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Feminist Things Rooted in Grief Le féminisme au coeur du chagrin

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Feminist Things Rooted in Grief

by Kacie G. Hopkins



Photo Courtesy of Kacie G. Hopkins, 2024

I sat my grandmother's graduation picture by the cardboard end of a lace spool.

504.

The number written on the cardboard. What does 504 mean? I will never know, but I can imagine and create a story. Behind the 504 cardboard sits my grandmother's basketball uniform, only the shirt. The colours are purple and white for the Panthers. I thought I had given away all my purple and white years ago when I left that small town and said I was never going back. But behold the vintage basketball uniform sits amongst my lace and scraps of fabric in my office in the city. The number on the uniform is 12. Why number 12? I will never know. My grandmother has passed on and no one really knows this story. Was this jersey even hers? I was told it was. But no one will really know. But I can imagine and create a story. I can see young grandma running with confidence down the basketball court in the same gym where I had summer camp. I knew as a child I shared this place with her. I imagined and created a story.

Dropping down over the basketball uniform, 504 cardboard, and grandma's picture lay satin ties from my wedding gown. This long cream coloured satin tie strapped me into my flowy lace gown on that sunny summer day at the river. Grandma was only there in spirit.

My feminist things (Ahmed 2017) are not intentionally chosen by me. Ahmed states that the feminist survival toolkit "contains my personal stuff, what I have accumulated overtime; things I know I need to do and have around me to keep going on" (236). Through this conversation she created the feminist killjoy survival kit, which features feminist things. Her killjoy survival kit is organized around the phrase, "feminism needs feminists to survive" (236). She states that the killjoy survival kit can be seen as a neoliberal agenda when seen as a self-care kit. Ahmed uses hooks' scholarship as an inspiration for "Item 2" of the feminist killjoy survival kit. She states,

bell hooks describes how she surrounded herself with precious objects, feminist objects, so that they are the first things she sees when she wakes up. Think of that: a feminist horizon around you, the warmth of memories, feminism as memory making. Feminism too leaves things behind. (Ahmed 2017, 241; hooks 1988)

The things that sit on my shelf have fallen there accidentally. They are the "feminist horizon" that is around me right now. They are a story that I can imagine and fictionally write. They help me understand that class is centered amongst my feminist things and connect to hooks' passion that feminism is for everybody (2014). My feminist things are filled with questions and memories that reach worlds beyond myself and my grandmother. My things are filled with grief from a thousand stories that no one will really ever know. But we can imagine and create a story. My feminist things hold worlds of women together and were touched by the hands of women from around the world, the remote hills, city factories, gymnasiums. Where did the satin come from? No one knows. Who sewed the uniform? No one knows. Whose hands wrote the 504? No one will know. What really happened to grandma? No one will ever know. Who won the Panther's basketball game in 1945? No one knows.

Finding the answer costs money. Money, that we don't have. Money that we will never have. We will never know. Our things tell stories. Our things tell the stories we want to remember. Our things tell our story. Our things connect us to the world. Our things allow us to write stories with curiosity. Our memories help us in our search for belonging amongst our feminist things (hooks 2008).

Things, Capitalism, Grief, Capitalism, Control, Grief, Capitalism: Controlled by the Cycle

The stone costs money
We dig for pennies in your home
They go toward the stone
The words cost money
We set goals and save for the next year
Your name costs money
Your name given to you by your mother costs money
Who gets the money
We will never know
The stone costs money

I visit
The stone with no name
There are bulbs in the ground
The season is not ready for
Yellow
Pink
Purple
But
You
Bring the colors
Your name not forgotten
My heart is red, my eyes green and brown
Your colors shine on me

Anger
The stone
I want to throw it down
You were more than a stone
The sickness
I wanted to save you from it
You were more than the sickness
The medicine
I want to flush it down
Did you have to take the medicines?
The windows
They were never yours to look out of
I want to break them with the stone

A home
A doctor
A healthy meal
A visit from us
It all costs money
Isolation
Death

Years ago, I wept
Alone by the washing machine
Washing the gloves, vintage gloves, that I told you about during our last conversation
Black or white I asked over the phone?
I could hear your voice tremble as you said Black.
Years ago, four granddaughters
Enjoyed pizza in your home
Amongst the mountains
In your living room
Years ago, four granddaughters moved you and your stuff from the mountains to the hills
We said our goodbyes
And on the rainy night years ago
Two granddaughters drove you through the mountains to the hills
To your next home
A house with women your age
But years ago, you cried
And the granddaughters cried
As they left you in this strange home on the rainy night
Years ago
We wept.
Today we remember you with random things.

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Kacie G. Hopkins (she/her) is a PhD Candidate with expertise in community economies, feminist social enterprises, and geographies of rural women's handmade crafts and creativity. She studies in the Communication and Cultural Studies program at York University and Toronto Metropolitan Universities. She is also a storyteller, creative writer, artist/ textile designer, and social entrepreneur. She is a member of global research networks such as: The Community Economies Research Network, Rural Women's Studies Association, Women, Gender and Social Justice, and Canadian Association for Studies in Co-operation. Outside of her PhD studies she is active in the social enterprise, Wildflower Enterprises at WildflowerConnection.-com, that she and her twin sister founded to connect rural women through crafting, design, and empowerment services. She is an advocate for ethical trading of fashion and continues to write on ethical fair trade practices, specifically decolonizing the fair trade field through ethical and decolonial storytelling and marketing and advocating against toxic charity structures. Further she is a survivor advocate and worked with the YWCA, National Sexual Violence Resource Centre, and Pennsylvania Coalitions Against Rape and Domestic Violence. She is passionate about lifting survivor voices and working on survivor centered and trauma informed pedagogies and approaches to social change.