



Audio Transcript: Rochelle

3, 2, 1, welcome to Ex Fabula! True, Personal Stories. Ex Fabula! Story, Stage, You. Ex Fabula is a Milwaukee non-profit committed to strengthening community bonds through the art of storytelling.

Ex Fabula Fellows are community members who use personal stories to inspire community led dialogue around some of the most pressing issues in the greater Milwaukee area like segregation, and economic and racial inequality.

Ex Fabula Fellow Rochelle Fritsch shared a story at a young professionals group in February of 2016.

This is a story about my daughter and I when I had to take her to her friends' house on a wonderful summer Milwaukee afternoon. She was having a sleepover. Now the thing to remember is that we live in the city, my daughter's friend lives about 20 minutes away from us in the suburbs. The other thing you should know about me is that I get lost very easily. So, because I know that, and because I kinda know the way to my daughter's friend house, I turn on the GPS anyhow. So we go and we're having a great conversation. We're enjoying the summer, we're talking about teen girl stuff and it was awesome. I wasn't feeling lost when all of a sudden, bang, we hit a detour. Because remember, it's summer in Milwaukee and it's road construction season. So luckily the GPS recalibrates and it takes us what feels like a hundred miles out of the way. I'm listening to it and all of a sudden I realized that 20 minutes had gone by and we are still not at her friends house. In fact, we're at a lovely little cul-de-sac where nothing feels familiar except the feeling of being lost. And for me it's that lost that carves a hollow in the pit of my stomach and it crawls its way into my shoulder blades and it finds its way down to my hands and they get all sweaty. I'm gripping the wheel tightly and before I know it I drop an F bomb. And I don't cuss, and my daughter knows I don't cuss. She's looking at me confused and I know I have to explain to her about what's going on. And so I think to myself, "well where do I go from this". How do I tell her that I've been here before? Not in this particular subdivision, definitely not on a summer day. This was in a winter night way back before people had GPS. When they'd write down instructions for you. And then I wonder, I think she'd believe that if I said "and mom got lost" because she knows mom gets lost. And then I wonder, would she understand about the Good Samaritan that came out of his house that night to push me out of an icy ditch. She would believe that because she understands winter in Wisconsin and she also believes in the goodness of all people. Where it gets sticky is if I would try and explain to her about the conversation I had with the Good Samaritan.

"Hey, thanks for pushing me out. Can you direct me to my friend's house? I know that he's around but I'm just not sure how to get there".

"You have a friend?"

"Yeah. Here, yes I do"

"In these estates?"

"Yes, in these estates. He just built a new house"

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“Well yeah there’s a new house but it’s got a no trespassing sign on it”
“I know that, but I am his friend and he is expecting me because I’m picking up his cat.”

Now, I think my daughter would be very relieved to know that the Good Samaritan finally gave me instructions. I got to my friends house and I picked up the cat. But I hesitate in telling her about the ride home. The cat’s in the back seat crying and I’m almost crying along with the cat because I just want to be in a neighborhood where I don’t have to justify why I’m there. And that’s when I see the blue and red lights in my rearview mirror. I check the speedometer and I’m right on spot but I pull over and then I wonder, do I tell her that the officer told me that the reason for me being pulled over was that I just didn’t look like I belonged there. I figure, I’m not gonna do that. I’m not gonna do that because my daughter is a smart kid. She’s aware, she knows about Tamir Rice, she knows about Dontre Hamilton and she knows about Sandra Bland. She understands that encounters that brown people sometimes have with the police sometimes turn out ugly. And I decide that I’m not going to tell her about that because I don’t want her for a minute to imagine her mother being a Sandra Bland once upon a time. And so I decided, that’s fine, I’m just gonna tell her what she needs to know now. And that’s when it dawns on me, we have talked about our hair, we had talked about our faith. We have talked about alcohol, drugs, boys, but we haven’t talked about this. So I have to soldier on and I just look at her and I say, “honey, this isn’t cool. Mom is lost and mom needs to slow down to get her bearings. But somebody in this nice little cul-de-sac might see a black woman driving slowly and figure she doesn’t belong there and call the cops.” I didn’t want to have that conversation with her. More than that, I did not want her to see me, her mom, her cheerleader, her last line of defense, shaking, frightened. And I’m unapologetically black, almost afraid of what someone else might perceive my blackness to be. But I had to tell her and I had to tell her because she’s a sneeze away from getting her drivers license. Now my husband, her dad, is white. He knows that this stuff happens anecdotally. I know it happens from experience. So I have to have these conversations. I didn’t wanna have it then, I’ll have to have it in the future anyway. I figure and I’ll have to have it again and again in different iterations unless, unless one or two things happen. Unless we start to see and perceive each other differently than we do now or unless my daughter doesn’t inherit my sense of direction.

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