

From where we stand

By Karrie Carlson, Daily Journal Media, Oct. 8, 2025

I'm not very tall — five feet two inches on the generous side. I have asked strangers to help me reach stuff in grocery stores and I've climbed unsteady structures when nobody was around to help. I have perched on counters to reach mixing bowls in kitchen cupboards. The operators at theme park rides still secretly do a quick double-take to make sure I'm tall enough to ride.

In grade school I was always the kid in the front of the class photo holding the sign with the class information on it — except for fifth grade. That year we had our photo in the afternoon and at recess I had fallen playing kickball and skinned my knee, ripping my tights. My kind teacher saw how sad I was that my outfit was messed up and I got to stand in the back row. I am at the far end and have the biggest smile on my face because I was able to see what it was like to be a tall kid.

When I'm out in a crowd, I see backs — lots of backs. I was good at the sit-and-reach in gym class because my legs are short, but rain means the hem of my pants will always be soaking wet. Those are just things I've always known about myself.

Having babies makes most people wonder which of their traits will be passed down. Year by year, we watch and see our own eyes looking back at us, put a braid in hair that is just like combing our own or watch a smile appear on a face that matches the reflection in the mirror.

Then there are characteristics that come out of a different place altogether. My son is over six feet tall. He was in eighth grade when he passed up my height, but I was prepared for that. It is the fact that he seems, still, to get taller every time I see him (and I see him everyday).

It was just this past year that I stood next to him at an arcade taking turns on a pinball machine that something crossed my mind — I wonder what this game looks like to him? From where I stand and pull the spring to launch the ball into play, I seem to be looking straight out at the lights and the moving features that bounce the silver ball back and forth. It's like looking down a road.

When he plays, he looks down at the machine like a board game set up on a table. He can watch the ball roll around from the bottom of the machine where it takes off and follow it with his eyes up, over and wherever it goes. The whole game looks different to him.

Whether I stand and look at the game or my son stands and looks down on the game, it's the same game. The goal is the same. The rules are the same. We both want to keep the ball in play and earn points. We both enjoy the game, it just looks different and has to be played from how we see it — from our own view.

When he walks through the same crowd as me, side-by-side, what does he see? I look at the backs of people, he sees the tops of heads and faces. Neither view is wrong and neither makes us more or less part of the crowd we are in.

It is a difference in the way we see what's around us and how we take that information into our experiences. I can tell him what I see and he can tell me what he sees. He may think the seats at a show are good and I may sit next to him and not be able to see very well at all. When we recount it, we will tell stories that won't be the same. But each will be the truth to us based on the information we took in from where we were — our point-of-view.

When someone tells you how they see something, their point-of-view, and it makes absolutely no sense to you, picture yourself in front of a pinball machine with them. Imagine life is the game and they are going through the plays the best way they can see from where they stand.