

(2026 July 19) Malchik - "Sordid little stories": Of class and living poor (Trespassing)

<https://open.substack.com/pub/antonia/p/sordid-little-stories>

My comments to this post:

Excellent. Thanks for sharing. The reality of class in free and equal America. Makes me, an eightyfive year-old cis-hetero white guy, recall my own working-class origin, being raised by a working mom, coping with my own marriages, kids, divorces, trying make ends meet, trying to make a life.

The war gave my father (and for a while my mother) a factory job that kept us above the FDR-era poverty line when I was a kid, but my father's gambling and related habits kept us borderline. I remember the sugary Kool-aid and high carbohydrate meals and the treat of cheapest cuts of meat, as well as my parents' stories of how much worse it had been during the pre-war Depression.

It wasn't until college and moving among middle class people that I really came to know the shame of being on a lower rung on the carrot-and-stick ladder -- the being looked down the nose at because of my clothes, manner of speech, and the like; the being told by prospective girlfriends that her parents insisted she had to stop associating with me.

Getting involved in the nascent civil rights movement, I later understood, was a natural thing for me to do not just because working with friends and neighbors against blatant racism was the right thing to do, but because racism and class were obviously integrated.

Dropping into academic artsy- intellectual bohemia was a sort of escape, but the reminders were always there (like the time a co-editor of the school literary magazine took me to meet her father on the family yacht so he could offer me a swabbie's job helping to refinish the teakwood deck).

Dropping out of academe into beat-hippie artsy-intellectual bohemia and decades of voluntary semi-poverty, rubbing worn elbows with others who knew about socio-economic prejudice and precarity, who had walked more than a mile in Goodwill shoes, was some better, even allowed for some pride in being able to make it if not outside at least on the fringes of establishment style.

But of course the class awareness never goes away and has provided some foundation for my years of confronting the ongoing -- and increasing -- racism, sexism, classism and income-based snobbery of our time.

Hang in there, Antonia. More power to you.