

A Dad Beyond
MEASURE

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It was a college fair—how could he wear that? My father never had much fashion sense, but this was completely out of hand. A torn jacket and old work pants . . . I couldn't even look at him. College representatives from all over the state, not to mention my friends and all their well-dressed fathers, would be there. I remember thinking, "How could he embarrass me like this?"

My dad was, and always had been, a blue-collar worker, a laborer. He started as a Maytag repairman, a job that lasted eighteen years. Not exactly glamorous, but he was making a living and providing for his family. I grew up knowing what my father did and almost took pleasure in saying, "My dad is the loneliest guy in town." However, at that time we lived in a very ethnic, very blue-collar suburb of a large midwestern city. Most dads in the neighborhood worked similar jobs and there was nothing to be ashamed of. Nothing, that is, until the move.

*J*ust after my freshman year of high school, my mom, dad, two sisters, brother, and I moved to a small town in a western state. This move took us from one end of the social spectrum to the other: out of the blue and into the white, bleach white. We planted ourselves smack-dab in the middle of upper-class America, where everyone is plenty well off, but still complains about the taxes.

My dad started working as a plant manager at a battery company. It seemed to be a step above what we had had before—a bigger salary, a better boss, a nicer house—but now the background had changed. For instance, the kids at school couldn't understand why my father didn't buy me a car for my sixteenth birthday. Or why I couldn't afford the out-of-state band trip. Or why I had to study hard so I would be eligible for scholarships.