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## The Fork

Written and Illustrated by Rachel Marie-Crane Williams

As my Grandmother's body and mind became unfamiliar, we slowly decided that she needed to leave her home.

In small bits and pieces we took away her autonomy, privacy, mobility and, in some ways, her dignity.

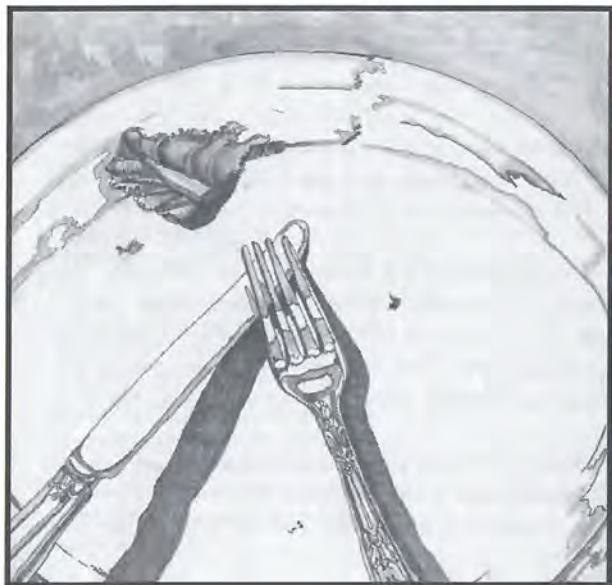
On the day she moved we packed up 94 years' worth of pictures, dishes, photographs, pots and pans, clothes, books, papers, and furniture.

Some went to family members, some to friends, and what was left went into the dumpster or to charity.

We replaced her old familiar things with new things that weren't soiled and were easier to care for or dispose of in the future. We decided she needed just "the essentials," a microwave and a new set of "picnic ware" from the local K-Mart.

The cheery pattern on the plastic handles of the forks, spoons, and knives watched the rims on the melamine dishes, mugs, and bowls. The set came in one box.

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Sweet memories-- in the end I could not part with her mismatched collection of knives, forks, and spoons. Most were bent, tarnished, and misshapen--worn thin by the lips, tongues, and teeth of our family for four generations. I put the shoebox of old silverware in my car instead of the charity pile. I knew it was silly, but I could not bear to let it go. I still use that silverware everyday just like my Grandmother did.

November, 2008



After we packed up her stuff we moved my grandmother to a "nice" apartment in a residential center for seniors.

December, 2008



By the middle of December she was dead.

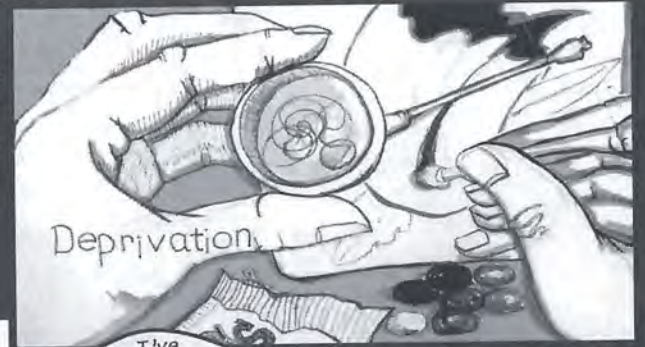
She finally got to return home.



Two years later I was on my way to prison..

Every week I teach art and creative writing to incarcerated women. The women like to participate in art classes because it relieves stress and gives them a chance to do something that feels positive and productive. The Prison administration likes to support the arts; participation reduces restlessness, violence and dissatisfaction. Teaching at the prison is rewarding; it reminds me that art can be meaningful and powerful. The art room is a safe space where women can focus their energy, stave off depression and sadness, socialize, and feel productive.

That night, I had a humbling experience in prison -- a place where people are deprived of all but the bare minimum needed to sustain their physical existence.

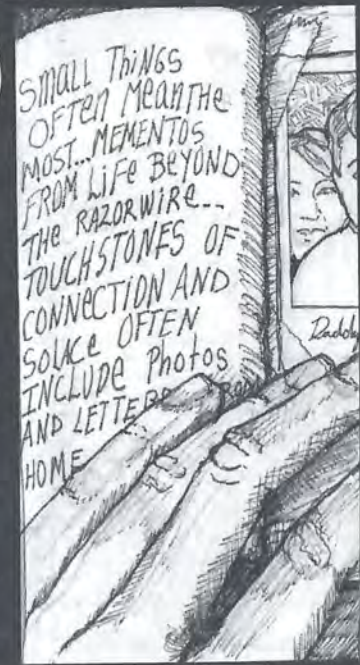


I've seen people soak the color off coated candies to make taint for their letters home.

Living in prison teaches people to make use of every scrap. They savor any small bit of debris that might wiggle through the fence like messages from the outside world, clippings from magazines, church bulletins, even the wrappers from candy and embroidery thread. These items are often re-purposed as decoration for greeting cards or in collages that leave the prison through letters or are displayed on cups or notebooks.

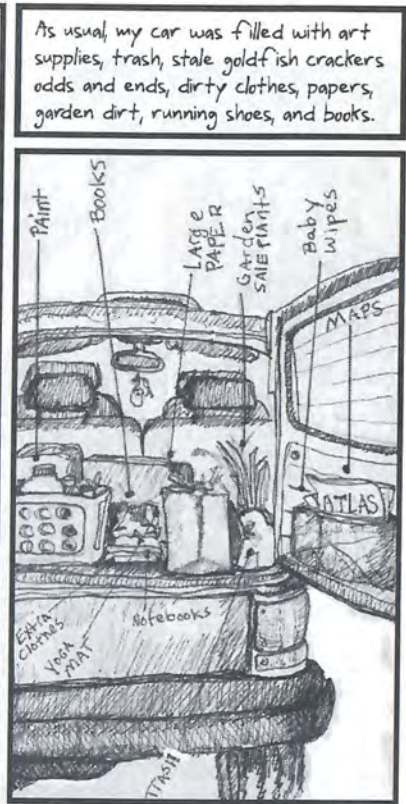


People who are incarcerated may go for years without sitting on a cushioned chair, hearing live music, tasting fresh food, or seeing and touching their families.

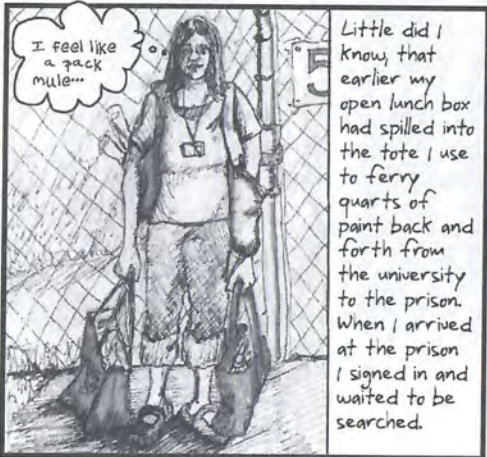




It was a normal Tuesday evening. I drove to the only women's prison in Iowa.



As usual, my car was filled with art supplies, trash, stale goldfish crackers, odds and ends, dirty clothes, papers, garden dirt, running shoes, and books.



I feel like a pack mule...

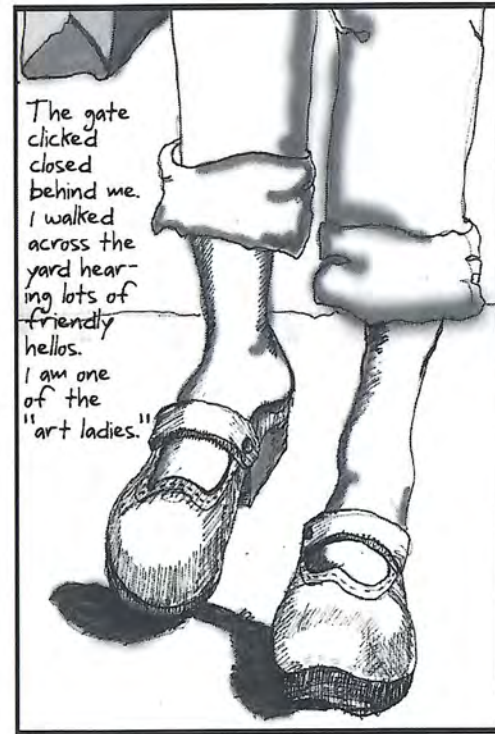
Little did I know that earlier my open lunch box had spilled into the tote I use to ferry quarts of paint back and forth from the university to the prison. When I arrived at the prison I signed in and waited to be searched.



CONTROL CENTER

Hi RACHEL. Unit 4???

The CO smiled and casually glanced in my bag. We go through this ritual every week.



The gate clicked closed behind me. I walked across the yard hearing lots of friendly hellos. I am one of the "art ladies."

I arrived in Unit 4 and found that the CO had unlocked the old chapel-turned-studio. Keiba greeted me; she was eager to finish her painting.

Did you finally bring that gold paint I asked for again last week?



She rummaged through my tote for paint and a good brush.

...that's how she found it



Keiba was overcome by nostalgia. I anxiously watched her pace around the room admiring the old silver plated fork. Eventually my panic subsided.

Don't worry Rachel, I'm putting it right back where I found it. *sigh*

As I drove home my thoughts drifted in and out with the radio stations. I was stunned by Keiba's reaction to an ordinary fork. I could not imagine using only plastic silverware for the rest of my life. The "no metal" policy is in place to keep everyone "inside" safe. But these policies lead to extreme emotional, physical, and mental deprivation. This deprivation can lead people to make unreasonable or dangerous decisions just to fulfill normal basic human needs and desires.

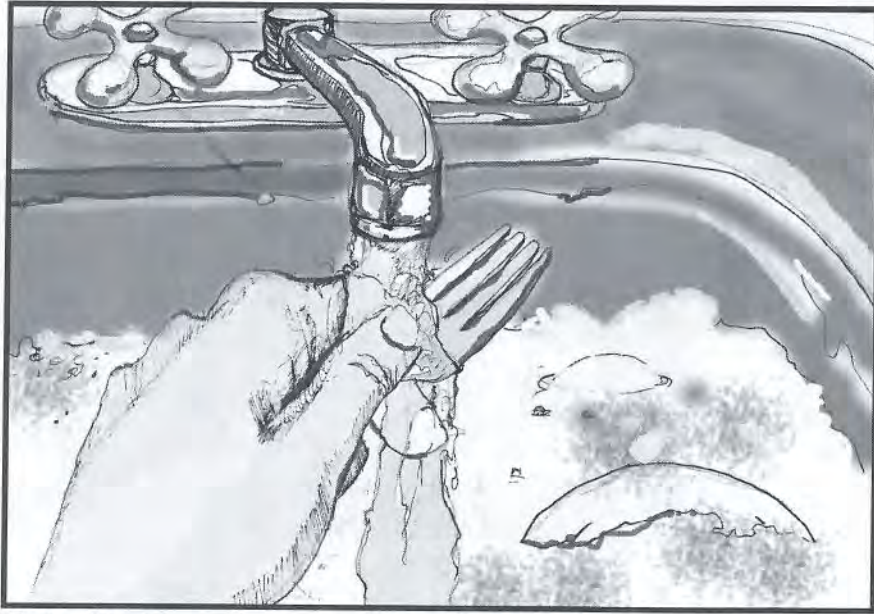


The women at the prison constantly challenge me to re-frame my privilege and place in our culture. They remind me over and over what it means to be human. That night I witnessed a humble, tarnished old fork momentarily flood Keiba's spirit with torrents of strong memories. It wasn't the fork, but the aesthetics and materiality of the fork. The weight, design, and embellishment as well as the tarnish and wear made that fork powerful and meaningful. For both of us it is a link to memories of the domestic.



That "real" fork is so closely connected to eating meals, a central domestic ritual in our culture that often involves sensual pleasure, the company of our family and friends, and is a key component to many holiday celebrations. This connection is the reason I kept the fork and the reason that Keiba was so moved. While the fork as an object was imbued with something special that comes from age and use, it was also full of memories. I did not realize the impact that something so ubiquitous could have. In prison the women are never allowed to use metal silverware. They eat three meals each day with disposable utensils. Mealtime in prison is the fulfillment of a basic biological function. In most instances all of the "specialness" with which we perform the rituals of mealtime are removed. People do not eat in comfort. The food is often bland and low quality. They are not allowed to socialize, or really relax because the time they are given to eat is often so short. The no metal policy is so sensible and sound, but until that day I had never felt the weight of it. Aesthetic experiences are essential to our mental health. As Ellen Dissanayake\* would say, we need to "make special moments and things within our life in order to mark them as touchstones for our memory and make us aware that we are part of something larger than ourselves.

\*Dissanayake, E. (1995). *Homoaestheticus: where art comes from and why*. Seattle: University of Washington Press.



That night, at home, the weight of that familiar old fork in my hand and the comfort of the warm running water was bittersweet, making me feel both lucky and guilty.

\*Special thanks to Sean Kelley, the women of ICIW, and the reviewers for the Journal of Cultural Research in Art Education.

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## Digital Storytelling and the Pedagogy of Human Rights

GAIL BENICK

### ABSTRACT

The increase in global migration has given rise to new concepts of citizenship and belonging. In the post-colonial era, the maintenance of a collective identity has been redefined as a human right. This paper considers the role of art educators in promoting the right to one's own culture as a site of minority resistance and empowerment. The inclusion of digital storytelling in art education offers an opportunity to intervene in the field of representation, to contest negative images and transform representational practices around race and ethnicity in a more positive direction.

Migration, arguably *the* defining global issue of the 21st century, has increased in volume and political significance in the post-colonial era. Although mass migration, both voluntary and forced, is hardly a new feature of human history, there is a growing recognition that the current global dispersion of migrant populations has given rise to a new order of instability (Appadurai, 1996; Spiro, 2004). In many classic countries of immigration such as Canada, the United States and Australia, the shift from race-based policies to race-neutral policies of admission has contributed to high levels of racial, ethnic, linguistic and religious diversity among the populace of these nations. But the urban concentration of diverse peoples and cultures has undoubtedly led to a world brimming with tension, confusion and conflict. For the relocated subject, the migrant experience is often fraught with disruption, displacement and loss. Whether the migratory flow involves labor migrants, permanent settlers, exiles or refugees, a formidable longing for homelands may accompany individuals into the diasporic wilderness, encumbered by what Edward Said (2000) has called an "unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place" (p.173). After settlement follows either secure legal status and gradual acceptance, or exclusion, socioeconomic marginalization and the formation of minorities whose presence is widely regarded as undesirable and divisive. In many countries of settlement today, the urge to return to old conventions and fundamental values is palpable, resulting in a trend toward heightened xenophobia and intolerance of difference.

New concepts of citizenship and belonging have emerged to accommodate mass migration and major demographic shifts, but with a distinctive twist.