

What Being Tall Means to Me

By Nicole Elizabeth Hensley

As far back as I can remember into my adolescence there was one question I was continually asked while growing up, "Do you play basketball or volleyball?" At the age of eight years old I really could not comprehend why I was always asked this question. Much to their surprise and astonishment when I responded that I was a competitive gymnast and a swimmer, most suggested that I should really consider playing basketball or volleyball. During my elementary school years, I can remember I was always referred to as being the tall girl with long legs. True, there were certain times that this did not play in my favor for example when taking a group photo, I was the only girl in the back row of the picture with the boys, and typically all you saw was my head. Trying to point my toes and keep my legs straight while mastering the uneven bars resulted in pure frustration. Shopping for clothes was yet another challenge, pants were always too short for my legs and my shoe size was never in stock. At this point I came to realize that I was tall, and I was going to continue to grow based on my pediatrician's predictions and one day I would likely be six feet or taller.

It wasn't long after I began to accept and embrace the fact that I was going to be tall and I developed a new appreciation for my height and the advantages that would come from it. I continued competitive swimming and retired from the sport of gymnastics to pursue my passion of horseback riding and playing the piano. For me, being the tallest in the group held a special level of accountability and I found that others would look up to me for my leadership and direction. Often due to my height and maturity I was regularly mistaken for being older than my age which resulted in the ability for me to take on more responsibility in my community. I take pride in my volunteer and community service activities in which I have orchestrated a leadership role; working as a small group leader for vacation bible school for second grade children, organizing a team of teens to build shoeboxes for children in underdeveloped countries, and taking the time to play the piano for long term care patients.

As an ambitious and self-directed young adult this leadership opportunity came naturally and provided me with the exposure to really appreciate my height and take on a level of confidence that really shaped who I am today. Being tall has allowed me to lead by example for others to follow. The key underling point here is that in being tall you are usually the first one to be noticed and the last one to be seen. In today's social infiltrated media environment, any opportunity to be a positive role model and influence choices and decisions for our young community is an important responsibility I have taken on with pride. It was through my passion for horses that I began to identify with my academic and career goals. In the fall, I will be attending college to pursue an undergraduate degree in Molecular, Cellular, and Developmental Biology with the aspiration of acceptance into Veterinarian School to specialize in large animal medicine. I feel that being tall is a special gift that I am grateful for and my purpose is to continue to use my height in a way to serve and mentor others building confidence and human kindness.