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### A Hammer and Tape Measure

It was a hot and humid day, and we were building an office space inside a giant metal building that could have doubled as a sauna. The smell of sawdust and screams of a circular saw whining in my ear had been going all day; I was tired, hot, and looked as if I had sweat out a month's worth of sins. I wanted to quit; it was not even halfway through the summer, I was sore to the touch, had not slept past five o'clock in the morning, and was tired. When I looked down and wiped the sweat from my eyes, I saw the old, wooden handled hammer and the worn down, yellow tape measure on the work belt my dad gave me before I came to this inferno of constant work and sweltering heat. I remember telling him I would not make him look bad, so I sucked it up and kept screwing in the seemingly never-ending wall of wooden framing.

It was about a month before summer break after my first year of high school, a hot day in Florida, but nothing-spectacular happening. I was goofing around with my brother when I heard the front door open and my dad shout, "Bradley, come here for a second!" in a serious but relaxed tone. I headed for the door and walked outside. He was on the phone when I walked out, clearly, wrapping up a conversation, "OK, I'll talk to him now and call you back in a few days, bye." With a slight bit of anxious curiosity and childhood humor, I quipped, "Wasn't my fault. What'd they say I did?" He smiled at me and asked what plans I had for the summer. It was a curious question because most of my summers to that point were fairly routine: spend half at my

mother's house, usually working for my uncle, and half with my dad, usually helping at his job or taking a small family vacation. He saw the confusion on my face and started to explain.

"My friend, Jack, just won a contract bid and will need some help this summer. He knows you and was wondering if you'd be up to it." A small sense of relief went over me, as in the back of my mind, I imagined summer school or something I did at school. I told him that I would think about it and call my mother, and then asked when he needed to know; he told me by the end of the school year. I thought about it and was a little scared and too proud to admit it, but as the school year was ending, I decided I would help Jack out that summer. It helped that I knew Jack pretty well: he lived about an hour away from us, and we would visit them on some weekends, have a BBQ, play paintball, or just hang-out; he was not an unfamiliar person.

The day I told my dad I would, I saw a small sense of pride beam across his face. My father is a blue-collar, never-complain type worker, and had always taught me the value of a good day's labor. This summer, however, was a little different, since I was not in a safety net. I could usually goof off with my uncle when I worked for him in past summers or do the same when I went and helped my dad at his job, but this was different. It was not family, and Jack needed serious help, not someone who did not pull their weight. My dad disappeared into our laundry room where it is somewhat dark and where he stored most of his tools, along with our deep freezer, and obviously, the washer and dryer. He popped out after a few moments with an old, worn, leather carpenter's belt that looked as if it had survived one of the World Wars. In the belt was an old wooden-handled hammer, which had a few chips in the wood but was still very sturdy, and a worn out tape measure that possibly, I thought, should belong in a museum. He handed them over to me and said, "You will need these. Do you know how to use that tape measure, all the different measurements? Jack said you will be doing a lot of framing and

everything has to be to code." I answered half sure of myself that I did, but my father always being able to sense my embarrassment of not knowing, instead of making me say it, showed me anyway. He made sure I understood that he expected me to work well and not make him look bad, mind my "P's n Q's," and listen. As I packed my things up for the summer--clothes, toothbrush, work belt, hammer, and tape measure--a small sense of being an adult crept through my mind.

As the days passed and more and more work started being completed, I started to feel a sense of pride replacing the pains, and accomplishment replacing the tired feeling. When we finished our project at the summer's end, I felt it was my accomplishment as much as it was Jack's. This large, empty space went from nothing to a 10-room office building with air conditioning, something the two of us did. I remember now the tools my father gave me and how they in themselves are not very important, they will never be a family heirloom in themselves, but they were more a metaphor. The wooden hammer, with all its flaws and rust built in, itself is a symbol with that tape measure, of the work ethic, pride, and confidence in myself that my dad ensured I had.