

sophisticated and tall"? You never hear the words "elegant and sophisticated and short" strung together like a string of pearls. Elegant and sophisticated, along with radiant and impressive and stunning, are reserved for people of the tall persuasion. (You've heard, no doubt, of "tall, dark and handsome"?) Police academies, movies and fashion magazines cheerfully corroborate the idea that value is measured by the inch. We all know stories of five-foot, six-and-a-half-inch men trying to stretch themselves the extra half inch needed to become policemen; short actors play love scenes standing on orange crates so they measure up to their taller female costars (unless, of course, they're Woody Allen and Diane Keaton); and the pages of *Vogue* are a world of willow-tree women. And now the music business has got into the act.

A popular song called "Short People" is spreading the news:

"Short people got no reason to live.  
They got little hands and little eyes,  
They walk around telling great big lies,  
They got little noses and tiny little teeth,  
They wear platform shoes on their nasty little feet."<sup>1</sup>

Randy Newman, the fellow who wrote "Short People" (he is five feet eleven), says that the song is, of course, a parody of all prejudice and narrow-mindedness. The Little People of America aren't buying that. This national organization, 3,000 strong, has demanded that radio stations boycott the song. They have a very limited sense of humor about being the butt of a satirist's joke, and a lot of disc jockeys and station managers agree with them. But at least one has carried the joke even further. Burton L. Levine, the owner of WROV, in Roanoke, Virginia, had his six-foot-two-inch creative director, Kevin O'Neill, record "Tall People" as a rebuttal, and it's now played at popular request, usually in tandem with the Newman song:

"They got arms like gorillas and long hairy toes;  
When you're standing beside 'em you got to look up their nose.  
They got long skinny fingers and big floppy feet,  
And they're starvin' the world with all the food that they eat."<sup>2</sup>

Recently Steve Lawrence (five nine) and Tim Conway (five eight) recorded another "Tall People" song—on the Midget record label. Which brings up the interesting fact (or theory, depending on how loath you are to let go of your larger-than-life images of these people) that some of your basic Hollywood sex symbols are—yes—short. Henry Winkler is exactly five feet six and a half. Al Pacino and Dustin Hoffman and Woody Allen and Paul Simon all hover around the same mark. It is not known that anyone has ever got close enough to Robert Redford to measure, but New York mag-

azine once ran a whole article on the subject of his alleged height, drawing graphs on pictures of Redford walking next to trash cans and then speculating on his height based on the actual known measurement of the trash can. (They concluded that he was five feet nine and three quarters.)

All of which brings up the question: What is short and what is tall? According to the Little People of America, the line of demarcation is four feet ten. According to my friend Audrey, the nurse, short is anything less than her own imposing five feet ten. "I don't think of myself as tall," she says. "I think of others as short." Now, that is crazy. Also crazy is the fact that my friend Cindy, the lawyer (five three), who wants desperately to be a tall person, organizes her life as if she were and puts everything way up high on her kitchen shelves. And also crazy is the fact that when I told my friend Emily, the photographer (five two, just barely), that I was writing an article on being tall and being short and I wanted to interview her, she began, "Well, I guess I've been tall all my life."

**T**he common denominator in these stories is, of course, self-image, and it's why some of us end up feeling good about whatever particular size we are and some of us don't. I know one little girl, now six years old, who probably will be the best-feeling tall woman of 1998. Her parents, both about six feet tall, know there is a good chance that their daughter will be a giant, and they are determined to help her accept that sentence gracefully. When clothes are outgrown quickly, it's treated matter-of-factly, as a mark of measurable progress. And they never say things like, "Amanda, you're getting too big to sit in my lap."

Lots of us weren't so fortunate in the times of our growing up. "I hated those stupid nicknames," a five-foot woman remembers with venom. "Peanuts. Shrimpy. Peewee. Beanie. They led to pages and pages of agony in my diary." The teens were especially cruel years, for they included the realization that "This is it, folks—I'll grow no more." Dorothy, a five-foot-two English teacher no bigger than most of her eighth-graders, never knew she was short until she went to college. "I had a new boy friend at another school and I thought he was gorgeous," she says. "For weeks I kept talking about how beautiful he was, but when my friends finally met him, they were stunned. 'Yes, he's very beautiful,' they said, 'but he's the size of a peanut.' I hadn't noticed—he cleared *me*."

Talls didn't have it so easy either. They can remember the pangs of regret at the discovery that they couldn't wear puffed sleeves, the years when the boys in their class came up to breast level at a time when breasts were a source of embarrassment anyway. "When I started dating," says my tall friend Wendy, "the boys put their heads on *my* shoulder. There were always wise guys who'd ask, 'Is it raining up there?' Sometimes I'd spit on people and say yes. We had such rigid standards in high school about how

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