

## What Being Tall Means to Me

Lindsay Lyman

We played in the waves of an unfamiliar beach, not noticing the slight current, the rocks, and how far we had moved from the sight of our parents. Before I knew it, I was standing on my tiptoes, jumping up when each wave came. I knew we went too far, yet I held my tongue, scared to be called a baby. Within minutes, we were swept into a rocky area, the waves picking up. We started to shriek. Swim away, I thought. But before I could, I was pushed underwater by someone, my feet hitting the bottom, my head not breaking the surface. The girl on top of me thrashed, using my body to propel herself. Waves swallowed me while my lungs screamed. I kicked to the surface, took one gulp of air, and was pushed down again by the clinging hands. This time, my legs crumpled against a cluster of rocks. I could not even register the pain. My worry was finding footing to push up again. Looking through the water at the sunlight, hoping, praying that I'll make it there.

Time must have skipped because suddenly, I was being scooped up by my mother. The girl who had clung to me was pulled away, the other children were rescued and taken to the beach. They were crying and scared with some scratches, meanwhile I was coughing up water and taking panicked breaths as blood gushed down my legs. But the real difference was our ages; I was three, and they were six.

After the panic of the incident faded away, I was frustrated at the girl who was three years older yet picked me to be the one to use as a buoy. But I was glad I was able to hold my own and help someone else stay alive. Glad my height enabled me to swim with the big kids.

My height has shaped my identity my whole life. At 3 years old, I was the size of most 5-year-olds. At 5 years old, the size of a 7-year-old. Being a tall child was normal in my family, but irregular everywhere else. During playtime, I would become the pretend mom, mimicking the behavior of my parents. Looking at someone in the eye gave me an advantage. Speaking to adults was never scary or unusual, teaching me how to put myself out there and giving me more adult-like roles, like junior counselor at a young age.

I did not, however, fit in with my friends physically. Towering over people can seem intimidating. From early on, I had to make an extra effort to show that I was still one of them, just taller. To show my friends that I related to their issues and passions, not those of the person they originally perceived me to be. My height has always been with me, serving as a constant reminder that I am always presenting myself to the world. You are how you are perceived, and I was proud to be perceived as the life saver, pretend mom, or junior counselor. My friends looked up to me, and I didn't want to let them down.

Today, I am 6'1". Not the tallest person ever, but still tall enough to be recognized. I am confident in my size. Comfortable with the looks, jokes, and comments. Proud of the person it shaped me to be, who doesn't hesitate in stressful situations, who isn't scared to be the leader, who is more than happy to tackle her challenges head-on. I have learned the importance of first impressions. The importance of searching beyond the surface, understanding perspective, and embracing differences. The importance of walking into a new room with your head held high. And I am ready for the new rooms. Ready to learn, ready to find my way yet again, to straighten my shoulders and stand tall. Ready for my next chapter, college.