

CROSSING TO INVISIBLE

by Annie B Seyler

[Context – the world of the story]

As the income gap in America widens and class mobility grinds to a standstill, the national dialogue around wealth disparity has surged to the foreground. According to a recent New York Times/CBS News poll, “Americans are broadly concerned about inequality of wealth and income...Far from a strictly partisan issue, inequality looms large...suggesting that it will outlive the presidential primary contests and become a central theme in next year’s general election campaign.” (NYT 6/3/15)

[Protagonist – who is this narrator and what does she believe?]

Amidst the dialogue and debates one thing is clear: nothing amplifies the issues or humanizes the impact more poignantly than personal stories. But the vast majority of stories are told from only one side of the income gap. Imagine the benefits of adding to the dialogue a personal account of the experience of growing up in both privilege and poverty within one’s own nuclear family. Imagine a story that taps into America’s widespread discomfort with poverty and the social norm that encourages those with means to distance themselves from those who have less. Enter *Crossing to Invisible*, a provocative memoir that explores the author’s emotional experience of crossing back and forth over the income divide as a teenager and the unmistakable influence of that crossing on her choices as an adult.

[Why it matters – the topic, the big idea.]

Wealth disparity has driven a wedge among teenagers’ worlds and many educators and parents of prep school youth are worried their teenagers are growing up in privileged silos that prevent them from identifying with anyone who lives on the other side. Today’s youth are tomorrow’s leaders, so cultivating in them the ability to identify and empathize with all people – across the class divide – has never been more critical.

[What happens externally and internally + why it matters]

Crossing to Invisible provides a bridge between worlds and a leaping-off point for reflection and discourse. From a Connecticut prep school to an Ivy League University, the author is immersed in privilege and taught to achieve, build status, and leverage every opportunity her elite education offers. But when her mother divorces her wealthy father and willfully remarries into extreme poverty, the author must choose between honoring the class rules that have shaped her family’s lives for generations or defying the rules, foregoing the rewards, and following her heart.

[What happens externally and internally + why it matters]

Setting aside the distinction that privilege bestows upon her, the author sleeps on a mattress on a barn floor, dumpster dives for pecan rolls behind a Freihofer’s outlet store, and immerses herself in a community that is trapped in a cycle of generational poverty and overlooked in a country that worships what they lack: prestige and money. As the author enters adulthood and faces life’s increasing complexities, she gets trapped between a culture that urges her to leverage her pedigree and a quiet yet pervasive instinct to hide from it.

[Resolution]

Although the author's story is unusual, many of her feelings are not. Her journey is one from resistance to acceptance; from resentment to forgiveness; from feeling like something is missing to feeling whole. It's a journey in which layers of distortion are peeled away -- distortions within our culture, within her own family, and within herself. It's a journey that gets beneath the surface of how we show ourselves in the world and how we see others – even those we pretend are invisible.