

READING

Chameleon

Our desire to fit in sometimes influences the choices we make. Here, David L. describes what happened once when he went to great lengths to fit in.

High school students are a lot like chameleons. They love to blend into their surroundings. Walk down the halls of a high school and you will see exactly that: students trying to fit in. Similar to chameleons, high school students do it for the same reason—survival. Being singled out is a dangerous thing. In a place where reputation defines you, having anything jeopardize that reputation can prove dreadful. In my freshman year, I was in a group of friends who loved to talk about shoes. Our conversations consisted of shoes, Call of Duty, shoes, girls, shoes, shoes, and school. The more they talked about it, the more I saw sneaker trends everywhere I went. It wasn't long until I figured out that all the "popular" kids had the most expensive sneakers, more specifically Jordans. Looking down at my plain, worn-out shoes, I knew I was no match. How could I expect to survive high school if I had nothing to show on my feet?

That night, I scrolled through page after page of Jordans. Different designs, different colors, but all well over \$100. Which ones were cool? What designs were best? Didn't that one senior wear these? He got a lot of attention at school. Maybe I should get the same. Nah, probably not. Maybe these? An hour into my search, I finally saw the pair I wanted—the Royal Blue 10s. This pair not only had my favorite color schemes (blue, white and silver) but they were, more importantly, "cool" enough for me to be recognized and accepted. In a jungle of trendsetters I was the chameleon trying to blend in.

I woke up at 7 a.m. on a chilly March Saturday morning. It was the day the Royal Blue 10s were being released.

I waited patiently outside the Champs store for two hours. All the guys around me had \$100+ shoes. They discussed the newest releases and the sneaker trades as I stood there awkwardly in my \$60 Nikes. I felt out of place, and even if I could fit in, I slowly realized I didn't want to. My thoughts were interrupted by the sound of a door opening. All heads turned toward the employee coming out of the store. Within 30 seconds, those outside in the cold jam-packed into the small store, dollar bills waving in the air. Stealthily sneaking

toward the front, I got the shoes, paid, and quickly left with a vibrant smile on my face. Whatever doubt I had before had gone.

That Monday, I wore the shoes for the first time. As I slipped them on, I could feel the soft sole press against the bottom of my foot. The new shoe smell flew up my nose. I could just imagine the look of awe on everyone's face, the compliments I would get, and most of all, the recognition. With a delicate hand, I wiped off a minor smudge on the side of the right one. A smile hit my face as I laced them up. Perfect.

There was a hop to my step that day and my head was held just a little bit higher. Looking around, I met everyone in the eye expecting to catch one of them staring at my shoes. First period passed. Nothing. Second period passed. Same thing. No compliments or anything. By lunch, I embraced my disappointment. I had imagined that I would be transformed into a new light, but as soon as I stepped through the school door I was still the same old freshman I was the week before. How could that be? I had the Jordans and everything. Were they really worth \$160 and two hours of my time? Not once did I ask myself whether I truly wanted the pair. The shoes didn't represent who I was, but I had imagined the shoes would help create a better me. What I failed to realize, however, is that when chameleons try to avoid being singled out, they don't fit into their surroundings. They disappear.¹

¹ David Lopera, "Chameleon," in *It's Not the Stone that Brings You Strength* (Boston, MA: 826 Boston, 2014), 77–79. Reproduced with permission by 826 Boston.