

# Cross Current



Volume 35, Number 3

January 17, 2010

## Big Shoes To Fill

Robert Wadlow lived life large. He was the world's tallest man.

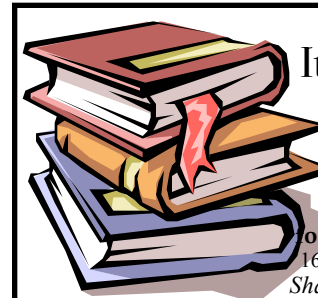
Born on February 22, 1918 in Alton, Illinois, Robert was an ordinary eight-and-a-half pounds at birth. But he weighted 30 pounds at six months — twice the usual size. At age five, Robert stood five-foot-four and was wearing the clothes of a 17 year old.

Ironically, Robert's astonishing growth was due to the body's smallest organ, the pea-size pituitary gland. It produces growth hormone and, in his case, it made way too much. Today the problem would be fixed with surgery and hormones, but not in the 1920s.

In 1927 Robert was spotted by some newspaper reporters in St. Louis, Missouri. They photographed the nine-year-old who was six-foot-two and weighed 180 pounds. After the publicity, people drove to Alton from all over, just to gawk.

By his mid-teens, he started to outgrow the world around him, making even simple pleasures impossible. His hands grew so big he couldn't play a guitar or operate his camera. On his sixteenth birthday, Robert was seven-foot-ten and 370 pounds. All his clothes had to be tailor-made using three times as much cloth. The biggest shoes available were 15s but Robert's feet eventually grew to size 37. Worse, his fast-growing bones couldn't get enough calcium so the teen was weak and unsteady, even when using a cane.

When Robert went to college, he was eight-foot-three. The big man on campus had trouble holding a pen in his massive hands, couldn't work the microscope in biology, and his 18-inch-long feet wouldn't fit



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on ordinary steps. Literally unable to fit in, he was often lonely.

Dropping out of college, the gentle giant wanted to open a shoe store. To get the money, he made public appearances. He and his dad were inseparable but Robert endured the same, tired jokes everywhere and people often kicked or pinched his legs, to see if he was on stilts.

Then, in July 1940, Robert got infection from an ankle blister caused by a metal leg brace. When he died, he was eight-foot-eleven — seven inches taller than the previous record holder. Robert's 1,000-pound casket was carried by 12 pallbearers and eight assistants then buried under eight feet of concrete because his father wanted to ensure his resting place was one of honour and dignity.

Just like Robert Wadlow, we in the community of faith outgrow much of the world around us, but in a figurative sense. We don't fit, and we don't fit in. It's not that we're superior in any way to those around us. In fact, as we grow spiritually, we see more clearly our own moral weakness and need for God's help and forgiveness.

It's just that we no longer value many of the things others place so much stock in, like power, popularity and possessions. *"Yes, everything is worthless when compared with the infinite value of knowing Christ Jesus, [and becoming] one with him,"* says Paul. *"I no longer count on my own righteousness [but] I become righteous through faith in Christ."* (Phil. 3:8,9) That means living for him because he died for us, taking our place and punishment on the cross.

Of necessity, we have a different perspective and that doesn't always endear us to those who see the rejection of conformity and uniformity as social deformity. We're often ridiculed and misunderstood because of our beliefs and behaviour, and those who suspect us of being phoney sometimes do the emotional equivalent of pinching us or kicking us in the shins to see if we're on the level. Through it all, you must *"worship Christ as Lord of your life. And if someone asks about your Christian hope, always be ready to explain it... in a gentle and respectful way."* (1 Pet. 3:15,16)

Yes, we're sometimes weak and unsteady, and we walk through life with the crutch of faith, but without apology. It's anything but shameful to admit we need help. And when we're done, our Father will ensure we have a place of honour and dignity. Til then, walk tall.

