

What Being Tall Means to Me

By Jeremy Burman-Bildfell

I was 11 when I arrived at summer camp with my friend. We were both the same age and had been going to that camp for years, but this was after covid and there were many new faces. We walked over to meet our new cabin mates and the first thing I heard was “is that a counselor”. I didn’t understand why they thought this. I didn’t look that much older than them and was dressed much like an 11 year old would. As life went on there became more and more experiences like this and I realized that it was because of my height. Being an introverted kid, I hated it. Because it’s hard to be shy, but also the first thing that people see when they walk into a room. Being ginger just added fuel to the fire (no pun intended), being called a lighthouse or a torch. I would wait for a shooting star or 11:11 on the clock and wish to be shorter just so people stopped noticing me.

Being tall and looking older at a young age also raised people’s expectations of me. Whenever I tried a new sport I was always expected to be great. “Why aren’t you good at basketball you’re so tall” was one I heard the most, but every sport I tried just ended in me hating it because of all the expectations on me. Eventually I became a dancer which was a bit different from all the other sports I played but still came with the same tall comments. I stayed with dance, but it was a lot harder for me than the others. First off I’m a boy, so that created its own challenges socially when I was a kid, but being tall made it hard physically. While all the girls were doing splits and bending themselves in half, I was still trying to touch my toes. It was an unfair disadvantage, but I was still expected to be great because I stood out.

As I continued my dance career it forced me to be less shy. Performing on stage and expressing myself in front of people went from a horrifying nightmare to a regular occurrence. Because of this, I also became more comfortable with being tall and in turn became much more social. I would walk in a room and want to be the first thing that people saw. When people would comment on my height I would use it to start a conversation. If someone told me I should “stop wasting my height” (I heard that an insane amount of times), I would just shrug it off.

Eventually I stopped treating my height as something to be comfortable with, but instead used it as an advantage. I ironically started playing basketball and progressed so much faster than others because of my height, joining a rep team within only 2 years of playing. I became the strongest dancer at my studio and it allowed me to be an asset when it came to lifts and harder moves. I accepted that I look older and used it to be a more commanding presence while teaching ski lessons and finally becoming the camp counselor everyone thought I was. I turned my height from being an insecurity to one of my biggest strengths and forced me to become the person I am today.