



Audio Transcript: Jennifer's Story

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, Jennifer Hoepner, shared a story at "Translator" in March of 2016.

So, part of being an Ex Fabula fellow is that we would share stories together, and ask each other questions, and talk about our stories, and I was telling a story during one of our meetings, about how many years ago I was working at this job. I was the director of a program, and the department head came to me and in coded language asked – or told – me that I was supposed to fire a very qualified woman because she was African American, and hire an unqualified woman because she was white. And then I had decided I was not going to do that, but I was afraid for my own job then, and I went to the Equal Opportunity Commission, filed a report. I went to HR; I talked to them, and basically put everybody on notice -- if there's any retaliation, I'm ready for battle. And during my telling of this story, another Ex Fabula Fellow asked me some questions. The first question she asked was, was "Well, Jennifer, what are you?" and I didn't really know what she meant by that right away, but I figured, I was like "ohhh," I didn't mention that I'm white, and this boss who had told me to do this was also a white woman. And so I was kind of mad at myself for not mentioning that. She asked another question, which was, "Well, what were your qualifications when you got hired for that director job?" And I was like kind of irritated by that and I was like, "well this story wasn't about how when I got hired. This story is about how, you know, I interrupted this crazy thing that my boss wanted me to do." And throughout the rest of the night, I was irritated. And then I started becoming irritated by myself, for like why does this bother me? She questioned my credentials? My credentials are immaculate, and I had listed them off. You know, I did this; I had this degree, and this experience. So why did that bother me that she asked me about that? And I was up all night, poring over materials that I had read in college about racial oppression and social stratification, and I came across this article by Peggy McIntosh, it's called "Racism: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack"... and there's a whole bunch of lists of things that white people can count on in their daily lives to work for them, work in their favor, whether they know it or not, whether they're aware of it or not. And one of the items was, I could get hired in a affirmative action company without my coworkers thinking that I got hired because of race. And I was like, "Holy shit. I got hired because of race at that job, when I was the director, didn't I? Because clearly that person who had to do the final approval, that woman who asked me to fire the black lady, was the same woman who had done final approval on my hire, and she clearly didn't care about my immaculate resume, 'cuz she didn't care about that woman's resume. All she cared about was skin color. And so it just kind of hit me in the gut, that not only did I get hired based on my race, but then I got to walk around for years and years and years thinking that I had been hired based on my qualifications, when that wasn't really true.

<http://www.exfabula.org>



And so the privilege to me was not only getting the job, but then just thinking that I got it because I deserved it, or because it was based on merit. Thank you.

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