

My Own Words

Shawn Bradley On Being Different



Shawn Bradley has played professional basketball since 1993, starting with the Philadelphia 76ers, then with the New Jersey Nets and the Dallas Mavericks. One of the National Basketball Association's great shot-blockers, Shawn led the league with 228 blocks in 2000-01.

Shawn traveled to South Africa in September 2004 to participate in the Basketball Without Borders Africa Camp. An international basketball and community relations outreach program, Basketball Without Borders runs instructional basketball camps in Africa, Europe, South America, and Asia. The NBA and the International Basketball Federation run the programs, which also focus on community outreach and education, grassroots basketball development, product donation, and HIV/AIDS awareness.

Castle Dale is a small town in central Utah. My grandfather's farm is a few miles to the north. I grew up here. Castle Dale has about 2,000 people and just about as many cattle. Milking a cow, feeding the chickens, chopping the wood, and walking the fields to tend the water were daily chores. Grandpa had me carrying a shovel when it was actually taller than I was. This was work and we learned to do it at a young age.

People in this small town knew your business but they also looked out for you. I was tall, very tall at a really young age. This caused all sorts of problems and opportunities. I remember going to an amusement park for my fourth birthday. We arrived at a bumper car ride and everyone got to ride the cars except me. They said I was too old. I remember feeling sick inside because the worker didn't believe me. I was not lying. My folks taught me not to lie. I sat down and started to cry, watching all my friends ride the cars. Finally, my mother realized what was happening and explained the situation. I wasn't too old, I was just taller than kids my age. I was able to ride with my friends after that.

We carried my birth certificate with us everywhere we went after that until I was in high school. My unusual height caused people to look, ask questions, laugh, tease, and sometimes even challenge me to fight. I was teased relentlessly as a kid. It wasn't fair, I knew, but that was just the way it was. Luckily, I was taught at a very young age a very important lesson. I matter and I'm important. No one could ever take that away from me. God loved me no matter what. If everyone in the entire world hated me, God did not. I knew this then, and I know this now. That alone helped me through the frustrations and heartaches of normal life.

When I was in junior high school, I realized something else that helped me cope. Most teasing and harassing came from one of two places—people who were either jealous or ignorant. I couldn't

change the way they were, but I could affect the way I felt. I was not going to feel bad because of their ignorance or jealousy. It wasn't worth it! Realizing this didn't stop them, or change the fact that these comments hurt. It did, however, give me a way to understand these people and deal with their treatment in a way that was okay for me.

These things still happen today. It will probably happen the rest of my life. I will always be 7 feet, 6 inches (2.29 meters) tall. I wouldn't change that for anything. People will always look because it is not every day that you see someone that tall. I learned that at a young age and I now try to teach my own children that they are important! They matter and, most importantly, God loves them. That is the message I give to you. Regardless of your race, religion, ethnic background, or circumstances ... God loves you! ■

Dallas Mavericks' Shawn Bradley (previous page) poses with a fan after a December 2004 game. (below) Shawn pulls in a rebound during a January 2004 game against the Denver Nuggets. (© AP/WWP)

