

“ 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.)