

Cultural Daily

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Limitless: The Story of Dani Bowman

Kendra Quadra · Wednesday, April 11th, 2018

First Impressions

The first time I heard of Dani Bowman, formally known as Danielle Bowman, was in December 2017 in my *Journeys* class at Woodbury University with Professor Mike Sonksen. It was the last day of school and we had just finished our final project for the class, which was a writing portfolio. He started the class by presenting Dani Bowman's short film "Animato," created as part of a project. Right off the bat, I found myself enjoying the short film and impressed by her animation and writing skills. The poem seemingly made the animation process appear scientific and surgical, but by pairing it with the melody of Justin Bieber's pop song "Despacito," she bridged the gap between education and entertainment. The short film clearly reveals her passion and depth of knowledge in animation methodologies, processes, and execution. After class I expressed to Professor Sonksen how talented I thought Bowman was and when he mentioned her disability, I could not believe it. With her talent and passion, her opportunities were limitless.

<https://youtu.be/kC8h2XfjTg>

Second the Best

A few months later, I'm now in Professor Sonksen's *LA Stories* class and it has a similar tempo to the *Journeys* class. I look around the room, see a few familiar faces, and exchange smiles. Professor Sonksen warms the class up by giving us a writing exercise, which we can volunteer to read out loud. A student at the front raises her hand and begins to say her piece, and as I am listening I realize it is Dani. I think to myself, "What a coincidence?" It got even better when Professor Sonksen, knowing I admired Dani, asked if I could write a piece on her for the interview assignment. Regardless if he'd asked me, I would have jumped on the opportunity to find out more about Dani Bowman.

Honestly, I did not know what to expect from Dani. She set the tone by sending me a copy of her biography. It included an "About" section describing her achievements, her company, DaniMation Entertainment, a list of **award-winning animated shorts**, events, animation camps/classes she taught and other speaking engagements she spoke for. After reading her resume and sitting down with her for only forty-five minutes, it was apparent what motivated her. "My ultimate goal," Dani tells me, "is to change the world's perspective on autism and show the potential that people on the autism spectrum have the potential to live independently and having a great life."

Dani's overwhelming success is proof that autism has never slowed her down. Interviewing Dani

turned into an inspiring event and a discovery of the qualities and attitudes a talented woman such as herself possesses.

Bio

Dani Bowman grew up in the city of La Cañada Flintridge just north of Los Angeles, California. She created books as a hobby in elementary school, founded her company DaniMation at eleven years old, and started her professional animation career at fourteen. Dani has premiered seven award winning animated short films, a PSA, and a music video at San Diego's Comic-Con in the past five years, illustrated and published six books, and teaches animation to children with autism at animation camps across the country.

<https://youtu.be/Tsfq1KMikU8>

Dani is a national speaker; she has spoken at several special needs and business conferences, including keynotes at the Ohio Center for Autism & Low Incidence Nationwide Conference, and the Oklahoma Statewide Autism Conference. Dani is currently working towards a BA in Animation at Woodbury University, and up next is an MFA in Animation at UCLA. Lastly, she was a member of AGI young leaders where she met with a group of young leaders to create strategies on how to lead in the autism community.

Many people do not think it's possible for someone with a disability to achieve so much, but Dani is proving that to be wrong. Autism was never an issue for Dani. "I focus on my ability, not my disability." Autism does not have to be a disability, if you do not let it.

Where it All Started

Growing up, Dani could not formulate full sentences and hold conversations with people. She arbitrarily repeated words back as a form of communication until she turned five, "It was a miracle that I could even say a sentence," she says. "There's a scene in *Charlotte's Web* where Wilbur says, 'I can talk... I can talk?!?' It was like a miracle for me." This moment in her life marked a milestone for Dani and set the tone for the rest of her life.

In elementary school, she realized she had a natural talent for animating. Her father was a photographer who owned a studio where Dani would make miniature stop motions with her teddy bears. Her dad had a collection of VHS videotapes, so she spent a lot of her youth watching animated movies. At school, she had a friend whom she learned how to make her own picture books by observing him. She began to make picture books for herself with characters she had a personal connection with. Before she knew it, she found herself making animations, hand drawn comics, and trading cards.

Overcoming Autism

At age eleven Dani found out she was autistic. Her aunt explained to her that she had been showing signs and symptoms, such as talking to herself. Dani replied, "Is this a disease? Can I be cured?" She realized from her aunt that, "There is no cure for autism, you just have to conquer it" and that is exactly what Dani planned to do. A few years later Dani realized she had an incredible talent inside of her while attending La Cañada High School.



She made animations through Power Point, Adobe Photoshop, and MS paint. Animation was Dani's passion and she did not let autism get in her way. "I would feel energy when I animate." Although she was fluent in visual communication, Dani requires verbal communication skills if she wants to succeed independently. She worked intensely to improve her communication skills by listening to her aunt's advice, doing extensive research, and being enrolled at the UCLA Peers Program.

Attitudes, Setting Goals, and Aspirations

Dani values the meaning of friendship, creativity, and believes in, “Never giving up and never surrendering.” She has a great deal of potential and she wants to spread a message of inspiration to people with autism. “My goal is to change the world’s perception of autism and show the potential that autistic individuals like me have.” She believes that autism should no longer be an inhibition for ambition and wishes to support those wanting to work and pursue an independent life.

She plans to help the autism and special needs community through her company. “My goal for DaniMation is for it to be a mainstream animation studio and the first to employ mainly people with autism and special needs.” Her passion for animation and vocation as the creative officer of DaniMation is the perfect combination for Dani to fulfill her mission to change the world’s perspective of autism and help the autism community.

Takeaways

During the interview, anytime I mentioned her disability or potential barriers, Dani was optimistic, positive, and hopeful in all her responses. She does not have a Plan B, there is no option to fail, and there is no alternative, because she is going to do everything she can to succeed. What I learned from this interview is this: if she can do it, I can do it and that is exactly the message Dani wants to spread to the autism community. I am not autistic, but I find her message to be even more inspiring for that reason.

<https://youtu.be/RI2LuYj8KQ4>

She took her disability and transformed it for her own benefit. Dani did not let her disability win; she took control of it and made it work for her. In a competitive field, Dani used her disability as leverage. The one takeaway you should get from this interview is to look at the disabilities in your own life. “The only limits to the possibilities in your life tomorrow are the butts you use today,” (Brown, 2017) and transform it into an ability.

After meeting Dani, my perception of autism has certainly changed. Reflecting now on what I thought of the autism community, I am ashamed. I used to think there was a cap to their success and how far they could succeed in the professional world, because of their disability. I am extremely happy to be shown I was wrong. They are building a community of leaders and professionals, who set their own boundaries. Companies need to be more open about hiring autistic employees, because autistic professionals like Dani are harboring great talent and competition.

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