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"What Being Tall Means to Me"

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My Mum often tells me about how, at 10 years old, I burst out in tears while she was driving me home from school. Confused, she asked me what was wrong: I was upset that I was going to be the shortest person in our family forever (*please hear my 10-year-old despair and drama in that sentence*). My older brother (age 13) had hit puberty and now was at least a foot taller than me, a fact that he didn't hesitate to remind me of. My mum, dad, and aunt would help me reach things that were too high, which was deeply annoying to my emerging independence. And to make matters worse, my classmates had grown over the summer; I was now also the shortest person in my friend group. My mother also reminds me that I spent the next two years frequently bemoaning to my family about how I would be short forever.

Now, as a seventeen-year-old girl who's 5'11" – 6'2" when I risk walking in heels – I can't help but laugh at this memory with my (5'9") Mum. Over five years, I've alternated between being proud and embarrassed of my height; I remember after my first growth spurt, I would sometimes hunch over to pass by unnoticed. But my height has also become very handy: I can pick the apples at the top of the (dwarf) tree in my family's orchard, my long legs are a speed advantage during cross-country running, and I can now reach the chocolate my Dad hides at the back of our tallest cupboard. What's more, I'm now asked so often about my height that it's become a source of entertainment: when someone asks me how tall I am, I'll say very confidently that I'm 5'8" and watch as everyone around me recalculates their own height relative to mine.

However, being a tall woman is not without its inconveniences: I've come to terms with the fact that most of my pants will always be slightly too short, maxi dresses will become mid-calf length, and chairs, doorways, airplane seating, and countertops constantly remind me that my body doesn't fit the 'average'. And sometimes, my height gives people an excuse to question my femininity and make assumptions on who I am as a person. I've lost count of how many times I've been asked if I play basketball, and I clearly remember when a classmate looked up at me and, in all seriousness, demanded "why are you so tall?!"

Yet my height has also helped me build a lot of confidence. Instead of allowing myself to shrink from attention, in the last two years, I've grown into it. If my physical visibility means I'll be noticed more frequently, then I want my presence to be a positive influence on those

around me. Simultaneously, my experience as a tall woman has exposed me to how frequently we judge people by their appearances. It saddens me that, as a society, we've become so obsessed with averages: anyone who differs from it by a few inches becomes the subject of endless commentary. Yes, my height may be intimidating to some, but wouldn't the world be so boring if everyone looked the same?

I'm excited about my future undergraduate studies (International Relations and French) at the University of Toronto for this exact reason. Coming from a rural town on Vancouver Island, British Columbia, living in a city where I'll be part of a community of diverse ideas and people is an exhilarating prospect. For me, being tall is no longer a source of shame, instead it's just a singular quality that does not define my whole identity. Beyond helping me pay for university textbooks, I will use this scholarship to purchase airplane seats with extra legroom on my flights to/from university in September, at Christmas, and after my April 2027 exams.