

Basketball Shorts

I have kept the same pair of basketball shorts since the summer before I started the ninth grade. I used to wear them all the time, but now that I have discovered that not every occasion is suitable for basketball shorts I keep them in my drawer. Since I have had them for so long I believe my basketball shorts is not just the hub in which a number of memories are stored by the catalyst for them. When I look at my shorts or throw them on, I think of a number of memories: the first time I ever used the boys bathroom, the time I got assaulted by my gym teacher, I think back to when I committed to play for Morton College on the kitchen table, among many others. When I wear my shorts around the house or look at them I am not flooded with all these memories at once and they do not come in a strict chronological order but in a randomized and shuffled up mess. These shorts are a portal where I can be in the present moment and move along my past at my own will.

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I remember sitting at the kitchen table. It was May and spring was finally drawing near. Grass was beginning to poke out of the snow and the air began to feel a little warmer. I was seated next to my sister and we had cleared all the place mats. My dad came from his office in the basement and gave us each our documents to sign. We were signing our letters of intent to go to Morton College in Cicero just outside Chicago. It was only a junior college, but it was a start. My dad, my sister and I had gone to visit multiple schools over spring break and had decided it was the best option. Signing gave us a miniscule moment of relief. We had both worked so hard and we finally had a place to continue our education. I was so excited and I had felt so proud of us. It was rare that siblings got to play on the same college team and we had

achieved it. We were both dressed ready to go for a run afterwards. I was wearing my favourite basketball shorts and the free shirt I had gotten from the Morton coach on my official visit. My mom and dad insisted taking a picture of us seated next to each other after we signed. I did not feel the need to take a picture because although I was proud, I felt like this was just the beginning. I felt like this was a stepping stone to something better and I knew there was more work to be done.

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I also think of the time I used the men's washroom for the first time. I had been struggling with my identity. I had no clue what was going on, I just did not feel right. I knew something was wrong, I was not like my friends or my teammates. I felt different and out of place wherever I was. I felt embarrassed when my parents made me go to therapy. My therapist had suggested trying to dress and act as full male role for a complete year. That whole challenge or prospect mortified me. I could not possibly do that full time. I was on the women's basketball team, everybody at school knew who I was. The school I went to at the time had only maybe a thousand kids and all my classmates I had known since kindergarten. Everyone would look at me if I went into the men's washroom. Someone would stop me and point me in the right direction. People would talk, my teammates would find out and I could possibly be alienated by my teammates. I had never used the men's bathroom since I was a kid and I was at the mall with my dad. What if it was super busy and all the stalls were occupied? Would men using the bathroom think it was odd that I was waiting for a stall? Should I go in the first time with my dad? Would that be weird? I remember going into the bathroom with him when I was a small child but I was much older now. All these questions were going through my mind and it made the stress to complete this task that much worse. Finally, after weeks of torturing myself I had had enough.

I threw on my favourite pair of basketball shorts. They provided comfort and lots of guys wear basketball shorts when it's hot outside. I would fit right in I thought to myself. I put on a plain shirt and tried to flatten my chest out the best I could. I went the whole day conforming to a masculine role as best I could. Nobody seemed to notice or care. I finally had to go use the washroom. I asked my teacher and started roaming around the halls. I purposely went to find a men's washroom that was not used that often and was the most likely to be empty. I looked around and quickly ran inside. I did my business and washed my hands, while I was drying them the door loudly opened. I froze in fear, my heart dropped, what if it was someone I knew? I made a break for the exit and realized it was a total stranger. He just nodded at me and that was that. I felt elated; mission complete. I kept using the men's washroom until it no longer felt like a large ordeal. It began to feel natural. I also learned that most of the time it is you making a big deal out of things and most of the time people are not paying attention enough to notice things.

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I think about the time I was assaulted by my gym teacher. The atmosphere in the class felt different that day. I had worn my favourite gym shorts to class and sat with my friends talking. As we did roll call my teacher called my name and stopped. I had skipped the previous class which was very unusual. I never skipped class. It was the first time I had ever skipped class ever. She laughed and asked me to stand up against the wall which I did. She told the other girls to stand in a semi-circle around me. At first they thought she was kidding and laughed along. She went and grabbed the large old dodgeballs. The hard ones that were still somewhat frozen from being in the back of the storage room. The gym and lower level of the school was built to be a bomb shelter so it was entirely cement and did not have any insulation.

She told them they had to hit me twenty five times, head shots counted, and we were not going to continue class until they were done. Some students whipped the balls as hard as they could, others aimed just for my heels. My teammates were also in my gym class. They too threw balls, but the hardest thing was having my twin sister in my class. She looked mortified. I just stood there with my hands in my pockets not knowing what to do. I played with the fabric of my shorts that were in my pockets and lowered my head. I closed my eyes and waited patiently for the moment to end. I did not bother covering my head. It felt like time dragged on for eternity until they reached their targeted goal. The rest of the gym class had that same strange vibe. Everyone was on edge and a usual game of Wombat Ball almost ended in a brawl between two classmates. The teacher never got fired and to my knowledge not even reprimanded for her what she did. Her child's god parent was coincidentally the principal at the high school. My dad sent emails to the school board representatives but never received any responses. She only apologized to me privately and later to the whole class. Going to gym class the rest of the semester was very awkward and uncomfortable because she was overwhelmingly nice to me. She was trying to make up for what she did. I switched high schools that summer and I have not talked to her since. The following year she ended up representing Canada at the World Cup for curling, I saw that on the news. I am happy for her and I forgive her.

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The only way to preserve these shorts is to keep them. Not all the memories that are linked with them can be digitized, most of these memories do not come with photographs. Nor could I take a picture of my shorts and keep that as a substitute for the shorts. A photograph could not adequately show how comfortable these shorts are and you certainly cannot feel them in your hands. As long as these shorts still fit I will keep them. I asked my sister the other day if

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anything happened to me if she would donate or get rid of those shorts. She said no because she knew they were my favourite and she also thinks they are very comfortable.