

"Trash, trash, trash . . . Definitely trash," echoed my brothers as we tackled the annual basement deep-cleaning ritual. In our home, this was a chance to reminisce about cherished possessions or ruthlessly purge less-favored ones. The dusty corners of the basement held a treasure trove of relics - tattered toys, forgotten books, and aged photographs, each a portal to our shared history. Amid this collection, one item stood out: a half-broken robot with neon green eyes, illuminating the dim space. Suddenly, the robot sprang to life, surprising us all. One arm was missing, the other barely hanging on, yet its motion sensors responded to our presence. My younger brothers, always eager to express their opinions, promptly declared it as broken and useless. "Why keep this old thing around?" Bliss chimed, disdain lacing through his voice. I hesitated, my gaze fixed on the robot, its single arm wavering in acknowledgment.

I was born in Cameroon- raised in the humble village of Babessi. My family, hardworking individuals, struggled daily to make ends meet. Life was a constant battle, where mobility often meant the difference between survival and defeat. Unfortunately, I had congenital "Genu Valgum" and Hip Dysplasia, making it impossible for me to walk and, at times, even stand. In a place where physicality was a primary necessity, I felt as though I had been dealt a bad hand, leaving me feeling broken, unfixable, and destined for a future of dependency and stagnation. But within these apparent physical limitations lay unexpected freedom. My body's constraints, deemed broken by others, paradoxically provided room for my imagination to flourish. Instead of holding me back, these challenges unleashed my creativity and kindled an unquenchable thirst for exploration.

As time went by, this mismatch between my imagination and my physical abilities became intolerable. A crossroads loomed between my ambitions and the boundaries of my reality. This tug of war forced me to confront a painful truth: I was living a life that didn't match my potential, and it was a life I no longer wished to accept. My family moved to the United States for the medical care I needed. Surgery on my body became routine. Each time, the trauma associated with it left me emotionally detached. In anticipation of my fourth surgery, my grandmother gave me a complex robotics kit: an intricate puzzle with hundreds of pieces: 961 nuts, bolts, screws, and latches; twelve motors; 50 sets of wires; and over 150 structural components. It posed an especially daunting challenge for an 11-year-old boy who could barely maintain his balance.

I made it my mission to master this technical challenge as my body healed from surgery. My bedroom became my workshop, a scene of organized chaos where metal scraps, coils of wire, and discarded bandages littered the floor. My surgical wounds protested, but I continued to move about, assembling robotics components with precision. Amidst the clutter and pain, an incomplete exoskeleton began to take form. Once my project was complete—the robot built and responsive to my commands—I was filled with a sense of accomplishment and newfound independence.

As I wrestled the robot from the piles of old clothes and furniture, I turned to my brothers. "No way I'm throwing this one away. Look, I can fix it." Fueled by passion and a spark of creativity, I can transform

anything, even my own limitations, into something remarkable. Genu Valgum may have thrown gnarled branches across my path, but I've learned to weave them into resilient bridges. Every obstacle, every stumble, has been a chance to sculpt my spirit into a monument of unwavering determination. This journey, forged in the crucible of challenge, has shown me that it's not the absence of roadblocks that defines success but the artistry with which we navigate them. And with each hurdle I overcome, the masterpiece I build—myself—becomes even more breathtaking.