(54) Title: MULTIPLE PURPOSE EATING UTENSIL ASSEMBLY

(57) Abstract: A multi-purpose device assembly for eating and for non-eating purposes. In addition to having the functionality of an eating utensil, the device is generally or nearly flattened or planar to accommodate non-eating functions that would otherwise be difficult or impossible using an eating utensil according to a conventional configuration.

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Figure 4
MULTIPLE PURPOSE EATING UTENSIL ASSEMBLY

CROSS REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

This application claims priority to UK Patent Application No. 1007437.5 filed May 1, 2010.
FIELD AND BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

The present invention relates generally to a device assembly that can be used for multiple purposes and more specifically to an improved eating utensil assembly that is packaged in a flat or nearly flat configuration. The eating utensil assembly can be readily separated into single or multiple eating utensils or implements and can accommodate non-eating purposes in addition to their functionality as eating implements.

Eating utensils or implements, such as the fork, knife, spoon or pick are known in the art and are common items of cutlery that are used for eating. Eating utensils have generally evolved into a particular form that allows for the handling and manipulation of food by the user. Traditionally, the knife, fork, spoon or pick come as separate pieces and the art has favored particular shapes and dimensions that have evolved over time in order to accommodate convention and ease of use or storage in a home or at a restaurant or other food service sites.

Hybrid forms of eating utensils have also been created in order to allow for alternative functionality or multiple purpose use for the same eating utensil or implement. For example, a spoon and fork hybrid is available, where the spoon and the fork member are formed at a common end of the same eating implement or piece of cutlery. Examples of eating utensils that can be used for multiple purposes are well known in the art. Combination forms of eating utensils, such as a fork and spoon combination where the spoon and the fork members are on opposite ends of the same piece of cutlery, have also been developed. Hybrid and combination eating utensils have been developed for different reasons. The art is filled with examples of eating utensils that attempt to satisfy the need for a single utensil that can be used for multiple purposes such as the manipulation function of a fork with the transfer function of a spoon or the cutting function of a knife. Accordingly, various knife, fork and spoon combinations and hybrids are known where the combination or hybrid is present in a single eating utensil or piece of cutlery. For example, U.S. Patent No. 33,285 to Ames discloses a combination of a knife, fork and spoon where a spoon or fork is at the opposite end of a utensil that also has a knife. Further examples of utensils that employ combinations or hybrids of knife, forks and spoons are disclosed in U.S. Patent No. 147,19 to Francis; U.S. Patent No. 462,068 to Sheppman; U.S. Patent No. 843,953 to Laramy; U.S. Patent No. 2,185,942 to Frank; U.S. Patent No. 2,473,288 to McNeill; U.S. Patent No. 2,542,600 to Vaccarezza; U.S. Patent No. 2,839,830 to Neiman, Jr.; U.S. Patent No. 4,535,538 to Nelson;

The eating utensils described in the art do not accord much flexibility in how the cutlery can be delivered to the user and the purposes for which the cutlery can be used. A limitation of the prior art eating utensils is that in order to permit ease of functioning, the food engagement portions thereof are generally formed in conventional shapes that are convex and curved. The configurations of prior art eating utensils accommodate the need for nesting of the utensils during storage or accommodate particular and intended manipulation with the hands. The configurations of the prior art utensils have a number of downsides. Firstly, such utensils are not flattened and cannot be easily stored without nesting the utensils together. Secondly, such utensils are more difficult to transport or deliver to the user. Thirdly, such utensils cannot easily be used for other non-eating purposes that would require planar, flat, or nearly planar or nearly flat configurations. Furthermore, the traditional shapes and dimensions of conventional cutlery do not allow for the fusion or joining of multiple forms of cutlery that can be delivered as a single intact piece prior to use, thereby making the utensils easy to deliver to the user.

Accordingly, it is desirable in the art to provide combination eating utensils that include food engagement portions or implements that are in a planar or nearly planar configuration that allows for ease of transfer to the user and for other non-eating purposes that require flat or nearly flattened or planar or nearly planar configurations. Despite the number of devices on the market, there remains a need for an implement which can be used for multiple eating and non-eating purposes and that can be easily delivered to the end-user.

**SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION**

The present invention is an eating utensil assembly that can be easily delivered to the user and that can accommodate other non-eating purposes. In a first embodiment, the invention is a set of at least one, but preferably multiple eating utensils that are joined together and delivered to the user as a single intact device that can be used as an eating utensil upon separation of the various eating utensil implements from each other. In another embodiment, the eating utensil assembly has multiple food engagement members that are joined together and delivered to the user in a flat or nearly flat or planar or nearly planar configuration. Each of the multiple food engagement members is situated in its own segment
of the device. In another embodiment of the present invention, the segments are fused or joined together so that the segments form a single unit or piece when the device is delivered to the user. The junction between the fused or joined segments or portions can be weakened or made susceptible to separation by pressure so that the segments can be easily separated from each other without damaging the functionality of the eating utensils or food engagement members therein.

According to other aspects of the invention, the invention is capable of being separated into combinations of eating utensils at the discretion of the user. This is because each segment can accommodate a complete set or subset of eating implements or food engagement members, such as a fork, knife, spoon and pick, in any combination.

In other embodiments of the invention, the food engagement member can be used for other non-eating functions, such as for the clipping of papers together. By way of example, in one embodiment, the eating utensil assembly has a fork member that can be used for eating, where the tines of the fork can alternatively be used to clip papers or other articles or materials together. In yet other embodiments of the invention, the nearly flat or flat configuration allows the device to be easily packaged and delivered to the user and allows for other non-eating functions, such as a bookmark or a coaster or to accommodate branding or messaging or other personalized text or imagery as required by the user.

An object of the present invention is to provide a set of eating utensils that can accommodate other non-eating purposes. Another object of the present invention is to provide a set of eating utensils wherein the food engagement portions thereof are formed in a planar or nearly planar configuration so that the utensil can be delivered to the user easily and to allow for stacking of the assemblies together. Another object of the present invention is to minimize the number of separate utensils required for a user to have in hand in order to accommodate any eating task. A further object of the present invention is to provide for the delivery of utensils for multiple users as a single piece or unit that can be shared or divided. A further object of the present invention is to provide for the delivery of utensils for all eating functions, such as fork, knife, spoon or pick as a single piece of unit. A still further object of the present invention is to provide a set of eating utensils that can be used in the alternative for non-eating purposes such as a paper clip or as coasters or to accommodate messaging or text, or imagery or branding or the like. It is also an object of the present invention to provide a set of eating utensils suitable for printing or affixation of a trademark, logo or other commercial symbol.
The present invention redefines the relationship between the positive and negative spaces in a tradition eating utensil. By replacing the negative spaces between a traditional fork tine or prong, with a secondary positive shape, the notion of a "yin and yang" cutlery tool is born. The invention promotes the idea of sharing in eating. These and other objects and advantages of the present invention will be apparent to those skilled in the art from the following description of preferred embodiments, claims and appended drawings.

**BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS**

The foregoing summary as well as the following detailed description of the preferred embodiments of the present invention will be best understood when considered in conjunction with the accompanying drawings, wherein like designations denote like elements throughout the drawings, and wherein:

**FIG. 1** is a top view perspective of a first embodiment of the multi-purpose eating utensil in accordance with the present invention showing an embodiment with two segments that are in the joined configuration as a single unit or piece.

**FIG. 2** is a top view perspective of the first embodiment of the multi-purpose eating utensil in accordance with the present invention showing an embodiment with one segment separated.

**FIG. 3** is a top view perspective of a second embodiment of the multi-purpose eating utensil in accordance with the present invention showing an embodiment with two segments that are in the joined configuration as a single unit or piece.

**FIG. 4** is a top view perspective of a second embodiment of the multi-purpose eating utensil in accordance with the present invention showing an embodiment with one segment separated.

**FIG. 5** is a top view perspective of a third embodiment of the multi-purpose eating utensil in accordance with the present invention showing an embodiment with two segments joined to each other.

**FIG. 6** is a top view perspective of a third embodiment of the multi-purpose eating utensil in accordance with the present invention showing an embodiment with two segments separated apart.
FIG. 7 is a top view perspective of a fourth embodiment of the multi-purpose eating utensil in accordance with the present invention showing an embodiment where the device is used for a non-eating purpose as a paper clip.

FIG. 8 is a top view perspective of a fifth embodiment of the multi-purpose eating utensil of the present invention showing an embodiment where the device is used for a non-eating purpose.

It is noted that the drawings are intended to depict only typical or exemplary embodiments of the invention and this many not be necessarily to scale. Accordingly, the drawings should not be considered as limiting the scope of the invention. The invention will now be described in greater detail with reference to the accompanying drawings.

**DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED INVENTION AND PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS**

The figures are referred to herein to describe certain exemplary embodiments of the invention. FIG. 1, FIG. 3 and FIG. 5 illustrate, in a top perspective view, a first and second embodiment of the multi-purpose eating utensil assembly 10 of the present invention. In these first and second embodiments, the assembly is planar or nearly planar and is heart-shaped 11 or circular 12 with two segments 13 and 14 that are joined or intact and made separable as described herein. The eating utensil assemblies 10 and 11 of the first and second embodiments comprise two fork implements and that are formed having first food engagement members 6 or tines 6 for the first fork implement and second food engagement members 6 or tines 6 for the second fork implement. As described herein, the eating utensil assembly of the invention can accommodate any combination of food engagement members, such as a fork, spoon, knife or pick. As exemplified in FIG. 1, FIG. 3 and FIG. 5, when the device is in its single unit or intact configuration 11 and 12 so that the segments 13 and 14 are joined or otherwise not completely separated, the food engagement members 5 or tines 5 of the first fork implement or segment 13 are made to fit together and complement or interlock the food engagement members 6 or tines 6 of the second fork implement or segment 14. The segments 13 and 14 are separable as described herein along a line of weakness or weakened boundary 7 between the two segments 13 and 14 that can be unjoined or separated upon the application of pressure, while keeping the integrity of the food engagement members 6 or tines 6 intact.
When the segments are separated, as is exemplified in FIG. 2, FIG. 4 or FIG. 6, each segment can become its own eating utensil with at least one food engagement member 6. In some embodiments only one segment 13 or 14 is capable of being used as an eating utensil because the second or other segments do not comprise food engagement members. In the separated or unjoined segments 13 and 14 of the first or second embodiments that are exemplified in FIG. 2, FIG. 4 or FIG. 6, the tines or eating utensil food engagement members 6 of the fork implements can be easily appreciated. The eating utensil segment has a region opposite the fork tines or eating utensil food engagement members 6 that can be used as a handle 3 for manipulation of the eating utensil by the user. As described herein, the eating utensil can accommodate other food engagement implements or members. For example, in the segments 13 and 14 of the first and second embodiments as shown in FIG. 2, FIG. 4 or FIG. 6, the eating utensil of the invention can also have a knife member 5 on one or each of the segments. As shown in FIG. 2, FIG. 4 or FIG. 6, the knife member 5 can be serrated, but other embodiments of the knife member can also be unserrated or in the form of blade. The knife engagement member 5 can be disposed laterally on each segment 13 or 14. Upon separation, the user can employ the fork implement 4 or 6 of the first segment 13 along with a knife implement 5 of a second segment as desired 14. Alternatively, the user can employ one segment of one assembly for a particular purpose while also employment another segment from another assembly for a particular purpose. Any combination is contemplated by the invention. The handle 3 members further include a region 15 that can be used to place desired text, imagery or other branding devices. If the knife food engagement member 5 of the implement or eating utensil is employed by the user, a region opposite the knife food engagement member can be used as a handle or to otherwise manipulate the eating utensil.

The device of the invention preferably includes at least one food engagement member. In one embodiment, the device of the invention includes at least two eating utensils or food engagement members. The eating utensils or food engagement members may be in the form of forks, spoons, knives, picks or other objects that facilitate food consumption and selection and any combination thereof. In one embodiment, the eating utensils are at least two forks or at least two spoons or at least two knives and any combination thereof. In another embodiment, the eating utensils are at least two forks and at least one knife. In another embodiment of the invention, the eating utensils are at least two forks and at least two knives. In another embodiment of the invention, the eating utensils are at least one fork and at least one knife. In yet another embodiment of the invention, the eating utensils are at least two forks and at least two knives and at least two spoons.
The tines of the fork members are formed from resilient materials as described herein and the device has a flat or nearly flat cross section, thus presenting a planar or nearly planar surface. The multi-purpose device assembly of the invention comprises at least one segment or food engagement member, or at least two segments or food engagement members, or at least three segments or food engagement members, or at least four segments or food engagement members, or at least five segments or food engagement members, or at least six segments or food engagement members, or at least seven segments or food engagement members, or at least eight segments or food engagement members, or at least nine segments or food engagement members, or at least ten segments or food engagement members.

The segments or food engagement members can be fused or joined together so that the segments or food engagement members form a single piece, article or structure. The junction between the fused or joined segments or food engagement members can be weakened or made susceptible to separation by pressure so that the segments or food engagement members can be easily unjoined or separated from each other without damaging the functionality of the eating utensils or other non-eating functions of the device as described herein. One of skill in the art would be familiar with any of a number of methods known in the art to render the junction between the joined or fused segments or food engagement members weak or susceptible to separation, including employing a perforated junction or other line of weakness bordering each segment, or a boundary bordering each segment that is thinned or made weaker by cutting, laser engraving, moulding and the like.

Each segment or food engagement members of the eating utensil assembly can accommodate at least one form, or at least two forms, or at least three forms, or at least four forms, or at least five forms, or at least six forms of eating utensils. Such forms of eating utensils that can be part of each segment or food engagement members can be a knife, fork, pick or spoon or any combination or hybrid thereof. In one embodiment, there is at least one segment or food engagement members to the eating utensil assembly of the invention with at least one eating utensil therein, such as a knife, fork, spoon or pick or any hybrid thereof. In another embodiment of the invention, there is at least one segment or food engagement members to the cutlery of the invention and at least two eating utensils therein, such as a fork and a knife, or a fork and a spoon, or a spoon and a knife, or any other combination or hybrid thereof. In another embodiment of the invention, there is at least one segment or food engagement member in the eating utensil assembly of the invention with at least three food engagement members therein, such as a fork, knife and spoon or any other combination or hybrid thereof. In yet another embodiment of the invention, there are at least two segments or
food engagement members in the eating utensil assembly of the invention and at least two or at least three food engagement members therein, such as a fork, knife or a spoon or any combination or hybrid thereof.

The invention is also capable of being used for non-eating purposes. In one embodiment of the invention, the non-eating purpose of the invention is as a clip. By way of example, FIG. 7 and FIG. 8 illustrate how the multi-purpose device of the invention can be used in a non-eating embodiment. All of the same features that apply to the eating utensil function as described herein are featured for the non-eating purpose embodiments except that the tines 4 or 6 serve to function as a clip member, also now 4 or 6 in this embodiment. In order to function as a clip, the user will not separate the segments 13 or 14 at junction 7, but will keep them intact to some extent. This will allow the tine or clip member 4 or 6 that is part of the first segment 13 to serve as the front or top part of the clip while the second segment 14 will function as the bottom or back part of the clip, with the paper or other material in between. In another embodiment of the invention, the device is used as a clip for holding various items together, such as a paper bag. Any purpose for which a clip may be used is intended. In another embodiment, the clip is a paper clip that holds sheets of paper together. In another embodiment, the clip is a paper clip that holds sheets of paper to another surface, such as a folder, or a metal surface, or clothing. In another embodiment of the invention, the clip holds materials other than paper together, such as synthetic or non-synthetic materials. The clip member is formed from the tines of the fork member, as described above, and thus present a planar surface that can be used as a clip for paper or other materials or items. Because the device of the invention has multiple segments, as described herein, the device is capable of being used as multiple clips, depending on the number of fork members present in a particular embodiment. In one embodiment, the device has at least one fork member and therefore can be used as a single clip. In another embodiment, the device has at least two fork members and therefore can be used as two clips. In another embodiment, the device has at least three fork members and therefore can be used as three clips. In another embodiment of the invention, the device has at least four fork members, and therefore can be used as four clips. In yet another embodiment of the invention, the device has at least five fork members, and therefore can be used as five clips.

By rendering the eating utensil susceptible to multiple purposes, the device can serve dual functions for the same user or transaction. For example, a merchant selling goods, such as a food establishment or market, can use the device of the invention to advertise its services or to clip receipts, menus, paper or the like to bags or other delivery goods, while the user can
employ the same device as an eating utensil upon receipt of the goods and according to the disclosure herein.

The present invention can be manufactured from any suitable material. By way of example, the material can include plastic, wood, paper, biodegradable cornstarch, or an edible, biodegradable or oxo-biodegradable material. One of skill in the art would be familiar with the type of material that is suitable for use in the present invention including a wide-range of natural or synthetic or semi-synthetic materials, including inorganic or organic solids or other materials that are used in the manufacture of industrial products. In one embodiment, the material is made from a natural substance, such as wood or other suitable plant material, for example plywood or rubber. In another embodiment, the material is a plastic or other polymer of low or high molecular mass that may also contain other substances that enhance the performance of the material. For example, the synthetic material can include bakelite, nylon, synthetic rubber, polyethylene, polystyrene, polyvinyl chloride, polytetrafluoroethylene, or polypropylene. In another embodiment, the device is made from magnetic materials that can be attached to the appropriate surfaces.

The shape of the device of the invention can vary to accommodate different purposes, needs or desires. The shape of the inventive device can be one with no sides or with any number of sizes, such as one, or at least two, or at least three, or at least four, or at least five, or at least six, or at least seven, or at least eight, or at least nine, or at least ten, or at least eleven, or at least twelve, or at least thirteen, or at least fourteen, or at least fifteen, or at least sixteen. By way of example, the shape of the invention can be of any non-geometric or any geometric shape, such as an oval, an ellipse, a square, a rhombus, a diamond, a triangle, a rectangle, a cylinder, a trapezoid, a pentagon, a hexagon, a heptagon, an octagon, a nonagon, a concave polygon, a constructible polygon, a kite, a convex polygon, a cyclic polygon, a equiangular polygon, a equilateral polygon, a regular polygon, a polydrafter, a balbis, a henagon, or digon. By way of example, non-geometric shapes comprise a heart or any other part of the anatomy of a living organism, a dog or any other animal, any animate or any inanimate object such as a tree or a car or other vehicle, or any celestial object, or any trademark or logo or any other sign used to identify a person or business entity.

The size and dimensions of the device of the invention can vary to accommodate different purposes for needs. In one embodiment, the invention has a length, width, radius or other comparable measurement across any two points of at least 0.5 centimeter, or at least 0.6 centimeter, or at least 0.7 centimeter, or at least 0.8 centimeter, or at least 0.9 centimeter, or at least 1.0 centimeter, or at least 1.1 to 1.5 centimeters, or at least 1.6 to 2.0 centimeters, or at
least 2.1 to 3.0 centimeters, or at least 3.1 to 4.0 centimeters, or at least 4.1 to 5.0 centimeters, or at least 5.1 to 6.0 centimeters, or at least 6.1 to 7.0 centimeters, or at least 7.1 to 8.0 centimeters, or at least 8.1 to 9.0 centimeters, or at least 9.1 to 10.0 centimeters, or at least 10.1 to 11.0 centimeters, or at least 11.1 to 12.0 centimeters, or at least 12.1 to 13.0 centimeters, or at least 13.1 to 14.0 centimeters, or at least 14.1 to 15.0 centimeters, or at least 15.1 to 16.0 centimeters, or at least 16.1 to 17.0 centimeters, or at least 18.0 to 20.0 centimeters. In one embodiment the material has a thickness of at least 0.1 millimeter, or at least 0.2 millimeter, or at least 0.3 millimeter, or at least 0.4 millimeter, or at least 0.5 millimeter, or at least 0.6 millimeter, or at least 0.7 millimeter, or at least 0.8 millimeter, or at least 0.9 millimeter, or at least 1.0 millimeter, or at least 1.1 to 1.5 millimeters, or at least 1.6 to 2.0 millimeters, or at least 2.1 to 2.5 millimeters, or at least 2.6 to 3.0 millimeters, or at least 3.1 to 5.0 millimeters, or at least 5.1 to 10.0 millimeters, or at least 10.1 to 15.0 millimeters, or at least 15.1 to 20.0 millimeters, or at least 20.1 to 25.0 millimeters.
CLAIMS

1. An eating utensil assembly comprising two fork members and two segments; wherein a first segment has a first fork member therein; a second segment has a second fork member therein; and said first and the second segments are joined together such that the tines of said first fork member mate with the tines of said second fork member when the first and second segments are joined.

2. The eating utensil assembly of claim 1, further comprising one knife member that is located laterally within said first segment.

3. The eating utensil assembly of claim 2, wherein said knife member is serrated.

4. The eating utensil assembly of claim 2, wherein said knife member is an edge.

5. The eating utensil assembly of claim 2, further comprising a second knife member that is located laterally within said second segment.

6. The eating utensil assembly of claim 5, wherein said first knife member is serrated and said second knife member is an edge.

7. An eating utensil assembly comprising two pick members and two segments wherein the first segment has a first pick member therein; wherein the second segment has a second pick member therein and wherein said first and the second segments are assembled in a joined state such that said pick members mate together when the first and second segments are joined.

8. The eating utensil assembly of claims 1 or 2 or 3 or 4 or 5 or 6 or 7, wherein the boundary between said first and second segments is perforated.

9. The eating utensil assembly of claim 1, wherein the tines of the fork member are used as a paper clip.

10. The eating utensil assembly of claim 1, wherein the assembly is used as a mark for indicating to a user the location where the user was previously reading in a piece of literature.

11. A paper clip assembly comprising two fork members and two segments wherein a first segment has a first fork member therein and a second segment has a second fork member therein and said fork members can be used to clip a paper to another object.
Figure 8
INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No. PCT/US2011/000764

Classifications of Subject Matter
IPC(8) - A47G 21/02 (201 1.01)
USPC - 30/147

According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC

Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)
IPC(8) - A47G 21/00, 21/02 (201 1.01)
USPC - 30/142, 147

Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched:

Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practicable, search terms used):
Patbase, Google

C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages</th>
<th>Relevant to claim No.</th>
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<td>X</td>
<td>US 5,699,618 A (BARBERA); 23 December 1997 (23.12.1997) entire document</td>
<td>1, 7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Y</td>
<td>US 2008/0000922 A1 (VANGUARD); 03 January 2008 (03.01.2008) entire document</td>
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<td>Y</td>
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<td>8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Y</td>
<td>DE 4,010,993 A1 (HESSIE); 10 October 1991 (10.10.1991) entire document</td>
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Further documents are listed in the continuation of Box C.

* Special categories of cited documents:
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Date of the actual completion of the international search: 18 July 2011
Date of mailing of the international search report: 27 JUL 2011

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