

HOPE

SAVES THE DAY



Hope Man:

Story of Paul Cimins

The World's First Super Hero for Autism & Special Needs

by Brian Cimins

Paul didn't always understand why he wasn't like other kids. He tried hard to fit in. He did his best in school, which wasn't always easy because of some of the educational challenges he had. He tried to enjoy the things that his classmates enjoyed. But somehow, he always felt left out.

Paul had been born with a learning disability, and while he was usually a sweet and happy boy, sometimes the way others treated him really got him down. His family loved him and recognized him as the special, unique, talented kid that he was. But it seemed to Paul that other people didn't always treat him fairly or kindly.

Like any other kid, Paul just wanted to make friends. He wanted to be around people his age, to laugh and play and have a good time like everyone else. He wanted to run around the neighborhood in the summertime, play touch football, enjoying the weather and playing tag and going swimming with the other children. He wanted to be able to express himself the same way they did.

But although Paul tried and tried, these things didn't come easily to him. He wished he could explain his challenges to the other kids, to tell them how it made him feel and act and think. He wished for so many things that seemed so easy, but in fact were very difficult for Paul.

One day, a new boy named TJ moved to town and ended up in Paul's class at school. Paul watched in amazement at the way the other kids acted around him. You would have thought TJ was some kind of superstar. He had the coolest lunchbox and the

coolest running shoes, he was good in sports, and he could tell the funniest jokes. It wasn't long before he was the most popular kid in the class. The boys liked him, the girls liked him, even the teacher liked him.

Paul was sure that TJ was going to ignore him for the rest of the school year, just like the other kids in the class. So he tried not to focus on wishing he could be like TJ or even make friends with him. Which was why Paul was so surprised one day after school when TJ called him over.

"Hey, Paul!" the new boy yelled as Paul began to walk away from school.

In shock, Paul turned around. He saw TJ hurrying toward him, along with a group of other boys from his class. Paul stood stock-still, a smile slowly spreading over his face. Could it be that these kids wanted to play with Paul? Could it be that they didn't think he was as different from them?

TJ and the other boys were smiling, too, and for a moment, Paul imagined himself just like all the other kids. He imagined himself laughing and playing and running, not having to worry about his autism or his learning problems. Just being free. Just being Paul.

But as TJ and his group got closer, Paul could see that their smiles were different somehow. He didn't know exactly how they were different from his own, but he took a step backward, suddenly feeling unsure.

"Paul, I have a question for you," TJ said.

Paul looked closely at TJ, and started to smile again. Maybe TJ really did want to be his friend. "Okay," said Paul, waiting.

TJ cleared his throat, and several long seconds ticked by before he opened his mouth again. "Paul," he asked, "why are you so weird?"

The other boys around them just laughed. They were still smiling those strange smiles. At first, Paul didn't understand why they would be smiling after TJ had asked a question like that. But suddenly he realized that the boys were being mean.

Paul backed away from them. He felt strange inside in a way he couldn't explain. "Weird?" he whispered, repeating.

TJ threw back his head and laughed. “You know; you’re not like the other kids. You’re quiet and awkward, and nobody wants to be your friend.”

Paul’s throat tightened. He knew he was different. He knew he didn’t have many friends. Why was TJ telling him all over again?

“I have to go home,” Paul said after a moment. He turned his back and walked off, leaving the crowd of laughing boys behind him. Paul didn’t like the feeling that swelled in the pit of his stomach and rose into his throat. He wished he knew how to explain that feeling, even to himself, but he couldn’t. All he knew was that he wasn’t happy like he normally was.

Over the next few weeks, things didn’t get any easier for Paul. Before TJ had moved to town, the other kids had simply ignored Paul, which was bad enough. But now that TJ was in their class, Paul had become a big joke to them, someone to laugh at and make fun of. TJ enjoyed making Paul feel bad, and once, he even punched him in the eye for no reason!

When Paul’s parents saw what had happened, they called up the school. But even after that kind of bullying had stopped, TJ and the others still bullied Paul through their words and actions.

Paul didn’t know how he would ever have gotten through the school year if it hadn’t been for his loving family at home, and for Jennifer and Chad, two kids in his class who always stuck up for him. Jennifer and Chad didn’t have a learning disability, but they did have big hearts. They were the kind of kids who didn’t judge others based on their dis-abilities.

They saw that Paul was a kind, sweet, caring boy, and they appreciated him for who he was. As the school year went on, Paul spent more and more time with them. He visited their houses, and invited them to visit his. Jennifer took him into her basement one day to show him her older brother’s huge aquarium filled with all kinds of colorful tropical fish and beautiful underwater plants.

Paul had never seen anything so beautiful. He stared through the glass into the blue light of the aquarium. The fish were so graceful, and the water bubbled softly at the top of the tank. Paul could almost imagine that he was truly under the sea.

“Isn’t it neat?” asked Jennifer.

Paul tore his eyes away from the aquarium and saw that Jennifer was smiling at him. Her smile was different from TJ's, and it made Paul happy.

"Yes," he said. "It's very neat."

Jennifer touched his arm. "I'm glad we're friends," she told Paul.

"Me, too," said Paul.

At Chad's house, Paul loved to look at Chad's collections of things. Chad seemed to collect everything—from baseball cards to comic books to video games and even rocks and crystals. Paul could look all day and still not see everything there was to see.

It made Chad happy to have a friend who was able to appreciate the things he cared about. Most people thought Chad's collections were silly or over-the-top. But not Paul. Paul even saved his baseball cards from Cooperstown to give Chad and kept his eye out for cool rocks that Chad might like to have.

"You're such a great friend," Chad said to Paul one day.

A strange feeling of warmth crept over Paul. He didn't know what to call it, but he knew it was a good feeling. He didn't know what to say to that, either, so he just smiled. A big, happy smile.

Chad understood.

The hard times weren't over for Paul, but with friends like Chad and Jennifer, he learned to focus on what was positive about his life, and to keep a good attitude. As he grew up, he met many people who were insensitive and rude like TJ. He was bullied and made fun of by others. But he also met people who, like Jennifer and Chad, loved him for who he was.

They didn't care about Paul's challenges. They saw through it, and they realized what a special, loyal, honest, and kind friend he was. Paul's true friends could always count on him to be there for them, to give them a hand when they needed it, and to never give up on them. They learned a lot from Paul's happy spirit and big heart and his hardworking attitude. Paul taught them to be kinder and more accepting. He taught them what friendship was truly all about, and he taught them to never give up, no matter how hard things got.

Paul's family was very proud of him, too. They were proud of how hard he worked in school, and they made sure he got the special help he needed to get through his classes.

Having special help made a big difference for Paul. Before, he had often pretended to understand what his teachers were talking about, but now that he was being helped by tutors who understood autism, Paul did better in school than he ever had before. His friends and family cheered him on as he graduated from high school, and then went on to a school called the Culinary Institute of America, where he was able to use his lifelong love for baking and cooking to become a wonderful chef!

Thanks to the family and friends who never stopped believing in him, Paul was able to do great things with his life. Today, he is well-known as a chef and author, and he also founded a Special Needs and Autism support radio program called "Hope Saves The Day," hosted on AutismRadio.org and syndicated in 27 Cities throughout North America and translated into Spanish, French and English.

More than six million people listen to Paul's program! He helps people with special needs and autism and their families to learn how to overcome their challenges and be the best they can be. He invites special guests who have overcome challenges with autism to be on his show. He shares special recipes for the parents of kids with autism. And he even donates lots of money to special causes that help families dealing with autism through their 100% volunteer 501c3 charity <http://AutismRadio.org>

Whether he's working to donate cars to needy families of children with autism, or bringing children with autism together to enjoy such activities as horseback riding, the National Autism Swim Team for Special Olympics, you can bet that Paul is making a big difference in the lives of parents and kids everywhere!

During the day, Paul cooks, writes, and hosts his radio show. But when the sun goes down...Paul stops being plain old Paul and morphs into the true superhero that he is on the inside! You've heard of Batman and Superman and Spiderman...now give it up for Super Hero defending Families and Children with Special Needs and Autism around the world...Hope Man!

Hope Man's message is an important one—having a disability doesn't define you; it's your heart and the things you care about, your special talents, and your hopes and dreams that make you who you are. Because Paul grew up dealing with many of the

same issues faced by other kids with disabilities, he understands them perfectly well, and has a big heart to reach out to these kids and make their lives better. As Hope Man, it Paul's job to encourage and inspire kids with autism and other disabilities to dream big and never give up.

Just the other evening, Hope Man was called to the house of a sweet little girl named Lilly. Like Paul, Lilly had been born with autism, and now she was struggling in school. Although she worked hard in school and had a special tutor, as well as a few good friends who truly cared about her, Lilly couldn't help feeling frustrated with herself.

When Hope Man found her, she was sitting sadly in a corner of her living room couch, her dog Max curled up by her feet. Lilly looked up in amazement as a bright burst of light outside the window caught her eye.

At first, she thought it was a shooting star, but as she watched, it dropped closer and closer to the ground, closer to her yard, closer to her house! Surprised, Lilly went over for a better look. The light was shiny and golden and beautiful. She opened the window and stretched out her hand, as if she could capture the light and bring it into the house with her.

Lilly gasped as the beam of light bounced off her palm and through the window into the living room. She turned in astonishment as it shimmered and grew, taking on the size and shape of a full-sized person!

And then, there he was, standing in the middle of the living room carpet—Hope Man himself, in his red superhero cape and gloves, his gray superhero suit, his tall boots, and a red mask over his eyes shaped like a heart! He was strong and proud—and he smiled straight at Lilly.

Lilly looked over at Max. Usually, her dog barked and barked whenever a stranger was around, but this time he sat still, wagging his tail and looking happy and eager, the way he usually did when an old friend came to visit. Animals always recognize the goodness and kindness of Hope Man, and they get excited when he comes to help their owners. Max knew that poor Lilly had been feeling down, and he hoped that Hope Man could lift her spirits.

"Who are you?" Lilly asked after a moment. She could hardly believe that this superhero was standing in the middle of her living room.

The tall, friendly man smiled kindly. "I'm Hope Man," he said, "and it came to my attention that you were having some trouble and I'm here to help."

Lilly continued to stare. "I'm Lilly, and I have autism," she said after a moment. "Sometimes things are hard for me. I do my best in school, but I don't always understand things like other kids do. I have some good friends, but sometimes people make fun of me, too. I wonder what it would be like not to have autism. I sometimes think that my autism will keep my dreams for my life from coming true."

Hope Man looked closely at Lilly for a long second. Then he smiled and motioned her closer. "Lilly," he whispered, "how about if I tell you a little secret? I know exactly how you feel...because I was born with special needs just like you were."

"You were in Special Education classes?" asked Lilly. "But you're a superhero."

"And you can be one, too!" Hope Man grinned. "You'll have to work at it. You'll have to be brave and stay true to yourself. You'll have to learn to recognize who truly is and isn't your friend. And you'll have to believe in who you are, no matter what anyone else tries to tell you. As long as you know you are and love you for who you are, the enemy or mean people on the outside can do no harm.

"That's how I made it to where I am," Hope Man continued. "I struggled in school and had a harder time making friends, just like you. But even though things weren't always easy for me, I had people in my life who believed in me. I got help in school when I needed it the most. And with the people I loved cheering me on, I realized that deep down inside, I had the power within myself to be and do whatever I wanted.

"I graduated from high school. I became a well-known chef. I wrote books that have been published. And I've even started my own radio program to help kids and families with autism."

"Wow," whispered Lilly.

Hope Man went on. "Every time I reached a goal, I became more confident in who I was. I didn't let my disability define me. Instead, I worked around it. I fulfilled my dreams of using my talents of cooking and writing, and especially of helping people, in very special ways. As I unlocked each of these special powers, I realized that I was a true superhero, able to overcome a learning disability and to help other kids conquer their disabilities, too!"

“If you hadn’t had challenges yourself, you might not have been able to do all that,” Lilly admitted.

“That’s right!” said Hope Man. “And now I’m here to show you that if I can reach my goals and watch my own dreams come true, so can you! Now, I’ve heard you have a special talent for playing the piano?”

“I love it more than anything else,” Lilly said. “Sometimes I dream of being a famous piano player—but I’m not sure how that will work out...not with my autism.”

“That’s where you’re wrong,” Hope Man told her firmly. “Believing in yourself is the first and most important step, Lilly. Now, come with me.”

Before Lilly knew what was happening, she and Hope Man were soaring through the living room window and up into the clouds above, leaving her dog Max behind. They went fast and high, but Lilly wasn’t frightened because Hope Man was holding onto her. He flew on his belly, his cape flying back, his shoulders and his arms stretched straight ahead, just like all the superheroes Lilly had seen in comic books.

When they came to a stop and Hope Man’s magical light had shimmered away around them, Lilly saw that they were in a large concert hall. The audience was full of people, and there, in the center of the stage, sat a pretty young woman dressed in black, her hands flying over the keys of a grand piano as everyone looked on in wonder.

It didn’t take Lilly long to recognize her older self. “That’s me when I get older!” she cried, turning to Hope Man.

Hope Man grinned back at her. “That’s you, Lilly.”

“But-but,” Lilly stammered, “I’m a famous piano player, just like in my dreams!”

Hope Man wasn’t nearly as surprised as Lilly was. “You can be that and a whole lot more if you just focus on being Lilly, rather than focusing on autism. Use the gifts your maker crafted you with to reach out and inspire the world. You have greatness inside of you, we ALL do,” he said gently.

The smile that lit up Lilly’s face was huge and genuine. “That’s right,” she whispered, encouraging herself. “I can do it. In fact,” she looked up at Hope Man, “I think I’ll grow up to be a superhero, too! You can call me Hope Girl, and we can work together, helping other kids with disabilities, just like you helped me today!”

“What a wonderful idea!” Hope Man exclaimed.

What about you? Will *you* use your own special talents to reach out to others and become a superhero, just like Paul and Lilly? You have greatness inside of you too. Find your super power inside and shine your light brightly for the whole world to see.

Please listen, learn and donate to support families challenged with Autism every day at: <http://AutismRadio.org>