

IdentiTEA: The Exploration of Identity through Tea

by

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FADE IN:

INT. DINNER TABLE - NIGHT

ESTABLISHING SHOT on myself and family sitting at the dinner table, blurred.

CHYRON: "IdentiTEA"

SABRINA

Ever since I was little, I would always
get homesick when I was away from my
family.

CUT TO:

INT. ELEMENTARY SCHOOL CLASSROOM - DAY

HIGH-ANGLE SHOT on younger me with watery eyes staring up at the camera.

SABRINA

Even when I was simply going back to
school and readjusting to new
schedules,

CAMERA VIEWPOINT on clock ticking.

SABRINA

I would count down the hours until I
could go home.

FADE OUT:

INT. BACK TO OPENING SCENE DINNER TABLE - NIGHT
CAMERA VIEWPOINT on younger me sitting.

SABRINA

My heavy heart was always healed every
evening by a warm cup of tea with my
family. There is a sense of home in
this particular, warm drink. It soothes
your nerves in a distinct way, and
connects you to whoever you are
drinking with.

CLOSE-UP on face.

Tea on the stove boils and a hand picks up the kettle. It then
pours the tea into a cup and the camera is BIRDS EYE.

CLOSE-UP on a cup of tea.

Then, camera KEN BURNS into the tea and changes to the next
scene.

EXT. CLASSROOM - DAY

POINT-OF-VIEW SHOT on friend.

SABRINA

Throughout my life, people have always tried to "place" me. I am used to catching people staring quizzically at me, head cocked, with the eventual question, "What are you?" A potentially existential question for a young person, to which I usually answer with a simplistic checkbox response:

CUT TO:

Appear like a checkbox.

CHYRON: "Half-White and Half-Asian"

SABRINA

"Half-White and Half-Asian." On my mother's side, I inherit a history of Japanese and Chinese descent. My father's family history is a bit murkier, with ancestry from all over Europe, including England and Russia. It is from his side of the family that

I get my Jewish heritage as well. When I think about my cultural heritage, watered down by generations in America, the only unifying element that comes to mind is tea.

CHYRON: "So how does tea connect both worlds that make up my background?"

EXT. KITCHEN - DAY

[NOT ANIMATED]

ESTABLISHING SHOT on kitchen, panning into the tea set and teacup.

SABRINA

I have a black flowered tea set passed down through generations on my paternal side. I also have one remaining tea cup from a broken set owned by maternal ancestors who were forced to relocate from California to a Japanese internment camp in Heart Mountain, Wyoming. Tea has been the unifying commodity of my two cultures and I have chosen this special drink to symbolize my own blend of cultural identity.

CHYRON: "Part I: My Japanese Descent"

FADE IN:

INT. KITCHEN ON CUP - DAY

SABRINA

I will begin with the lone teacup.

SABRINA

Tea has always been one of the most prominent commodities in Japan. Tea originated in China and reached Japan in the 8th century by visiting Japanese diplomats and monks. Chanoyou or Sado translates to "The Way of Tea" and became popular in Japan amongst samurai and merchants in the 14th century before shaping into the popular ritual many enjoy today. Personally, I like the term "Way of Tea" more than the translated "ceremony" because the objective of this ritual is to create a serene environment in which guests experience the hospitality of the host in a way that allows for escapism from busy every day life and instead creates an environment of peace, simplicity, and reflection.

MONTAGE of series of clips depicting the announcement of the Japanese Internment Camps, footage of those fleeing, etc.

CHYRON: "February 1942"

SABRINA

It was February of 1942 when President Roosevelt signed the executive order that would enforce the relocation of nearly 21,000 Japanese Americans into Japanese Internment Camps.

EXT. SMALL HOME - NIGHT

SABRINA

My mother told me a story that my grandmother told her.

(PAUSE)

Because of Executive Order 9066, Japanese Americans frantically collected whatever they could take with them to the internment camps and packed for the journey. When Americans not of Japanese descent heard of the order, they would pay Japanese Americans a visit.

HIGH ANGLE SHOT of people marching to the house and the door opening.

SABRINA

They would offer to buy priceless family heirlooms for a pitiful dollar or two, knowing these families would be desperate to sell and get some sort of payment for their cherished belongings.

PANNING SHOT onto tea set.

Transition to animated sequence of narration.

SABRINA

However, one item stood out. In response to the attempted exploitation

of these white citizens offering a buck
or two for their tea sets,
Japanese-American families would
instead smash their teacups, teapots,
and saucers. Tea was such a symbol of
their strong identity and history that
they would rather destroy it than pawn
their cultural identity for next to
nothing.

PAN OUT on a tea set.

(CRASH SFX)

FADE to single cup.

INT. INTERVIEW FOOTAGE - DAY

SABRINA

I found an old tape in which my mother
interviewed her grandmother to ask her
about her experience as a young mother
in the Japanese Internment Camps.

(INTERVIEW CLIP PLAYS)

CUT TO:

SABRINA

I reached out to learn about my own
grandmother's experience as well as its
connection to tea.

(Interview)

FADE OUT:

CHYRON: "Part II: My Jewish Descent"

FADE IN:

SABRINA

This conversation with my grandmother was so special to me; it led me to want to have a similar conversation with my grandfather on my father's side.

(Interview with Grandfather plays)

SABRINA

Most of my grandfather's stories were happy memories from his childhood growing up in Columbus, Ohio. When I asked if he ever experienced any antisemitism, he said "maybe a little with a few comments but nothing worth mentioning, probably because it was largely a Jewish neighborhood. He did share with me a story his parents told him about Kristallnacht, also known as the Night of Broken Glass. This was a violent riot against Jews carried out by SA paramilitary forces and civilians throughout Nazi Germany on 9-10 November 1938. The German authorities looked on without intervening. The name Kristallnacht ("Crystal Night") comes from the shards of broken glass that littered the streets after the windows of Jewish-owned stores, buildings and synagogues were smashed. Although the circumstances were drastically different, this also reminded me of the shattered tea sets my Grandmother's family would experience seven years later.

Unfortunately, both sides of my family have had to endure oppression and violence.

SABRINA

My grandfather speaks of my father's late uncle who was fortunate enough to escape from a concentration camp.

Images and footage of horrors of the Holocaust flash by.

Tragically, the horrors of the concentration camp could never leave him and eventually contributed to him taking his own life years later.

FADE OUT:

FADE IN:

INT. KITCHEN ON TEA SET - DAY

SABRINA

Since this notorious genocide, ceremonies in honor of remembrance continue to happen all over the globe.

News articles, footage, etc. play.

SABRINA

I also discovered how tea connects to Judaism in the sense of spirituality. I discovered that a cup of tea is a mild stimulant.

Zoom in on a cup of tea.

SABRINA

It stimulates our nervous system.

Body depicting nervous system lighting up.

SABRINA

Parallel to this phenomenon, there is a spiritual stimulant: having faith in God.

Person praying or demonstrating some form of faith in God.

SABRINA

When a person is feeling tired or drained, it is not uncommon that they drink a warm, cup of tea to stimulate their nerves and regain that feeling of stability.

Person droopy and clearly tired. Pour a cup of tea and take a sip. Immediately lightens up and color returns.

SABRINA

Similarly, people who are spiritually tired might lose faith and slip into an emotional and spiritual state of depression or helplessness. In this moment, having faith and putting trust in God can stimulate the soul and help uplift their spirits. This cup of tea for the soul can truly help individuals

regain their emotional state and happiness.

Darkness with a person's eyes crossed out. Praying to God. Then eyes return and the person stands up. Darkness disappears. Focus on tea.

SABRINA

Even further than believing there are other aspects of the Jewish culture than can serve like this uplifting "cup of tea." People can follow Mitzvot which are God's commandments. The Jewish word "Mitzvah" commonly refers to a good deed or an act of human kindness. A Mitzvot can include volunteering, helping underprivileged children, donating, and more. The Jewish phrase Tikkun Olam translates to "heal the world." In modern Jewish circles, tikkun olam has become synonymous with the notion of social action and the pursuit of social justice. It's one of the most meaningful aspects of my faith.

A girl doing good deeds such as volunteering, donating, putting together backpacks.

FADE OUT:

CHYRON: "Conclusion"

FADE IN:

INT. KITCHEN ON BOTH TEA SETS - DAY

SABRINA

I come from two worlds of survivors.
Two worlds of pain, loss, and
suffering. But also great strength,
resilience, faith, and love.

Focus on my grandmother and fade transition to my
grandfather to represent the two worlds I come
from.

SABRINA

My heritage is what shapes who I am.
Like tea, the blending of my culture
and faith help me feel centered, warm,
and restores my sense of equilibrium.

Illustration of myself talking through the
conclusion.

SABRINA

I am honored to come from multiple
cultures of such strength and beauty.
Learning about my family history has
been transformative and given me a much
better understanding of who I am as a
complete and whole individual. Not
someone who is "half" of anything, but
rather someone who is wholly her own
person. The next time someone stares at
me quizzically and asks what I am, my
response will simply be: "I'm Sabrina."
I'll then smile, turn away, and go
enjoy a nice relaxing cup of tea.

Montage while I narrate that recaps my story with both sides of my family. Then land on drawings of my grandmother and grandfather. And then myself smiling. Finally, the last shot ends on a cup of tea surrounded by the two tea sets that represent my family.

FADE OUT:

THE END