

“So what? I said.  
I’m better than you at math.”

Okay, I didn't actually say that.  
But I was thinking it.

You always  
Why don't

We were both 12, Dave and I, but he sported  
a **much** taller  
and  
**much more** muscular frame  
for someone our age...

and he had just made fun of the fact  
that I had worn my shirt tucked in.\*



It wasn't really my choice.

My Dad said I should look presentable;  
going around in an untucked shirt and  
unlaced shoes was presenting the world with the  
wrong image.\*



I did mention  
I was 12, yes?

We were on the bus returning from school.  
I sat in the front, attempting to befriend the driver,  
while everyone else vied for the back seats.  
But once the bus had made a few stops  
and was emptier,  
the back moved forward  
and surrounded me.

dress funny, said Dave.  
you wear **Normal** stuff?

"What's normal?" I asked.  
I really was curious.

**"Where do you get your clothes from?"**

A girl chimed in from two seats behind me.  
She too seemed overdeveloped for our age.

Was I on the wrong bus?

I wasn't sure how to answer.  
I never liked shopping for clothes.\*

\* ( In fact, I was often quite disappointed  
whenever I eagerly unwrapped presents  
from my grandparents only to find  
a folded shirt  
that everyone seemed to  
fuss over but me.\*\* )

\*\* ( It's a shirt.  
Where's the fun?\*\*\* )

\*\*\* ( I shouldn't say that. I did like one shirt I got once.  
It had flags from around the world.  
I used to wear it all the time until one day  
it came out of the washer pink. )

You need to shop at Abercrombie, she continued.  
That's where **Everyone** goes.

I thought about it it.

It was true.

# Abercrombie Surfing 1978

Most of the popular kids at school all went around with the same ridiculous shirts that implied they did crazy activities.\*

\* ( I had wondered what everyone else did after school while I just went home and watched cartoons. )

**Later that afternoon,**

after p r o l o n g e d begging to my Mom to take me shopping, I found myself staring at oversized **shorts** and pre-ripped **khakis** and extra long **shirts** which said things that just wouldn't match up with my short, thin, bushy-haired physique.\*

\* ( Really, why would **anyone** think I was involved in "Abercrombie Wrestling?" )

But that didn't matter. I needed these clothes to fit in.  
Funny thing was, I didn't actually fit in **them**.

# “Do you carry anything with a narrower waist?”

Mom shouted over the music to the girl at the counter.  
I was mortified.

“No that’s the smallest we have,” she replied,  
pointing at the pair of pants Mom was carrying that would have fit  
a boy who could eat me and still be hungry.

“Eric, they  
don’t have  
your size.”

said Mom, thinking I was behind her.  
I wasn’t, but some attractive girl was.

“Let’s just go back to JC Penney where we already know they have clothes for you,”  
she said when she finally found me hidden behind a belt rack.

## B U T I W A S P E R S I S T E N T

I was **determined** to go back to school with something **Abercrombie** ●

The next morning,  
I had managed a way to wear the one pair of oversized pants my Mom had reluctantly bought.\*

\* ( No one would notice my belt with the extra notches holding up the pants high above my waist for the extra-long T-shirt I had made sure was left untucked. )

I waited anxiously for the bus,  
expecting that my change of wardrobe would bring  
about the change in my life that I wanted.

That somehow these magical pants had something  
that would free me of ridicule and give me  
a sense of PLACE.

The kids on the bus noticed and they congratulated me.\*

\* ( But they still  
teased me for the  
rest of the year. )