

Narratives

Narrative 1: Hunger and Poverty in the Land of Plenty?

John and Margaret have been married for 47 years. Now retired, John worked most of his life as a self-employed electrician. Margaret never worked outside of the home, choosing instead to remain at home with their only child, Sally, who is now married and lives in Tulsa. Neighborhood property values have declined in recent years, diminishing the worth of the couple's principal asset -- their home. Most of the couple's bank savings were depleted by Medicare co-payments and other costs not covered after Margaret fell and broke her hip three years ago. John and Margaret's only other significant asset is their car. A car is a necessity in the Florida community where they live, but the cost of maintenance and insurance have skyrocketed and the couple has contemplated selling the 1982 Dodge and relying instead on taxis. Some months the modest sum they receive from Social Security falls short of their needs. Tea and toast have to do when the cupboard is bare. "We're survivors -- we remember the Great Depression," John states proudly. "It's just that we didn't expect to end out our days this way. Retiring to Florida was always a dream for us." Their daughter doesn't realize her parents go to bed hungry some nights. Why should she? They are living in a land of plenty.

Narrative 2: "I Can't Have TB"

Ann is an executive for a large bankcard company in New York City. She earns a high salary, lives in a Connecticut suburban community, and travels occasionally to London on business. Her lifestyle sometimes proves stressful, but she always makes a point to reward herself with time away. This past spring she took a Caribbean cruise, sailing from Miami. Ann tries to be health conscience. She regularly works out at the company health club and always gets an annual physical examination. During her most recent examination Ann was given some shocking news -- she tested positive for tuberculosis. "How can this be?" Ann demands of the doctor. "I live in Connecticut, I work in the City, I make \$100,000 a year - I can't have TB!"

Some Background Information on TB

Tuberculosis is an infectious disease caused by the tubercle bacillus and affects the respiratory system, but other parts of the body such as gastrointestinal, genitourinary tracts, bones, joints, nervous system, lymph nodes and skin can also be affected. Three types of the bacteria exist: human, bovine (cattle), and avian (birds). Humans can become infected by any of the three types, although in the United States, the human strain predominates. The infection is usually acquired from aerosol droplets or sputum from an infected person or through drinking unpasteurized milk from an infected cow.

Narrative 3: The Future Ain't What it Used To Be

Emilio liked growing up in the Midwest. His family had a comfortable lifestyle, supported by his father's job as a pipefitter at the mill, and his mother's work as a teacher at the local high school. After graduation, Emilio enrolled at the local community college in a data processing program. After receiving his A.S. degree, Emilio discovered that the same downsizing that forced his father into early retirement meant that he could do little better than find part-time and temporary work at local firms as a data entry clerk. He made enough money when he did work to get by, but the lack of job security and the limited opportunities in his home town were very discouraging. Emilio and his friends from high school increasingly found themselves "living for the day" and this often meant drowning their sorrows at the local pub. Emilio's depression became deeper still with the loss of his father to mesothelioma -- a cancer brought on by his exposure to asbestos on the job. Emilio knew the mill job took a physical toll on his father, but to see him die that way from the effects of fibers too small to see was hard. A bottle of beer slipped through Emilio's hand and crashed to the floor. "One too many?," inquired a friend. "No, my hand is just a little numb after nine hours at the terminal," responded Emilio. "I'm fine, really. It's not like I'm doing anything dangerous -- just crunching numbers on a stupid computer," he chortled.