

Afi Koffi

Ms Pahomov

English

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Wow, You're Tall

I'm tall. I know that I'm tall. Since before I can remember, I've been tall. So trust me, you don't have to remind me every few hours. Being tall is a hereditary trait, it's not like a cold that you catch somewhere. And it's not something that happens all at once. I didn't grow from 5'0 to 5'6 overnight. Yet, people can't seem to stay away from the ridiculous, demeaning nicknames. Skyscraper, giraffe, and tree are just a few of the things people thought it'd be funny to call me. To them they were just jokes, but this was an issue I'd deal with for a very long time.

From a very young age, I've been exposed to the stereotypes that come with being tall. When I was in first grade, I realized that I was different from the other kids. In the middle of the day, directly after recess, my teacher, Ms. Martha, pulled me away from the other kids to speak to me. I was immediately intimidated because we were walking towards the time out seat, something I had never been in. I soon realised this conversation was about something much different.

"Afi, I need you to be considerate of the other kids," my first grade teacher, Ms. Martha, said.

After reflecting on what I was just told, I asked, "What do you mean considerate?"

"Well, I mean careful and thoughtful of the other students," she answered.

"I haven't done anything to bother them," I explained

"No you haven't, not intentionally. You see Afi, you're tall, taller than the other kids, so there are things that you just can't do. For example, you can't sit in the front during class or brag about the sports you're good at, because you have an unfair advantage over the others." After prohibiting me from doing all the things I enjoyed doing she asked, "Do you understand?"

I pondered for a while and finally cried, “But that’s not fair. I’m a good student that’s why I belong in the front of pictures and in class. I haven’t done anything to deserve to be put in the time out seat. Besides, you don’t make Derrick or Cynthia sit out on things for being too short and that’s basically the same thing.” I remember being livid and upset more at myself, then at anyone else. For the rest of the day and for many more years, I’d ask myself the same question. Why did I have to be so tall anyway?

For my entire life, people had many questions to ask me. I specifically remember this very baseline conversation I had with classmate of mine. After staring at me for what seemed like an hour, she finally mustered up the courage to ask, “How tall are you?”

“I’m five foot six” I replied.

“Are you really that tall?”

“Yes,” I answered, already getting annoyed by this conversation. As I assumed, the conversation didn’t get any better. She continued to ask her questions, with amazement in her eyes, and I continued to answer her redundant, annoying questions.

“Yes, my parents are tall. That’s kind of how this works.” “Yes, my kids are likely to be tall, that’s kind of how this works.” “The weather is the same up here as it is down there. It’s not like you could jump and be in a different season.” “No I don’t play basketball. I don’t play volleyball either.” “I don’t know if I can touch the rim. It’s not something I try after every inch I grow.” “Well... I’m sorry for making you feel short, I guess.” “No, I am not a model.” “No, I never tried to be a model.” “No, I don’t plan on becoming a model.”

Being tall had limited me in some areas but pushed me in others. As I grew and became more mature, I’ve learned to get used to being tall and though it is something I still battle with today, I wouldn’t want to be any other height. Through these experiences, and many more, I’ve learned that I can’t let the way society views me control the way I view myself. In everything I do, I am confident and I stand tall, reminding people that I’m more than my physical attributes. Afterall, great things come in tall packages.

