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It Takes a Village – No, Make That a Mall – to Raise A Daughter

As a female, I fit the exact profile of someone who loves to shop. But I hate shopping, which wouldn't be a problem except for one thing: I have a daughter. Kelly's twelve, and lives to shop. If she had her way she'd go to the mall more often than most people go to the bathroom. To her, Nirvana isn't a legendary Seattle grunge band; it's a whirlwind shopping trip that includes Abercrombie and Fitch, The Gap and Nordstrom, all in one day.

It doesn't matter that she already has plenty of clothes. They spend most of their time on her bedroom floor imitating wall-to-wall carpet. When I survey her wardrobe, the only thing that seems to be missing is "anything on a hanger."

When I was her age, I thought shopping was fun too. What wasn't to love? Back then I could try anything on, and it looked great! And I didn't worry about trivial details – price tags, for instance - until my mom piped up with some annoying parental platitude, like "what do you think I am, made of MONEY?!"

It's different now. Finding an old picture of myself - taken twenty years ago – reminded me that everything has changed except my wardrobe. Do I get sick of the old stuff in my closet, long past its expiration date? Yes. But when I realize the only remedy is to go shopping, my tired wardrobe clings to life, perking up to stump for "Four More Years!"

You get the picture; I think "mall" is a four-letter word. But as I said, I have a daughter. So today I reluctantly steered my car toward the mall while Kelly fidgeted beside me, anticipating the thrilling adventure ahead.

I don't get it. Which is weird, because I used to get it. What did it feel like? As I parked the car, I wanted to remember. I vowed to capture some of what she was feeling, at least vicariously.

The car had barely stopped before Kelly jumped out. "Wait for me!" I called after her. I ran, struggling to keep up, as she bolted toward the mall entrance and into the first store. She paused to study her surroundings. My heart rate was finally inching toward its normal range when suddenly – as if by instinct - she was

propelled ahead. I trailed behind her until we landed in the department with clothes for “Tweens.” Deftly she navigated the maze of clothing racks, her cheeks flushed with excitement. She came to a rack of stone-washed denim skirts. And froze. Her hand trembling, she reached out to remove one from the rack, then floated over to the mirror to study her reflection.

“Mom,” Kelly said, “Wouldn’t this look cute with a white tank top and my pink flowered shirt?” Then her gaze shifted; she thrust the skirt in my direction. Building momentum, she darted toward another rack.

“Mom!” she cried, “Look at these pants! They’d be perfect with my corduroy blazer and brown boots!” She moved from rack to rack, coming up with more combinations than most locker rooms.

“Can you imagine what all this would look like?” Kelly gushed.

“Can you imagine what all this would cost?” I countered.

I don’t think she heard me - all her senses were being used to shop. The only sense that apparently wasn’t involved was the common one. Because she picked up a faux leather skirt that looked completely impractical, not to mention high-maintenance.

“What are the washing instructions?” I asked.

“Huh?” She was obviously puzzled. “It says cold wash separately, then line dry.” She looked up. “That’s no big deal.”

“That’s because doing the laundry is no big deal when you’re not the one doing it!”

Too late. Kelly’s nose had picked up the scent of leather. She moved on. Wandering into the shoe section, she spotted a pair of pink pumps and plucked them from their reclining position on the rack. After cradling them in her arms, she held them up to her nose and inhaled deeply. “Mom,” she said, dreamily, “don’t you just LOVE the smell of new shoes?”

She set them down, then stood back to scan the racks of sandals, pumps and boots. Her eyes worked in an organized, back and forth, up and down motion. As she calculated how each pair would fit into her wardrobe, her brain worked faster than Russell Crowe’s in “A Beautiful Mind.”

Enough. It was time for the voice of reason to step in. “I know you’d like to give every pair of shoes in this department a good home,” I began. “I’m sure with the right attention and love, these shoes could grow up happily knowing they’ve achieved their purpose. But I don’t have enough money to adopt every pair of

these shoes!”

“Of course not,” Kelly answered, indignant. “You’ll have to use a credit card!”

“What do you think I am, made of PLASTIC?!”

Some things never change.