

A Trip to Home Depot

At the age of 14, I realized I did not need my father. However, as a child I saw my father as a god. He could do no wrong and any second he could spare for me felt like a blessing. Unfortunately, he didn't have too many of these seconds, so this meant that the moments I did spend with him were a mix of free time and work time. I spent a lot of time on his work sites, usually sitting in the shade of an orange tree playing with a discolored hammer, a rusted nail and a spare two by four. I would sit and watch my father nail plywood to wooden structures with a single swing of a hammer. My father was a large, very stern, man. Horacio Orozco stood 6 feet 2 inches tall, but his chevron mustache, worn out redwing work boots and rippling muscles made him seem a lot taller. He was raised to be a laborer, leaving school at the age of ten to work on his father's farm. Although my father lacked education, he was a skilled man capable of laying cement, attaching water pipes, and, my favorite, climbing trees. The same tasks that would typically need three to four men, were completed by my father. During one of my work sessions it seemed as if he had constructed an entire house in a single day. However, besides tinkering with my two by four, I never got really involved with these projects. The most action I got was throwing scraps of unneeded materials into the dumpster.

Every once in a while the materials on the work site would run low, so my father would jump into his white Chevy Colorado, with some beer in hand, me sitting in the back seat, and take a trip to the store. The first couple of trips I took ended with me sitting in the truck. I would gaze at the monstrosity of a store from the point my father walked in until he walked out. It stood three stories high, built and shaped like a brick. At the left end, it had a huge door with ingoing and outgoing trucks, freshly supplied with cement, tile, gravel, and a bunch of other construction materials. On the right, palm trees, flowers, and different fruits grew like a mini jungle. In be-

tween sat the clearance section filled with lawnmowers and refrigerators the store so desperately wanted to get rid of. The closest I got to seeing the inside was the few seconds between the opening and closing of the automatic doors my father would walk through. It wasn't until 4 or 5 trips later that I would finally take a look for myself.

It was the summer and my father and I had just come from cutting a few palm trees. A job consisting of some trimming and cutting off the seed clusters, standard stuff. However, this trip was far from standard. I got to ride in the front seat, which I wasn't legally allowed to do this age, so please don't tell my mom, or the social services for that matter. Anyways, we arrived at the store and my dad said something to me he had never said before, "Vamonos," or "let's go." I sat there, still uneasy from sitting shotgun, not really sure of the meaning behind his words. It wasn't until he gave me a reassuring nod that I got the courage to unbuckle my seatbelt and step out the truck. My father started walking towards the entrance leaving me in a frenzy to catch up. When my father got near the doors, they opened slowly, seemingly welcoming me into adulthood; I was finally a man. Later, I would learn that this was not the case but, nonetheless, I believed it to be true in that moment. I walked through those doors staring at the same sign I would cross hundreds of times in the near future, "Welcome to Home Depot".

If you've never been to Home Depot, and you're not fond of working with your hands, then this place probably wouldn't seem too special. It might seem like a huge room filled with tools, wood, and other household appliances whose uses are unknown and insignificant. However, to me this place was paradise. It was the place where my father knew how to be a father. As I stepped into the store the first thing that hit me was the smell. It was a variety of smells that I had been exposed to previously, but I had never made the connection to this store. The smell of my father opening a brand new mixed can of paint, the smell of the recently planted roses in the

moist soil outside my home, and the sweetest smell of the freshly cut two by fours we used to build the shack in the backyard. These smells had composed my entire childhood and would soon become very distinct to the Home Depot. My amazement was cut short by the sight of my father disappearing into the opening of the labyrinth, otherwise known as the first aisle. The entire store was made up of these ominous openings, each leading to whole different ecosystem of tools and people. Of course, it would take me years before I was able to maneuver this maze like the best of them, so for now I sat in my father's shadow and simply watched and admired.

As soon as I caught up to my father I found myself in the heart of the jungle. Otherwise known as the garden section, which would soon give me my first shovel: a mighty rod of oak connected to a sleek sheet of curved iron, a great weapon for any man or boy. Well, it was more like a skinny rod of cheap pine with a head a tad bigger than a hand trowel, but my 6-year-old self would hear none of this because to me that tiny shovel was my first tool. A tool that helped me complete dozens of jobs, which mainly consisted of relocating and planting flowers from one side of my backyard to the other. With a new shovel in hand, I followed my father to the next aisle.

It was like walking into the sun, if the sun was composed of dozens of overhanging chandeliers with a few ceiling fans sprinkled throughout. Its walls were lined with the same outlets and wires I would later learn how to install into my own home. This was the aisle of my first lesson and the first real connection I ever had with my father. It was just a simple, "Go get me those light bulbs," but to me it was a sign of confidence, welcoming me into his world. This feeling was something I would seek more and more as time went on. After walking out of the sun I immediately walked into the sewers of the plumbing section. PVC, CPVC, PEX, copper, and galvanized pipes galore. My father would soon teach me the beauty of pipe cutters, and how to use

pipe glue and solder with great efficiency. Within the next few years I would have these skills put to the test on our new water heater. A lengthy process I can proudly say ended with a functioning water heater that has not yet exploded, and continues to work to this day.

My first trip to the Home Depot, left me wide-eyed, and bushy tailed, like a dried up sponge ready to soak up any tiny bit of knowledge my father would allow me to have. So, for the next few years I learned. Every visit I picked up a variety of tips that extended from laying tile to landscape work. These visits and my father's lessons gave me the knowledge to be a self-reliant man, but I would honestly trade all of that in for the one thing I truly wanted from these trips, a father. As time went on my father's lessons became less and less frequent, and I found myself roaming the aisles alone. Without him by my side I began to rely on my personal knowledge more and more leaving my father in the past.

A few months after my 14th birthday I made a quick trip to Home Depot to pick up a few lightbulbs. As I made my way towards the exit a dime slipped from my hand. I turned to find not only my dime but also my father, both hiding in plain sight. There was the man who had taught me how to walk and how to work with my hands, treating his own son like he was just a stranger. That was the moment I realized my father had taught me all he could and from that point forward I would maneuver the aisles of that monstrous labyrinth as my own man, and as my own teacher.