

What Being Tall Means to Me

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“Do you play basketball?”

At 6’5”, that question usually comes before my name. Strangers ask it on the street, in line at the store, in job interviews, and in classrooms before class. I always notice a flicker of expectation in their eyes - as though my height has an assigned script to follow. When I tell them I don’t play, a heavy pause always follows, as if to quietly shame me. I’ve been told that being tall is an advantage, something everyone else wishes they had, a gift. For me, it means standing out when I wish I could just blend in, awkwardly bending down in pictures, and folding myself into an airplane seat. To me, being tall means realizing that I need to define myself beyond what people assumed when they looked at me.

I have noticed that people usually have assumptions about me. From the moment I crossed that invisible height threshold, gym teachers, coaches, and strangers began looking at me with a glimmer of hope or expectation - like how you look at your lottery ticket before the numbers are drawn. I always smile, nod, and omit that my coordination is a work in progress. Height didn’t come with athleticism, rather the expectation, which I feel is somehow worse.

The physical implications are a whole other story. I love to travel and fly, but airlines clearly didn’t design their seats for someone like me who can’t splurge for premium economy. Buying pants isn’t a shopping trip, rather a scavenger hunt, complete with stages, quests, setbacks, and sometimes without a prize at the end. My shoe size is somewhere between “limited inventory” and “mythical creature.” Hugging elderly relatives is always an awkward dance, making sure Aunt Suzanne isn’t at belt height. I’m always crouched down in group photos, a little cut off at the top, always the reason for a retake at “a better angle.”

However, I’ve realized that tallness doesn’t always show up in the inconveniences. A moment that really puts me back into perspective happens occasionally. At the grocery store, an older woman reaches for something on the top shelf, just out of her grasp. She sees me, and a wave of relief washes over her face. I reach up and effortlessly grab her desired item, and she politely thanks me, as if I’ve done something heroic. At that moment, I feel as if I have.

Those moments seem small and irrelevant, but it reminds me that being tall isn’t just about being useful on the team, but about being useful anywhere to anyone. This really inspired me to invest more time into service. I’m the one who people call to change a lightbulb, hang a banner, and look over a crowd to find a missing friend. As I work and volunteer, I know that I am capable of helping set up, serve, and take down. I can do anything for someone who might find it a bit more difficult.

Being tall is awkward. It is inconvenient, humbling, and is not what people make it seem to be. But it also means that I have a special set of skills that almost no one else has. What I once saw as a problem, turned into an opportunity and readiness to serve. Tallness has made me more physically present in the world, with that comes a natural way to influence people for good.

This is what being tall means to me: not a highlight reel of athletic achievement, but an honest, sometimes comedic, meaningful way of moving around in this world – and the end, being grateful for the view.

