

## What Being Tall Means to Me - Marvin Chen

Being tall is like carrying a longer ladder—heavier to bear, yet capable of unlocking access to greater heights. As the tallest person in most rooms, I learned early on that my height would set me apart and influence my experiences, interactions and identity in profound ways. Being six-foot-three, I have come to see my height not only as a challenge, but also as a gift, as well as a source of inspiration that has helped me grow mentally and personally.

Unlike what many of my peers might believe, my height has not always been an advantage. As someone who often towers above those around me, I have experienced feelings of self-consciousness and discomfort—for instance, when being part of a class picture. Literally standing out from the crowd, I felt exposed and unable to blend in. In social settings like these, my acute awareness of how different I am from others evoked a feeling that I didn't belong. Over time, my height forced me to accept how I stand apart from others, and I realized the emotional weight that comes with a difference beyond one's control. Furthermore, it obliged me to adapt to a world tailored to people of average height. In mirrors, I crouch to see my face; on beds, I curl up to fit comfortably; in classrooms, I move to allow students behind me to see. Before I could see my height as a strength, I first had to face the pressure of existing outside the average.

Over time, the initial insecurities I felt about my height gave way to an embrace of the advantages it provides. Being tall afforded me unique opportunities to grow, particularly through my athletic successes. Encouraging me to pursue volleyball, my height provided me with a powerful edge, enhancing my ability to run, jump, and spike. It became an inborn gift in my role as a middle blocker, furthering my ability to contribute meaningfully to my school team. However, being tall did not solely empower me—it enabled me to empower others, too. Whether adjusting a clock for my teacher or helping fellow passengers retrieve luggage from overhead bins, I have frequently applied my height as a tool to care for those around me. These experiences gradually reshaped the way I viewed myself, transforming my height from a burden into a source of strength and purpose. I realized it was a blessing, guiding me to my place in the world while also propelling me through personal growth.

As I embraced my role as a tall person over the course of high school, my intrinsic mentality developed alongside my body. My height motivated me to abandon the teenage urge to fit in and instead actively seek out opportunities to showcase my individuality. For instance, my self-esteem in what others may view as a “nerdy” quality rewarded me with a fulfilling leadership role as Co-President of Math Club at my school. I taught and continue to teach lessons with confidence, making my unique passion for math apparent and inspiring peers to engage with the subject as well. Thanks to my height, I adopted a new mindset—one that yearns to distinguish my identity. Through this transformation, I discovered how much impact a few extra inches can have on who I am and how I think.

Ultimately, my height has served as both a challenge and an asset, and its influence has bolstered my self-confidence. The perks and hardships that accompany being tall have helped define me as a person—one who has embraced themselves and their differences. I am fortunate that my height is a lifelong gift that will guide me as I continue climbing the rungs toward becoming a better version of myself.