

On being tall

COMMENTARY

By Jody Russell

It was a glorious September morning. The sun had risen, the dew was being to evaporate off the lawns and the trees had begun their ascent into color before their descent to the ground. Beautiful morning. And I was walking the dog. Feeling tall. My back straight, my shoulders back and I was definitely feeling long and tall. What a morning.

Later in the day, I went off to photograph a high school football game. Seventeen- and 18-year-old boys loomed over me. Shoulder pads wide, helmets hiding hair, giant boys. They are awfully tall. It felt downright dangerous to be standing so close to them. After all, I stand 5 feet 2 inches and not tall at all.

Not tall if I compare myself to others, that is. How is it that I had felt so tall that morning? So it got me thinking. Do I define myself for who I am? Or do I define myself in comparison to others?

In general, I think I define myself in comparison to others. I am – heavier or shorter or darker or grayer or stronger – than the other person. I feel young when I'm with someone much older and then old when I'm with teens. I feel relatively wise when I'm pondering but then sometimes naïve and simple when I'm with someone truly wise. It's not a matter of lack of confidence or happiness – I have an abundance of that – but just how I see myself.

But what if I defined myself without regard to others? What if I defined myself by virtue of who I am, and who I want to be?

My mother sent me a birthday card last week. An African saying was on the front:



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Jody Russell stands next to senior Nick Harris, at 6 foot, 6 inches.

“If you can walk you can dance, if you can talk you can sing.”

I can neither dance nor sing, I thought as I opened the card, wondering how this birthday card was going to turn out OK.

But inside, in that handwriting I recognized instantly as that of my mom:

“If you can write, you

can be an author,

“If you can take a photo, you can be a photographer,

“If you can get an idea, you can make it happen.”

And then it dawned on me. I am tall.

Jody Russell is an Eden Prairie Web designer, photographer and writer.