any disappointment or rejection.

I can even play sports every now and then without the doctors or my parents knowledge. I was such a rebel back then...maybe just to prove to myself that I could defy my limits. I don't regret experiencing those activities even if "they

say” that I got post-polio early on because I was not conserving my physical energy/ body.

They don't know how I got polio. Doctors say it could be “provocation” polio. When I was born I was injected for a week with antibiotic left leg and right leg. Another said my muscle and fat densities are unnaturally softer/flabby and that all my joints are not hinged tightly as what is natural.

Growing up - During my first year of college, I was invited to sing and participate at the Rotary International conference recognizing the Philippines as a polio free country.

The main speaker's advice to me was to be "lazy," so as to conserve my energy/body. She said because you had polio you are running on a battery that can't be recharged. “So spend as little energy as possible in whatever you do to live a long life.”

That was shocking to me because that is my greatest frustration - that I am held back physically, but my mind wants to do more. I don't want to live a long life if it's not a quality kind of life. But I also don't want to push myself too much, because I don't want to be a burden at an early age and have to be taken care of or be dependent on others. I hope others can offer me advice on that, but right now I do what makes me happy. I don't want to hold back to enjoy life now. I don't care about the latter years and the consequences.

I didn't have any psychological treatment but I turned out ok, or at least I hope so. That is why I am interested in being a counselor for people with disability. But for now it is just a dream because I'm still facing my own challenges of feeling fatigued, and most of the time I want to sleep. I'm take vitamin B-complex to compensate. My shoe lifts are very helpful.

My summary has turned out to be a long narration and I did enjoy recalling my journey so far. Thank you for listening.