

Belant

Prison Turned Me Into An Environmentalist

Andrew Belant- AA4623

Valley State Prison

I am slowly losing my grip, coming undone. I am detaching and letting go. Each day I feel it progress. I worry but I do not stop this process. This is the direction I need to be headed. My old self must dissolve for the new me to form.

15 years ago, I walked into my first jail cell and looked at my cellmate, with his stacks of legal materials and small stash of personal hygiene supplies. All I had was a few items of bedding issued to me by the intake staff.

As the guards shut the door, I notice how my hands were still oily with the ink they used to finger-print me. My existence of collecting has begun. The guards collect from me and I collect from them.

A few days later, one of my minders throws away a Zip-Lock bag. I take it out of the trash can. I am now in the ranks of a trash diggers. My life has hit this low point.

For the next fifteen years, I will collect. In this environment of scarcity, you never know when something will be of use.

Thread harvested from a torn sheet, lid from a steel can, staple from the packet received in the mail, shoe laces from worn out shoes; these all have uses as a part of daily life in prison. Other items are rarer and also rarely used. I have held on to items for years and never used them. I refused to give them up, though, because you never know when you will need them.

But I am losing my grip on the ~~physical~~ items that clutter my world. I am detaching from them. The things I have put so much effort to collecting are losing their significance to me. As my mind expands and I start to look, really look, at life outside of prison, these collections of useful yet trashy good lose their significance.

I no longer care whether I have that perfect thing for that one situation where I need something. In fact, I no longer care about that something that needed that thing in the first place. As I look up and out, what is right in front of me loses cohesion, it loses focus and I am glad.

How did I ever care about such things when the world is out there? That is where my attention needs to be focused. That is what I should be collecting.