

DIFFERENT LIKE YOU

Meet teens whose unique experiences might make them seem as if they're from another world—when in reality they're just like you.



I have seven (yes, seven!) sisters, ranging in age from 6 to 22.



Every person is unique in his or her own way, so don't ever feel like an oddball—that's what makes you, well, you. There's no such thing as "normal"!

Genevieve is a Person of Short Stature

At 14, she is only four feet two inches in height—but Genevieve is standing tall.

BY GENEVIEVE HOMEN, AS TOLD TO JANE BIANCHI

I didn't realize that I had a growth problem until I was 7 years old. That's when I noticed that I was the same height as a lot of the 5-year-olds at school. When I asked my mom why I was so short, she explained that I have a medical condition called dwarfism. My pediatrician says that it's genetic—my parents are of average height, but my grandmother's aunt on my mom's side was barely five feet tall, and my dad's grandmother was four feet eleven inches.

At first, I was bummed by the news. I wanted to be tall, mainly because of the way people reacted to me. Kids would say mean stuff, like, "What are you looking

at, midget?" or "It's weird how you're so short." Comments like that made me feel like an oddball. In elementary school, I was like a sponge—I absorbed everything. Whenever classmates would bully me, I'd run away and cry.

Another problem: Partly due to the fact that my lungs are especially small, I have asthma, so exercising can be hard. One time, in phys ed class, I was trying to run 400 meters around a track, and I fell to the ground on my knees, trying to catch my breath. I ended up being OK, but now I have to use an inhaler when I play sports.

Life outside school can also be tough. At the local amusement park, I'm not tall enough to go



I am picky when it comes to books, but I like this series by Lauren Baratz-Logsted. It's about eight sisters—I can relate to that!

on all the rides, so sometimes I have to sit on the sidelines while my friends have fun. And clothes shopping can be frustrating. Often, sleeves are too long on me, or I have to roll up my jeans twice to make them fit.

Sometimes it's even difficult for me to do certain things around the house. I don't like relying on my mom, dad, or sisters to help me at home—I'd rather be independent—so I've learned how to be a creative

JONATHAN SPRAGUE/FREDUX (GENEVIEVE HOMEN)

JONATHAN SPRAGUE/FREDUX (HOMEN FAMILY)

problem solver. For instance, if I can't reach the paper-towel roll, I'll use a flyswatter to push it around so I can grab a piece!

OLDER AND WISER

I'm now in the seventh grade, and I'm four feet two inches tall. I usually grow a little each year, but my doctor isn't sure how much

more I'll grow in the future.

And you know what? It doesn't matter! My

height no longer bothers me like it did when I was little. I met a girl at school named Nevaeh, who is my best friend, and she has helped me realize that it's not what's on the outside that matters—it's what's on the inside.

Nevaeh doesn't even mention my height when we hang out. In fact, if people tease us about being short (she's only six inches taller than I am), we'll crack jokes, like, "We're not short. We're fun-sized!" I refuse to let nasty people get me down. I'd rather turn something cruel into something

funny, laugh it off, and move on.

AGAINST ALL ODDS

One of my favorite things to do is prove people wrong. Take basketball, for example. Since it's a sport associated with tall people, I was determined to play. And for almost two full seasons, I didn't make a single basket! But then, during a game last year, I stole the ball from this girl, and she fouled me. I got to take two free throws, and guess what? I made the first one with a swish, and I knocked in the other off the backboard!



I love playing basketball. One of the best moments ever was when I made two free throws in a game—I couldn't stop jumping up and down!



I was raised around country music, and I love it. I especially like the Kenny Chesney song "American Kids."



I dream of visiting the Caribbean. It looks so pretty there, especially the water.

JONATHAN SPRAGUE/PREX (GENEVIEVE), JOHN LAMPARSKI/WIREIMAGE (KENNY CHESNEY), ISTOCKPHOTO.COM (ISLAND)



You've heard of stand-up comedians? Well, I want to be a sit-down comedian! I like to crack jokes and make people laugh—at home and at school. If someone is upset, my goal is to cheer them up!



Someday I want to drive a Volkswagen Bug, except I want to put huge wheels on it!

ISTOCKPHOTO.COM (MICROPHONE), ISTOCKPHOTO.COM (VOLKSWAGEN), ISTOCKPHOTO.COM (TIRES), JONATHAN SPRAGUE/PREX (GENEVIEVE)

It was amazing. Everyone cheered. I was like, "Oh my gosh, I made it!" I felt so great that I wanted to scream. I was jumping up and down and high-fiving everyone. Later, when the boys' team was playing, they all congratulated me. The experience made me realize that if I can score baskets, I can do anything.

KEEPING IT POSITIVE

I've definitely learned to stop focusing on the negatives in my life and see the good all around me. One time, in a grocery store parking lot, I noticed a guy in his 30s who was a person of short stature, just like me, and he was getting into his truck to drive. When I witness stuff like that, it makes me happy, and it gives me hope, because this guy could obviously get around just fine—and even do things that

I can't do yet, like drive! The same is true when I watch the TV show *Little People, Big World*, which is about adults who have dwarfism. It's inspiring!

The bottom line is, I'm not going to let my height get in the way of achieving my dreams. I have so many interests! I love showing yearling heifers (they're young cows) at my annual county fair, drawing my own wacky cartoons, being a member of my local 4-H group (a nonprofit youth-development organization), and coming up with amazing ideas for my school's yearly talent show. (One year, I put together a cool performance to the Michael Jackson song "Thriller"!)

Maybe someday I'll be an actress—who knows?

Whatever it is I decide to do, I dare you to try to stop me! •



I can do everything you do. Sometimes I just need a little lift!

3 Things Genevieve Wants You to Know

1 CHOOSE YOUR WORDS WISELY. I don't mind being called a "person of short stature" or a "little person," but the term "midget" makes me mad—that's just mean.

2 LOOK AT MEAN KIDS DIFFERENTLY. If people bully you, it's a reflection on them, not you. Maybe they're teasing you because someone teased them, or because they think it makes them look cool. It's not your problem—it's theirs.

3 FOCUS ON YOUR STRENGTHS. People think that being short is a disadvantage, but I don't see it that way anymore. Think about this: It's way easier for me to steal the ball from you when playing basketball!