

NO BARRIERS

Written by

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Inspired by the true events of
Erik Weißenmayer.

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FADE IN:

INT. HIGH SCHOOL GYMNASIUM - DAY

The high-energy workouts of a physical education class.

We move past TEENAGERS engaged in various exercises. A basketball bounces off a student's foot and rolls the gymnasium floor until it stops against a thick blue mat.

A WHITE CLIMBING WALL towers behind with staggering colored holds running up its surface. Then--

THUD! **ERIK WEIHENMAYER** (15) slams down on the mat INTO FRAME. He rolls to his knees. His eyes swell in frustration as he punches the mat...

...making the other students laugh.

MRS. MUNDY, a stern teacher with no trace of playfulness, marches up to Erik holding a cane.

MRS. MUNDY

Just like everything else we've done -- sloppy and disgraceful.

ERIK

I told you I couldn't do it. I didn't even want to try it.

MRS. MUNDY

Yes, you did, and I ignored your request. The lesson here young man is you need to be careful and take small steps. Activities that once came easy now have their barriers, especially at the beginning. Understood? Good. Let's take this harness off and I'll help you to the bathroom before next period.

As Mrs. Mundy removes the harness, Erik notices the silence that has replaced all physical activity. He hears whispers and giggles. He feels the students staring.

Erik hangs his head.

Alone and humiliated.

ERIK

Can we go now, Mrs. Mundy?

MRS. MUNDY
I couldn't hear you, Mr.
Weihenmayer. Speak up.

ERIK
Can we go now? --Please?

Mrs. Mundy guides Erik's hand until he clutches her arm. She puts the cane in his other hand before leading him through the students and towards the exit.

MRS. MUNDY
Remember, your proper cane
technique. Tap your cane in front
of one foot, and then the other.

ERIK
Can you stop?

Mrs. Mundy opens the door and bumps into **JERRY**. He's an energetic black man in his early 50s, whose kind eyes make one overlook his large figure draped in athletic gear.

JERRY
There is nothing better than
opening a door and finding the
great Erik Weihenmayer. Now, I can
see what your thinking. But I have
never lost a free throw challenge
my entire life. I have a perfect
record, so if you expect me to take
it easy on you, you have a better
chance of winning the lottery.

Erik's head stays hanging. His mouth closed.

Jerry looks at Mrs. Mundy. No words needed. He gets it.

JERRY (CONT'D)
I was just kidding, Erik. Ask
anyone breathing, I'm the world's
worst free throw shooter.

Still no response. Jerry notices the students watching and squats down, speaking softer.

JERRY (CONT'D)
Tell me what's going on in that
head of yours. --Erik?

Erik pulls Mrs. Mundy through the door.

Jerry watches Erik walk down the hallway until the bell rings, carrying us to--

EXT. HIGH SCHOOL (BUS PICK UP) - AFTERNOON

School's out. Energetic voices and screeching brakes fill the clear blue sky. A TEACHER calls out directions near the line of buses, but it all falls on deaf ears.

We PAN over to--

A DUMPSTER

Mrs. Mundy stands alone, patiently waiting. Moments later, a GRAY VAN pulls to a stop. She opens the door but doesn't enter, choosing to step aside and clear her throat...

...signaling for Erik to come out from hiding behind the dumpster. His cane leads him into the van, quickly closing the door.

The van drives off, rattling.

INT. VAN (MOVING)

Erik lays on the backseat below the windows, hiding from the students as the gray van drives past.

ERIK

Did we pass them?

JERRY (O.S.)

You are plain childish, Erik.

Recognizing the voice:

ERIK

Jerry?

Jerry is behind the wheel glancing at his rearview mirror until Erik POPS INTO FRAME behind him.

JERRY

Oh, thank goodness. You're here. I was worried I'd have to talk to an empty backseat the whole way home.

ERIK

(stern)

Why are you here?

Beat.

JERRY

Because you always know how to make a person feel welcome. Thank you.

ERIK
I just meant, Mr. West always
drives me home--

JERRY
--And he does it perfectly. I know.
But I use to drive this van before
coaching football took over my
afternoons. I kind of miss it.

No response. Jerry checks the mirror--

JERRY (CONT'D)
Still don't feel like talking?

Again, no response.

JERRY (CONT'D)
I'm going to let you in a little
secret, Erik. I can read minds.
It's a gift and curse, especially
when you're a single man my age,
but I've always been able to feel
when somebody is being torn up
inside--when they need to get
something off their chest.
(looks in rearview)
So, what do you say?

Beat.

ERIK
I don't belong in this van.

JERRY
Oh, you don't. Why not?

ERIK
Because I don't.

JERRY
Or, it's because you believe this
van should only be used by cripples
and wheelchair riders--helpless
kids who wear leg braces.

ERIK
I didn't say that.

JERRY
You didn't have to. Mindreader.

Erik scowls. Then softens.

ERIK

I'm sick of the teachers. I'm sick of every adult telling me what to do--telling me what they think is best for me.

JERRY

You do know those teachers are trying to help you.

ERIK

Embarrass me is more like it.

JERRY

You really believe that, don't you?

ERIK

I don't need their help. I don't need anyone's help.

JERRY

Is that so?

Jerry holds up his right hand--

JERRY (CONT'D)

Hey Erik, how many fingers am I holding up?

Erik, disgusted.

ERIK

You're not funny.

JERRY

I'm not trying to be. You have a new reality, Erik. --And whether you want to admit it or not, you have (a disability--)

ERIK

(over)

No I don't.

JERRY

You're blind. There's no denying it. But you're not as blind as you think you are. And if you stop fighting everyone, you'll learn to understand that.

Erik shakes his head--

ERIK

You have no-- You have no idea what
I'm going through.

Jerry looks at Erik in the mirror, irritated.

JERRY

Make me understand then.

ERIK

I feel stuck. Like I'm trapped. I'm
15 and my life is going backwards.
I can't walk without bumping into
something. I'm always scraped and
bleeding. I can't read. I can't
wrestle or rock climb. I can't-- I
can't go to the bathroom alone. And
I hate it when the kids do what
they did today.

JERRY

You mean stare.

Erik nods--

ERIK

They think I can't see them, but I
do. I can feel their eyes and I can
hear their--

(punches seat, frustrated)

I just want all you assholes to
leave me the hell alone.

SCREECH! Jerry yanks the wheel right and slams on the brakes,
heaving Erik against the back of the front seat.

JERRY

Get out.

ERIK

You want me to get out? It takes 7
turns to get to my house and you
only (took 3--)

JERRY

(over)

Get your sorry, complaining butt
out of my van.

Erik opens the door and scurries out onto--

EXT. PARKING LOT -- CONTINUOUS

TIGHT ON Erik as he listens. Did Jerry leave him?

Hardly.

The van's engine turns off, relaxing Erik. He hears the door open, followed by the trunk. After that--

SILENCE.

ERIK

Jerry?

WHACK! A BASKETBALL strikes Erik in the chest. He keels over, more stunned than anything, as the ball bounces off in the opposite direction.

ERIK (CONT'D)

What the hell, Jerry?

Jerry picks up the ball and walks towards Erik, stopping directly in front of him.

JERRY

Listen to me... you're blind.

ERIK

NO, I'M NOT.

JERRY

You're blind.

ERIK

(softer)

I'm not.

JERRY

You can't catch a basketball.

(beat)

Unless... This time I'm going to tell you when its coming, and you I want you to put your hands out.

ERIK

But, I (can't--)

JERRY

(over)

Put your hands out... NOW.

Jerry passes the ball. Erik throws his hands up on cue and stops the ball before it hits him, catching it.

Erik, surprised.

JERRY (CONT'D)

You may not want to be blind, Erik, but you are. The answer isn't to fight everyone. You need to let people in. Let them help you, just until you get your feet wet, because if you do, you can learn to catch again.

Erik nods, lowering his guard. Soaks in the words.

ERIK

I don't know how to survive being blind. I'm scared I'm going to be pushed to the side and forgotten.

JERRY

You can't see the orange on a basketball--or an oak tree, sunset. But you can visualize what you can do. Seeing and visualizing are two completely different things. And the latter is more powerful than you could ever imagine.

Erik takes a deep breath, focusing.

ERIK

I want to try climbing again.

JERRY

I was hoping you'd say that.

A WOMAN'S VOICE interrupts, revealing to Erik we're...

EXT. GYMNASIUM SIDE DOOR -- CONTINUOUS

...back at the high school. Mrs. Mundy approaches.

MRS. MUNDY (O.S.)

Hello Jerry.

(turns to Erik)

Nice to see you again, Mr. Weißenmayer.

ERIK

(to Jerry)

You brought me back to school?

MRS. MUNDY

Yes, he did. After checking in with your mother, we thought you can give rock climbing another try. Today. As in, right now. In an empty gymnasium you have all to yourself.

ERIK

You planned this.

JERRY

We might have exchanged a word or two... But Mrs. Mundy's right. The gymnasium is empty. Not one teacher or student will be allowed inside. You have my word.

Then something happens. Something unfamiliar to both Mrs. Mundy and Jerry.

Erik smiles.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL GYMNASIUM - AFTERNOON

A HAND REACHES FOR A CLIMBING HOLD ON THE ROCK WALL. MISSES.

ERIK SLAMS DOWN ONTO THE THICK BLUE MAT.

ERIK TRIES AGAIN... AND AGAIN.

AS JERRY COACHES FROM BELOW--

JERRY

You have to learn how to break through barriers. You have to look inside yourself because that's what needs to grow. You can't see with your eyes, but you can with your brain. Your brain is listening, touching, and processing vision. You must push the parameters of what you can do. That's the only way to break through, to live a no-barrier lifestyle which is about living with a purpose, pushing fear aside, and living the life you always wanted.

ERIK'S HAND REACHES UP AGAIN, AND WE--

CUT TO:

EXT. MOUNT EVEREST - MORNING (18 YEARS LATER)

...AS A GLOVED HAND GRABS HOLD OF THE SNOWY MOUNTAIN.

THE REAL ERIK WEIHENMAYER IS CLIMBING THE PEAK OF MOUNT EVEREST. AS HE ASCENDS, HIGHER AND HIGHER, WE HEAR A VOICEOVER FROM HIS INSPIRATIONAL SPEECHES. PHOTOGRAPHS, HOME VIDEOS, MAGAZINE COVERS, AND INTERVIEWS OF ERIK SUCCESSFULLY CLIMBING THE SEVEN SUMMITS--THE TALLEST MOUNTAINS IN EACH OF THE SEVEN CONTINENTS. ERIK KAYAKED THE ENTIRE 277 MILES OF THE GRAND CANYON, BECAME AN AUTHOR, MOTIVATIONAL SPEAKER, AND STARTED A NONPROFIT ORGANIZATION--

AND HE DID IT ALL BLIND.

FADE TO BLACK.

THE END.