



Why I Care About the Jubilee Initiative (Part 1)

I promised to write about why this project means so much to me.

The truth is, I could write hundreds of pages about this, but there isn't that kind of space here, so I'll give you the short version.

I grew up in a working class neighborhood in St. Louis. My neighborhood, like my family, was sustained by union jobs. Both my parents grew up pretty poor.

My mom lived in housing projects in St. Louis with her mother and two sisters and a brother, and they lived with a kind of food insecurity – they were never sure what dinner would look like. My grandmother tried to make sure there was something even if she would go hungry herself. But sometimes dinner was something like mustard sandwiches. Their clothes were mostly used and they were made fun of by kids who were doing a little better (it's always a hierarchy – no matter how much you have or don't have).

The girls (my mom and my aunts) got married as soon as they could so that they would not be a burden on my grandmother. My oldest aunt was married when she was 16. My mom and my other aunt got married when they were 18. My uncle was drafted and went to Vietnam. None of them finished high school.

My dad didn't grew up in southern California. But when his mother was divorced, he moved to St. Louis with her and his little brother. They weren't as poor as my mom's family, but they still struggled. He met my mom in high school and they got married very young.

My dad was drafted, but it meant he got two years of college, and so, an associate's degree in commercial art. He wanted to make a living as an artist, but he also needed to support a family and Chrysler was hiring, so he got a job on the assembly line.

Which is was what most of my family and my neighborhood in that generation did. There were lots of those kinds of jobs at that time. Others in my family worked on the loading docks of Yellow Freight. So most of my family and my neighborhood had good union jobs and belonged to the United Auto Workers or the Teamsters or some other union. And those jobs meant an amazing step up from the lives that most of them came

from. In one generation my family went from poverty and near poverty to something that some of us might call middle class.

The union job my dad got meant that:

- My mom could stay home with us (she was always around);
- We had great health and dental insurance;
- There was always food in the house;
- Though my mom grew up with a pretty low key Christmas (fruit, candy, maybe one toy – usually to share with her sisters), WE grew up with presents like crazy;
- My dad had to work overtime often, but he got paid double time (and even triple time on holidays);
- He got paid sick leave and vacation;
- My childhood was pretty stable and so was the neighborhood.

We took this for granted. It's the way the world worked, now. Progress meant progress for working people. The deal was that if you worked hard, you could have a stable and secure life.

Except those jobs didn't stay around.

Next time – Why I care about the Jubilee Initiative Part 2

Canon Rhodes