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Doctors Tell Speech Champion "You Will Never Speak"

CEDARVILLE, OHIO -- Once told he would never speak, one Cedarville student is proving his doctors wrong by winning state and national awards with the university's speech team.

Senior Paul Miller from Chariton, Iowa, was 18 months old when doctors noticed moderate hearing loss during a wellness check.

After two years of general therapy, he was officially diagnosed with a severe case of oral motor apraxia, a speech inhibiting disorder, at age 4. His parents were told he would never communicate verbally and they should not count on him attending college.

"Paul had always been a vocal child, even though he was not verbal," said Paul's mother, Brandy Miller. "He used many attempts with the word 'uh' to communicate. We actually used sign language for a season."

Miller began speech therapy at age 2, and by 7, he was speaking intelligible words and simple sentences.

"I know my first word was 'mama,'" he shared.

Having undergone no medical procedure or treatment, Miller attributes his healing solely to God. "I was told I wouldn't speak," Miller added. "When I speak now, I want to give all the glory to God. I have even been invited to men's conferences to rap. I mean, if you can't speak you can't rap. God did that. That was not me, but the Lord."

Stewarding his new gift, Miller underwent nearly six years of challenging speech therapy.

"I was very self-aware when I first started speaking," Miller noted. "I couldn't even say the word 'rabbit' or order things at restaurants."

He credited his parents as his biggest supporters as he learned to speak. "My parents prayed daily for me to be able to speak," he said. "They drove me repeatedly to therapy, paid for it and invested in me."

Now, Miller is a [broadcasting and digital media](#) major at Cedarville University, living free from all effects of his former disorder. He uses his voice at every opportunity, including theatre performances and as a member of Cedarville's speech team.

“When Paul commits himself to a speech, I know it will be good,” said [Eric Mishne](#), assistant professor of communication and director of forensics. “He has the ability to pull meaning out of a text and perform it in a realistic and emotive way that connects to his audience on a very real level. Paul is an integral part of the team dynamic and adds a positive energy to every team meeting and event. When he’s not around, we feel pretty boring. Paul is memorable in all the good ways.”

Miller’s shining moment on the team came in the form of a slam poetry presentation about his journey with speech apraxia, which won runner-up honors at the 2020 National Christian College Forensics Association ([NCCFA](#)) National Championship. He has since won numerous awards, including both a state championship for the Ohio Forensics Association (OFA) and National Championship for NCCFA.

“I love public speaking for the message,” he said. “It’s an opportunity for you to communicate something to an audience and share something that is impactful to you. I love being able to not so much entertain but give them a valuable message through that.”

“Why am I speaking now?” Miller continued. “What does God have in store for me? God gave me my voice to communicate a message, and I want to use every opportunity I can to point that message back to Christ.”

Located in southwest Ohio, Cedarville University is an accredited, Christ-centered, Baptist institution with an enrollment of 4,715 undergraduate, graduate, and online students in more than 150 areas of study. Founded in 1887, Cedarville is one of the largest private universities in Ohio, recognized nationally for its authentic Christian community, rigorous academic programs, [including its Bachelor of Arts in Broadcasting, Digital Media and Journalism](#), strong graduation and retention rates, accredited professional and health science offerings, and high student engagement ranking. For more information about the University, visit cedarville.edu.

Written by Alex Boesch