“What Being Tall Means to Me” by Jeremiah Aziz

My mom often jokes I became the tallest in our family through sheer determination. Having been the fourth-shortest member for many years, I declared I would one day surpass them all. I first passed my mom at 5’8”, then my older brother at 6’ and finally my dad at 6’2”. I now stand 6’4”, and my doctor thinks I still have a little more to go.

I remember being a first-grader and looking up so high at my teacher. As the years moved on, our eyes gradually grew closer and closer.

In ninth grade, I visited my elementary school again. I remembered huge ceilings and long halls, with my teachers standing above me. When I walked those halls for the first time in years, I was astonished at how small and cozy everything felt. And when I said hi to my teachers, I was shocked to tower over them all.

To me, being tall means seeing the world differently. It means I can always see at plays and movies, at the cost of blocking others. It means constantly being asked and having people surprised at my height, by friends and strangers alike. It means looking down on people in a way I don’t think about until I see somebody else tall eye-to-eye. It means feeling excited to have a child to lift on my shoulders so they can see just as well as I can.

It’s peaceful being tall. My line of sight is rarely interrupted. In crowds, I can carry forward and observe my surroundings without being stuck. I can find my friends in the halls, and they can likewise find me.

It’s always fun to stand up after a meal or just as class ends and stretch to my full height. I immediately feel free.

Being tall is also about slouching in my seats so I can better see eye to eye, needing to squish myself into cars, being able to warn people of incoming raindrops, and always getting high-up things for people.

Once at a Trader Joe’s, a total stranger came up to me and asked me to get some greens down off the top shelf for her. I was completely shocked, since I’d never been asked for help in this way before. I agreed, and got them. I handed them to her, and she thanked me. What a small moment that was, but it made me smile for the rest of the day. My height allowed me to connect with a person and do them a tiny favor, and that made me so delighted.

I remember throughout my life, year after year, lining up back to back with a friend or family member to compare. Sometimes I’d beat them, sometimes not. As I grew taller and taller, my competition waned. Eventually, there was nobody left for me in my grade. I didn’t even need to stand back to back anymore, I just had to stand up, and it was clear I’d won. My height reminds me of everything I once was, and everything I still can become. It’s a marker of my growth and childhood, and all the experiences I had at each new inch I grew.

To me, being tall is something that makes me unique; something that lets me see life from a different perspective; and something that will allow me to help others in a small way for the rest of my life. I’m incredibly grateful that I get to be tall.