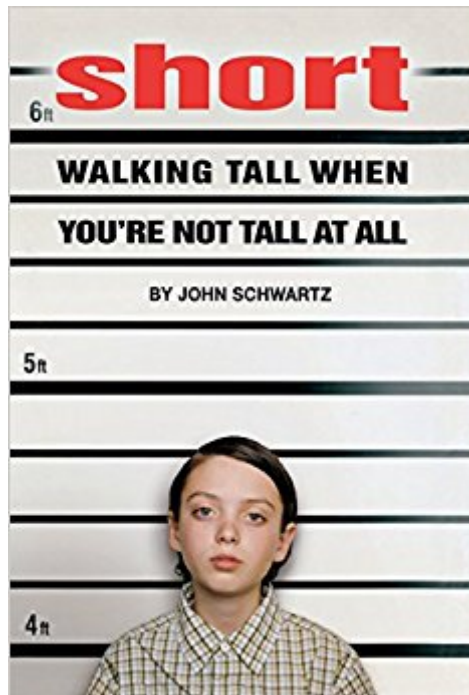




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# Short: Walking Tall When You're Not Tall At All



## Synopsis

A SURVIVAL GUIDE TO GROWING UP SHORT. Part science book, part memoir — a book for everyone concerned about looking (or feeling) different. When veteran journalist John Schwartz took a close look at famous height studies, he made a surprising discovery: being short doesn't have to be a disadvantage! Part advice book, part memoir, and part science primer, this fascinating book explores the marketing, psychology, and mythology behind our obsession with height and delivers a reassuring message to kids of all types that they can walk tall — whatever it is that makes them different. Short is a 2011 Bank Street - Best Children's Book of the Year.

## Book Information

Hardcover: 144 pages

Publisher: Flash Point (April 13, 2010)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 159643323X

ISBN-13: 978-1596433236

Product Dimensions: 6.4 x 0.7 x 8.5 inches

Shipping Weight: 8.8 ounces

Average Customer Review: 5.0 out of 5 stars 7 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #1,394,161 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #63 in Books > Teens > Education & Reference > Science & Technology > Anatomy & Physiology #262 in Books > Teens > Social Issues > Self-Esteem & Self-Reliance #263 in Books > Teens > Personal Health > Self-Esteem

## Customer Reviews

A Q&A with Author John Schwartz Q: What started you thinking about writing Short: Walking Tall When You're Not Tall At All? Can you tell us about the genesis of the project? Schwartz: It all started with drugs. Well, a drug. In 2003, the Food and Drug Administration approved Humatrope, a synthetic human growth hormone, for treating healthy children who were merely small. The hormone had long been approved for use in people with a hormone deficiency, but this was a much broader approval than ever before. I thought it sent a bad message to parents and to kids: being short is a problem, a condition that ought to be fixed. I wrote an essay on the topic for the New York Times "Week in Review" section. That little essay got a lot of attention. I heard from plenty of people who loved the piece. And I thought maybe I should write a book — not for the grown-ups, but for the kids who might be feeling some of the pressures of

growing up small. Q: Can you tell us anything about the personal nature of the topic? Schwartz: You're so diplomatic! I'm short. When the FDA approved Humatrope, it was for any boy who was likely to be less than five feet, three inches tall as an adult. Well, I'm five foot three, and now the government was calling me, officially, short. Short enough to need help! I wasn't too happy about it when I was a kid. I grew up in Texas, and a lot of the kids around me were huge. Huge. But I didn't think I was deformed. Q: Were there any moments in your history that were particularly frustrating, and/or inspirational, about dealing with height stereotypes? Schwartz: When you're little, everybody's a comedian. In the school playground and the hallways, I heard a lot of jokes and put-downs. "Short Schwartz," which almost rhymed, was considered the height of cleverness, and I heard it a lot. Even as a grown-up, when people hear I'm from Texas, many say, "But I thought everything was bigger!" You know, that gets old. But I can't really call this a huge burden. This is really what I'm trying to tell the kids: if this is your biggest problem, you're one lucky guy. Q: As a science writer for The New York Times, you see and assess studies and statistics all the time. How did that help you in examining some of the cultural stereotypes surrounding height? Schwartz: All reporters are supposed to be skeptical. As the old newsroom cliché goes, "If your mother tells you she loves you, check it out." Becoming a science reporter gave me a toolkit that helped me to be skeptical in a whole new way: to check out studies that seemed to say one thing and to find the biases and flaws in the design of the study that mean that they actually didn't say that at all. It also taught me that science can be abused, whether in the name of marketing or for political gain. So as I approached the scientific evidence in studies that height might be more than a childhood annoyance for short people, but that it might be setting them up for failure later in life—well, the toolbox came in very handy. Q: Can you think of a few shorter-than-"normal" people who inspired you growing up or inspire you now? Schwartz: When I was a kid, I was tickled to learn that the first man in space, Yuri Gagarin, was only five feet, two inches tall. (The Vostok cockpit was cramped, and the Soviets chose small cosmonauts.) I loved hearing successful short people joke about their height. One of our United States senators from Texas, John Tower was under five feet six. "My name is John Tower," he'd say, "but I don't." It all helped me to understand that you could be depressed or angry about being little, but the folks who succeeded found a way to laugh about it—and to disarm others by getting them to laugh, too. It's kind of like having a posse, this brotherhood of smallish people. I smile when I see George Stephanopoulos on television, and Mayor Michael Bloomberg leading New York City. Being on the small side didn't hold them back. It hasn't held me back, either. And it won't hold back the kids who read *Short*. Q: What did you learn in the course of researching the book that might most surprise people? Schwartz: The

big surprise was how quickly the supposed evidence that there are big problems with being short fell apart. I figured that I would be giving my readers an on-the-one-hand, on-the-other-hand discussion of the disadvantages of being short. But in fact, beyond having trouble reaching the high shelf, I didn't find any studies that really supported the idea that being short was a disadvantage— even those much-publicized studies that seem to say small people earn less than taller folks. Beyond that, I knew that science can be manipulated and misused, but even I was surprised to see how far people stretched it. I spoke with David Sandberg, a researcher whose groundbreaking work showed that the overwhelming majority of short kids actually cope pretty well with being small. His studies showed that their height doesn't cause them deep psychological stress, and in fact he found that other kids did not see them in a demeaning way. One of his studies, which I describe in the book, is really cleverly designed, and involves asking schoolchildren to cast each other in a play. It's a head fake -- he really used the process to explore the kids' attitudes toward each other. Sandberg was startled to find that his work was being cited to the FDA to support the notion that small kids do have big problems!

Grade 7 Up— Looking to dispel the popular myth that shorter people don't do as well in life, that they encounter far more difficulties, earn less money, and aren't as happy romantically as their taller counterparts, the author breaks down related studies and explains the real statistics behind the headlines and hype. In a style that is funny, accessible, and irreverent, Schwartz deftly handles topics such as human growth hormones, bullies, genetics, and the psychology of being short. Interviews with a variety of experts are included, and the author does an excellent job of clarifying complicated statistics. In this part memoir, part self-help book, and part treatise on why the media and the medical establishment have blown short stature way out of proportion, the author uses his own experiences and those of others to demonstrate how many of the myths are wrong. Booktalk this with Dan Elish's *Born Too Short* (S & S) and Joan Bauer's *Stand Tall* (Putnam, both 2002) as a fun way to get kids interested in the topic— Jody Kopple, Shady Hill School, Cambridge, MA  
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This book is supposed to be for young people...between the ages of about 12 and 18, but the message is so good and can benefit anyone, young, old, short, tall, skinny, fat, or whatever. I knew about the book because it was written by my son, John. He is the third of four sons...the first being twins. The other three boys are average size, but John was always small - "the runt of the litter". He did get bullied at school. He even got bullied on the school bus on his way to school, but one of his

older brothers, Dicky, got on the bus with him one day and announced that anyone who picked on his brother, Johnny, would be dealing next with him. No one wanted to deal with Dicky. John found activities to do in school that weren't affected by his size. When John was young, a doctor suggested that we give him growth hormones. These hormones were the newest big thing in medicine. Maybe they would have given him an inch or two, but we were concerned about any side effects they may have. As it turned out, very serious side effects were later discovered. Not only that, John looked perfect to us. I can heartily and happily recommend this book to all children and adults...and not just because I'm his Mom.

This highly readable and deeply moving book isn't just for short kids -- it's perfect for any young readers who've ever been ostracized because they're built differently. (For that matter, it's perfect for the ostracizers too.) Schwartz is a former science reporter for The New York Times (he also trained as a lawyer and recently became the paper's national legal correspondent; so much for any easy myths about stature and achievement) and his sections on the science of shortness are particularly good reading. His clear, brisk explanation of the statistical analysis behind marketing to short people is worth the price of admission all by itself. As good as the science stuff is, though, this is at its heart a book with a humane message: Anybody who tries to make you feel bad because you're different doesn't have science, logic or history on his side.

The author is the principal character in this book. He grew up in Galveston Texas below the media height of most normal sized kids. The book spends a good amount of time describing that, and how he saw it and felt it. I'm 5 foot 5 inches myself and it's a difficult read in some places. I can hear the rationalizations and feel the same pains of growing up short in a place (Texas) where tall is the norm and anything else -- just wasn't acceptable. Imagine being sidelined in gym class because the teacher is afraid of getting sued for getting them hurt?! Through it all he seems to have come out with a level head, though admits if you listen to everyone else, being "short" is your problem and nobody else is really paying attention. I know a few bullies in real life that tend to dispute that and to this day revel in any advantage they have in height.. but that's beside the point of this review. I'm still reading the book, I take it in measured pauses.. it seems like one life lesson at a time. But I'm not looking forward to the end. Hope there's a sequel of sorts or perhaps an ongoing blog somewhere to go with the book.

This is an informative, thought provoking, friendly to read book about what it's like to be on the far

end of an average. I learned a lot. I didn't know that I am a good 5 inches taller than the average American woman. I didn't know that exercising as a child helps make bones grow. I didn't know that in China there are height requirements for jobs and schooling. It was interesting to realize how much in common people on both ends of average have. The jokes. The bullying. The preconceived notions people sometimes have. I really related to the author's experience growing up. I was charmed by the author's stories. I felt like I was having a conversation with him as I read the book. I highly recommend it and am going to recommend my daughter's school library purchase a copy of it for the parents section. Come to think of it, this book would be a wonderful read for a teenager who might be struggling with feelings about their height.

I love the way this author wrote about being short. Especially talking of the many challenges he faced in acquiring clothes to wear. I thought it was funny when the author talked about getting clothes that were formerly worn by boys at their Bar Mitzvah. Especially getting out those cake stains with the first dry cleaning. He described himself as being built like a pack animal. I wondered if he meant an alpaca. I think I would have loved to joke with the author and tell him that big and tall people have their challenges when it comes to finding clothes for their bodies. Besides they don't make night shirts in 4xl or 5xl sizes that are pure white. Only 3xl is sold by some companies. I have diligently searched the web for such companies and no such company exists.

This book debunks many of the myths about being short. It is well worth the read for anyone, short or tall.

Journalist John Schwartz knows just how it feels to be short. He's heard all the jokes and put downs. In this book he takes a close look at famous height studies. The more he learned about being short the more he has learned to embrace it. I think that kids short or not can take away a good message from reading this book. Outward appearances are not important no matter what the media would like for you to believe. Children need to learn that they are who they are and that's a good thing! It covers the topic of self esteem in a humorous way.

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