

What The Hell Nationality Are You?

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Dragon

In 1993, I was ten when *Dragon: The Bruce Lee Story* came out in theaters, when my older sister dragged me to see it so she could revel in Jason Scott Lee's buff glisten. Being ten, I didn't understand most of the movie, especially the part when Bruce's soon-to-be Caucasian mother-in-law said to him and his fiancé, "But what about children... what will they be? They won't be white, and they won't be oriental. They'll be some kind of half-breed and will not be accepted by either side." My sister tore up the theater laughing, befuddling not only me but also everyone in the place.

Years later, I get it.

On Names

My mom is a third generation Japanese American. Her last name is Diaz. Before her father was shipped off to battle the Germans in WWII, he changed the family name to something that wouldn't get his wife and kids sent to the internment camps. Often, people come up to my mom with, "You don't look like a Diaz," to which, she replies with, "Is your name Richard? Because you look like a dick."

I think she's kept "Diaz" as an excuse to be a smartass.

My dad's a first generation Irish American. He came to the US in his twenties to see what all the hype was about, and when asked if this country lived up to his expectations, he replies with, "No, but I'm stuck here until a potato famine hits. Or another George Bush."

Being adopted, he has an old English last name, so all our lives we've had to hear him bitch and moan about how he's had to wake up every day of his miserable Irish life knowing that after the years

of disconnect his “people” have had from Great Britain, he's still “overshadowed by a kingdom of wankers.”

I think he's kept his name as an excuse to bitch and moan.

Fast-forward a generation, my mom and dad allegedly crap out my sister and me. I say allegedly because they always told us kids that we were adopted, and to add insult to injury, they hyphenated our last names because neither wanted to give up surname “identity.” As teenagers, my sister and I eventually discovered the truth when we stumbled across our birth certificates and saw that blasted hyphenation.

Total mind blow. We could no longer find relief in believing that we weren't blood-related to those people.

On Religion

My mom and dad tried being PC about the whole God thing, raising us in the Catholic and Buddhist Church simultaneously. It was no different than genetically fusing together a whale and an elephant and telling them to just figure it out.

So we did the Catholic Church thing every Sunday morning and the Buddhist thing every Sunday afternoon. Nothing like knowing we're going to Hell because we'd never been baptized, yet we took Communion at every Catholic church within a thirty mile radius since we had to bounce whenever someone started asking too many questions. After a while, we ran out of churches to hit up, and my dad decided that he'd rather read the Sunday paper over eggs and bacon than break his back against a wooden pew and choke on Styrofoam.

Shortly after the Catholic lapsing, my mom yanked us out of the Buddhist Church, claiming that it had “an unbalanced belief system.” To her, Buddhism meant giving up all desire in order to achieve true enlightenment, and without the Catholic Church's guilt and shame balancing out the Buddhist Church's “give up all worldly desire propaganda,” she hypothesized that her two daughters would end up Peg Bundy clones.

To date, I'm not sure if she felt the presence of religion would or would not result in such a fate.

On Food

Meals at home consisted of Ramen with cut up hotdogs or something from a box like macaroni and cheese. Whenever we went out it was always Happy Meal this, KFC that. School lunches were always peanut butter and jelly this, Hostess that.

On holidays, my mom and dad barbecued. Argued. She'd nag him all day about how he always undercooks the meat and just because his family may have been cave dwellers a few decades ago didn't mean he had to force his archaic tendencies on the rest of us so when it was finally time to fire up the grill, not only was he already drunk but he was agitated from all the harping so he'd purposely burn the chicken and undercook the beef.

I haven't partaken in a single Fourth of July, Thanksgiving, or Monday Night Football when my plate wasn't sloshing with burnt chicken flakes floating in a pool of blood.

On Discipline

My mom was all about the rice paddle. Irony is we didn't own a rice cooker, and if we did have rice for dinner, it was Uncle Bens' stovetop cheese and broccoli, so this paddle of hers was purchased purely for whacking purposes. That thing stung like a son of a bitch. And she used the non-stick rice paddle, the one with all the textured bumps, so my sister and I would walk away looking like we'd sat on a medieval torture chair.

My dad was all about the yardstick. He never used it on us, just brought it out whenever we were bad. He told us to get a running start then he'd chase us through the neighborhood swinging the stick overhead and screaming gibberish like the Lucky Charms leprechaun. His theory being, "There's nothing like terror and exercise to put kids in their place."

Despite the obvious, I occasionally found myself wondering why I never had any neighborhood friends.

On Dating

In high school, my sister had this crackpot idea of bringing her boyfriend home for dinner, as if bringing a nice Christian boy into a house filled with Ramen, hotdogs, and spite was supposed to result in something other than him choking on alienation. At least it was hot dogs and Uncle Ben's night, and not "pick your poison," which was a graceful way of saying "find whatever's in the fridge and scarf at your own risk."

It was, however, a weeknight, and on weeknights my dad, a public defender, would chug beer on the couch in his underwear. When dinnertime rolled around, he'd come to the table in his transparent tighty-whities, and bitch and moan about frivolous lawsuits, about his last name, or about my mom's park job in the garage and what a travesty it was for her to get behind the wheel not just as an Asian, but as an Asian woman. She turned the tables with the "drunk and lazy oaf" insults, their bickering ending with my mom hurling a piece of broccoli cheese rice-ridden hotdog at my dad's face.

Despite the obvious, I occasionally found myself wondering why I never had any boyfriends.

American-size Me

It's confusing enough to grow up in a place like America, a country without definitive culture, except for ranch dressing and reality TV, but it's even worse to grow up half one thing, half another, christened a hyphenation of names without connection to either owner, raised by "parents" who redefine suburban bickering.

And yet, I've come to accept this family, my family as the epitome of dysfunctional; which, aside from divorce and frivolous lawsuits, is more American than processed cheese slapped on a super-sized slice of apple pie.

