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## How A Disabled Chinese Immigrant Turned Polio And Ableism Into Becoming An Apple Executive And Author

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Libo Cao Meyers was an 11-month old girl living in China when she was diagnosed with polio. She immigrated to the United States at 24, where she eventually married and gave birth to two sons. Nowadays, Meyers works in Silicon Valley, where she works at Apple as a high-ranking engineering executive. What's more, Meyers is the author of an upcoming book, a memoir titled *Limp Forward: A Memoir of Disability, Perseverance, and Success*. The name of the book is an homage to Meyers' lifelong limp. According to her website, pre-orders for the work begin Tuesday, May 23. Despite her successes, attaining them hasn't been an easy for Meyers.

"Of course, you can imagine any kid was a disability, you have to grow up in a relatively harsher environment. It doesn't matter which country you are in," Meyers said recently about being disabled in an exclusive interview. "By the time I got to college, I was told by one of the deans of my school that I wasn't really going to get into any college regardless of my [SAT] score. At that time, I wanted to study computer science; however, computer science is a very hot major, and unfortunately, at that time, I couldn't pass my [physical education] test, I remember I got I got all A's in all [the academic subjects]. However, I couldn't run fast enough, or even run at all. That was the time that I realized that there is a certain expectation [in] society on people with disabilities."

Meyers eventually would find herself at Apple when, in 2011, she jumped out of bed and excitedly told her husband "Steve Jobstouched my soul!" after reading Walter Isaacson's biography on him. "I just applied and then within a couple of weeks, I made to Apple," Meyers said of joining the company over a decade ago. "I've been there ever since."

Asked about her book's origin story, Meyers said *Limp Forward* came to be at the height of the pandemic. There was a dramatic rise in anti-Asian rhetoric during this period, and Meyers felt a strong motivation to share her life's roots. "I realized that I have a responsibility to do something about it," she said. "However, I wasn't sure what exactly I was trying to achieve at first, so I decided to just write down my life as an Asian immigrant to this country, at least to pass down my stories to my sons."

She continued: "However, as I sat down to write each Sunday, something shifted within me. To piece my life together, I asked my parents to share their own life stories and soon found myself with a wealth of material for a family history book as well as my own stories. As I delved deeper into the project, I began to feel a sense of responsibility to share this work with the world. I felt that my story, and those of my family, could help to bridge gaps between communities and inspire those in need."

Despite a compulsion to tell her story, Meyers admitted it was a "difficult decision" to publish. She's an intensely private person outside of work.

"I am not a public figure and have always preferred to stay out of the limelight," she said of her outlook on life. "I have lived my life quietly, without much engagement on social media, allowing me to focus on my own passions without distraction."

She works in the tech industry now, but Meyers didn't grow up with technology all around her like so many young people (like her children) do in contemporary times. She explained technology "was not a major part of my life" growing up in her village. That would all change in 1996, when she connected to the internet for the first time, telling me the experience "changed my perspective on life." The web "opened up a new world" for her as she began to realize the immense and far-reaching power of potential technology on her everyday life. "It was through technology that I realized that there was another way of living and that I could try new things and live a different kind of life," Meyers said.

One of the things she most appreciates about technology is its ability to level the playing field to marginalized and underrepresented people. Accessibility features like the ones Apple announced this week, have a unique ability to bestow unprecedented levels of what Meyers described as power and equality. Particularly for members of the disability community, she said, "accessibility features built into products have changed the way people with disabilities interact with the world." Of course, she knows this ideal intimately, saying she uses exoskeleton technology that, she told me, helps her "walk better and work out better so that I don't let my polio contain the athletic side of me."

Of course, Meyers was quick to caveat the obvious by rightfully pointing out just because assistive technologies exist aplenty means not that all technology writ large is accessible to everyone. That's a primary reason so many in the tech sector are so bullish on doing this type of work—they know it's a never-ending, evergreen endeavor. As so many who work in accessibility often say, there's always going to be more work to be done. Meyers concurs with that sentiment. "While technology has the potential to do great things, it is crucial that we work to ensure that it is accessible to everyone, regardless of their economic situation," she said.

Apart from her career at Apple and writing her memoir, Meyer told me she's heavily invested in the advocacy aspect of the disability community. She's dedicated herself to helping give disabled people "gain more visibility and voice in society." To that end, Meyers serves on the board of Hope Services, a non-profit organization founded in 1952 whose mission it is to "improve the quality of life for people with developmental disabilities and mental health needs." Meyers is grateful to have the full support of her employer as she does her part to give back to others in her community. She explained volunteer work in various capacities is something she's done for several years, but it wasn't until 2020 when she sought "more consistent and impactful [ways]" to pay it forward. It was then that she decided to join Hope's board of directors. "My main goal in working with Hope Services is to help empower individuals with disabilities and increase awareness about their needs and challenges. I believe that early intervention and access to resources can greatly improve the quality of life for people with disabilities, and I hope to contribute to that effort," she said of working with Hope. "As a board member, I have been able to participate in discussions about the challenges facing non-profit organizations, such as funding constraints and logistical issues. I am continually humbled by the work that Hope Services does and the impact they have on their clients' lives." Looking towards the future, Meyers' ambition is rather plain: she wants to keep pushing forward not only in her work at Apple, but in her work with Hope Services as well. She's excited to watch both facets of her life expand and grow. Personally, Meyers has a few projects in the pipeline. She's hoping to promote a book authored by her father, in which he chronicles 80 years of China's history told from his perspective. Additionally, Meyers is currently engrossed in training for her next martial arts belt with her boys. She's committed 5–10 hours per week in core muscle work with the goal of someday being able to run. In spite of her jam-packed schedule, somewhat incredulously, Meyers said she has her Sundays and nights all mapped out "for the next three years."

So, why go forward with *Limp Forward*?

"I see *Limp Forward* not just as a book, but also as a platform for people to connect and share their stories," Meyers said. "I never set out to create a formal community, but I'm thrilled that it's been a catalyst for people to engage with each other and with the broader public. I'm eager to see more diverse voices represented and to help people use their experiences to advocate for themselves and others." In the end, the hard work was well worth the reward in Meyers' eyes. "I've been overwhelmed by the positive response to my book, and the many people who've shared with me their own experiences and journeys with disability," she said. "I believe that when more people speak openly about their challenges and successes, it can inspire greater resilience and mutual support in the wider community."

Meyers' hopes and dreams can be distilled into a single word: resonance.

"I hope that it [the book] will connect with readers and make them feel less alone, as well as provide a glimpse into the experiences of Asian Americans," she said of her book's hopeful impact in the long-term. "Though it required sacrificing some of my privacy, I believe that the potential impact makes it all worthwhile. The world indeed needs more diverse voices from everyone, which brings different perspectives."



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