

A Tall Tale

Category: Disability

written by Ronna L. Edelstein | October 2, 2025

No physician would diagnose me with a disability. That label comes from within myself; it has been with me since I was age twelve and reached my adult height of 5'8". I felt like a physical outsider—a Brobdingnag in a world of Lilliputians. Walking through the halls of junior high and then high school, I adopted the turtle trudge—head buried in my shoulders to try to take inches off my height. All I succeeded in doing was ruining my posture and causing my neck to constantly ache.

Peers reinforced my self-defined disability by calling me the Jolly Green Giant or referring to me as Olive, a reference to the tall, lanky Olive Oyl of Popeye fame. Even the tallest boys refused to dance with me at school events because I made them feel short. I always got stuck with Freddy, the shortest boy in the class. Neither of us enjoyed doing the box step together.

My sense of being disabled due to my height followed me throughout my life. I married the first tallish man to ask me, choosing him because he was several inches taller than I was, not because of a deep feeling of love. Unsurprisingly, that marriage ended in divorce. I attended one single's event, leaving when a rude short man asked me how the weather was up where I stood. I should have told him it was less polluted than the air he tainted, but instead I ran to my car in shame. I communicated a sense of disability—one that the whole world acknowledged.

For far too many individuals, disabilities are real—amputations, hearing and seeing challenges, and other diagnosed issues. For me, my disability is all in my mind. It has eroded my self-esteem, turning me into an introvert incapable of engaging in any kinds of casual conversation. I would never wear high heels like the statuesque Nicole Kidman, and I would never stand with tall pride like the players in the WNBA. Being tall has been a detriment to me, a disability that causes me to retreat from the world. It is the bane of my existence.

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