

To me, being tall means more than just standing out in a crowd; it means learning to hold your shoulders up even when people keep knocking you down. For as long as I can remember, I have been taller than almost everyone around me. In elementary school, I was the one in the back row of every class picture. By middle school, I was taller than most of the school. While teachers would comment on how lucky I was to have “model height,” my classmates often turned my height into a joke. Somewhere between the compliments and the teasing, I stopped knowing how I was supposed to feel.

Being taller than my friends made me feel like I was always under a spotlight I never asked for. When we lined up in the hallway, I stuck out. When we sat in assemblies, I worried about blocking someone’s view. Even walking into a room felt like making an announcement without speaking. People would say, “Wow, you’re so tall!” as if it were the only interesting thing about me. I know most of them didn’t mean to be unkind, but hearing it over and over made me feel less like a person and more like a measurement.

The teasing hurt more than I liked to admit. There were jokes about how I should play basketball, comments about how I must have trouble finding dates, whispers that I looked “intimidating.” I laughed along sometimes, pretending it didn’t bother me. But when I went home and looked in the mirror, all I could see was someone who didn’t quite fit in. I didn’t feel graceful or confident. I felt awkward, like my limbs were too long and my presence too large.

So I tried to make myself smaller. In pictures, I would bend my knees or slouch so I wouldn’t tower over my friends. When I walked through crowded hallways, I slumped my shoulders and lowered my head. I trained myself to shrink, as if taking up less space would make me more acceptable. “Stand tall,” adults would tell me, smiling as if it were simple advice. But standing tall felt like volunteering to be noticed, and being noticed felt risky.

Over time, though, I began to understand something important: shrinking myself didn’t actually protect me. Slouching didn’t stop the comments. All it did was make myself uncomfortable in my own body. I realized that the real challenge wasn’t my height, it was my confidence. Being tall was something I couldn’t change, but how I carried myself was something I could.

I started small. I practiced standing straight in front of the mirror, even when it felt unnatural. I reminded myself that taking up space is not the same as stealing it. I paid attention to the way confident people walk into a room. They were not apologizing for who they are, but not demanding attention either. Slowly, I began to lift my shoulders instead of rounding them forward. I let myself be exactly as tall as I am.

Now, when someone comments on my height, I try to respond with a smile instead of embarrassment. I am learning that being tall is not a flaw to hide or a feature to explain. It is

simply a part of me. And more than that, it has taught me resilience. Every joke I endured, every moment I felt out of place, pushed me to grow stronger inside.

Being tall means I will always stand out in some way. But it also means I have learned how to stand up for myself. It means understanding that confidence isn't about blending in; it's about accepting the space you naturally fill. Today, when I hear the words "stand tall," they mean something different. They no longer feel pressure. They feel like permission.