

“What Being Tall Means to Me”

From a young age, I learned that I was different than most of my classmates. I was tall; super tall. This gift of “tallness” is extraordinary and only a select few are given it, so I push myself and drive hard every day. To me, being tall means standing out, making a difference and taking action. If a person is tall he/she is looked at differently and I want that look to be a **virtuous** look. Consequently, my life has been dedicated to being a leader, serving others and making a difference.

Like being a leader in my high school actively involved in Student Government. Also, being chosen to the Principal’s Cabinet, the High School Leadership team, and the mentor program for incoming freshmen. Leading these groups and collaborating with others has been an amazing experience. I’m the tall kid amongst these other leaders.

Similarly, while other boys were playing video games, I was accumulating more than 21 merit badges, fulfilling requirements and working on my project to earn the rank of Eagle Scout. As a Scout, I had the opportunity to gain leadership skills as well as be of service to the community. The Eagle Scout Service Project was the culmination of 10 years of leadership training, and required a significant effort while honing in on my leadership skills. Only 4 percent of eligible Scouts have been able to make it to the end and earn Scouting’s highest honor. My tenacity has helped me be successful.

In addition, most teenagers never get the chance to actually live with those from different parts of the world, but I have had the opportunity twice. Yui from Bangkok Thailand and Laura from Vigo, Spain were exchange students that lived with my family and me. It was hard at times but my eyes have been forever opened in a way unlike most to the differences in lifestyles. By opening our home, I feel we have helped and connected with the larger community and introduced our smaller community to more diversity. In our increasingly interconnected world, I have learned that greater global knowledge and an appreciation of all cultures is essential.

Further, I’m passionate and motivated about serving others! The social issue that means the most to me is helping combat the inequities for the disfigured especially those with Venous Malformation (VM), a rare vascular anomaly disorder, affecting 4% of children at birth. Children are born with painful, abnormal veins producing permanent patches on their skin (limbs, trunk and even their face) resembling spots on a giraffe. As one grows, the purplish area spreads like creeping ivy on a trellis. Unfortunately, society does not accept people who look different and there is limited awareness of VM. Therefore, I took action and launched a non-profit organization supporting those with Vascular Anomalies called Venous Malformation–Parker’s Project where countless teens, parents and others have been touched through support of my organization. We work to support and fight the social injustice many experience.

Now, I am prepared for a multi-cultural life and the 21st century with a mindset of service, leadership, and collaboration which will help me take on new situations. I often wonder, if I had been born shorter would I have had the confidence and tenacity to accomplish what I have thus far? I think not and I am happy my “tallness” has given me the power and confidence to do so much with my life. This is just a warm up, more to come.