

What Being Tall Means to Me

Being tall is a blessing, and a curse. It comes with an imposing presence baked right in; whenever someone tall enters a room there is a tendency to watch them, as if their very presence was a siren's song to seafaring sailors. However, it also comes with a lack of anonymity. Oftentimes, my height of 6'2" is perceived before I am, people ask me if I play basketball or football, despite the fact that I haven't held a ball since my elementary school days. In many ways, I am judged by expectations that I never even knew I was supposed to live up to.

Expectations creep into every aspect of society. Without even realizing it, the reader of this essay has already more than likely made an assumption - that I get my height from my dad. I do not. At a strong 5'4, my dad is a short man, there's no getting around it. I inherited my height from my mom, in fact, who's 5'11". She taught me that being tall is not a weakness, it is a strength that should be leveraged wherever it could.

My mom is tall in a world that doesn't expect a woman to be tall. Being perceived as tall for a man is generally a positive trait - in a woman, it almost seems frowned upon for its abnormality. She didn't see it like that. She leveraged her height as a built in ethos, her height giving her an automatic authority that made it easier to lead and command respect. She quickly climbed up to higher up the ladder, and eventually, to the manager position of the bakery and deli. She knew that her height was an advantage, and she was so proud when her only son grew up to be tall, just like her. It was my mother who taught me how to leverage this gift, a trait that allowed me to occupy a room and be seen, like so many others struggled to do.

One of the first times I actually felt that my height had helped me was when I landed my job at the Lodi Kumon Center. My mom had given me the same advice she had always done, which was just to stand tall; my height already spoke for me. She explained her secrets to me,

how people notice me everywhere I went, and I just needed to stop self-sabotaging. And sitting across from my interviewer, I knew she was right. Even if I was a little bit jittery at times, my presence never left.. There, I finally learned how to play the cards I've been dealt to their fullest.

Being tall is still a curse, but as I have matured, I realize it's far more of a blessing. There are the odd moments, where I get confused if I'm my dad's dad, or when people question my relationship to him. People can't handle a tall woman, much less a man shorter than his son by a foot and a half. These moments remind me of the expectations that are not only placed on my shoulders, but the people I associate with as well. I've learned to live in the awkwardness, as the upside represents a privilege that many people don't experience. I might not always use this gift to the fullest, I haven't played basketball since I was 5 feet tall, but I have learned to leverage it with intent, so that it works with me rather than against me. I choose which occasions and expectations to rise to, just as my mom taught me.