What Being Tall Means To Me

Prime Sterling

I first noticed the abnormality of my height on the playground in elementary school. The stark realization that looking down at all of my peers was not everyone's experience was jarring, to say the least. Since then, I've been complimented by adults, many of my friends have expressed jealousy, and I've experienced the occasional dig at my height. My adversary is usually equipped with the unoriginal "How's the weather up there?" and "Fee-fi-fo-fum." There are many stories that include being asked to retrieve something from the tallest shelf, having to prove my height by touching a door frame or ceiling, squeezing into an airplane or car seat with my long legs, and even getting stuck under a table after an earthquake drill. A few years ago, I vividly recall my principal approaching me during lunch, interrupting a conversation. He asked me why I was on a middle school campus. With my obvious confusion, he continued to explain that as a high school student, I wasn't allowed on campus- that I was actively trespassing. My friend and I hurried to explain that I was actually in eighth grade at the time. In hindsight, it's a funny story, but now I wonder what would've happened if he didn't believe us.

Despite all of this, I tend to forget how uncommon it is to be taller than six feet. It's strange to admit, especially since it's very noticeable from the outside. While sitting with friends in class or lunch, unless they're substantially vertically challenged, I'm provided the illusion of us being the same height. That illusion, when we both have to stand up from a piano bench to depart for our next class, and our parting embraces force me to crane my neck to accommodate them. Each time this occurs, it serves as a sharp indication of difference I fail to anticipate.

Not only am I one of the few black students in my circle, but my height also

unmistakably sets me apart from my peers. It's uncomfortable when I tower over a dance partner to the point of having to switch multiple times to find the right match. This past fall semester, while rehearsing for my high school's production of Mamma Mia!, the issue of costuming became particularly challenging. Many of the suits and accompanying pants that were already in the costume closet from past years were too small, tight, or short for me. With my principal role of Harry Bright, our final bows included glam outfits. While the five other characters who had matching costumes were finished and ready to wear on stage by opening night, the costume master and seamstress scrambled to find a pattern to base my pants on. Four out of our five shows ended with me being the only person out of six not being able to wear full glam costuming. This is just one of many moments where my height is not those I collaborate with.

Even with the troubles of my height, I can't help but express how grateful I am for it. Whether it's me being the first person someone thinks of when they need help or being the only person in my family who can put the angel atop the tree, I find that my height grants me many privileges. Recently, when leaving a choir concert with my best friend, a girl who stands a little over five and a half feet, her father ran up to us and, after complimenting us on our performance, he hugged me and thanked me for consistently walking his daughter to the car after school to help her feel safe.

My height is many things, and I've found that beyond the jokes and moments of embarrassment, it's allowed me to become the person I am today. I'm larger than life, and I put my best foot forward- even if it's a size fifteen.