

The Adventures Of My Ancestry

Artist's statement: This relates to the theme unearth as Meena uncovers her past history. She learns about the Japanese American internment camps and learns to love her culture. She also learns her mother's past and that she was raised by Japanese foster parents.

Prequel

When I was four people would ridicule my name. They ganged up on me and commented about how since I'm Japanese I don't understand American culture. Since then I changed my identity, or who I am. Instead of Mika Yamamoto, people call me Meena Jones. I can't say I'm ashamed of who I am, right?

Chapter 1: Sichi-Go-San tradition

As I sat in the car, my brother Hiro or Oliver as they call him, was whining about how he had to go to visit the Shinto shrine for a blessing. This was a common Shichi-Go-San tradition. After that though, the whole family was going out to eat authentic Japanese food and for the children to receive their chitose-ame candy. We entered the household and immediately they were greeted by aunts and uncles kissing them and welcoming them into the household. They visited the Shinto shrine and just as I had expected we went to Sakagura, a lovely Japanese restaurant on 43rd street near Grand Central station. I ordered the Miso Salmon for myself and the clay pot rice for Oliver. My aunt, Himari kept on raving about how big I had grown and how I was turning out to be a mature young lady. She had acted like she hadn't seen me in years, even though we went to dinner at her house last Saturday. On the TV in the restaurant there was an advertisement about Japanese-American internment camps and how we should "look to the future." Immediately Grandpa Haruto went into fits of screaming, but as he was waving his arms I saw the numerals MCMXLVI tattooed across his arm. I wondered what it meant for a second, but quickly dismissed the thought. The staff tried their best to calm him down, but I couldn't help but wonder what life would be like with a normal family.

Chapter 2: Revealed

The next day I put on my tie-dye long sleeved shirt and black overalls. I put my hair into a loose fishtail braid and put in my favorite multi-colored scrunchie. I walked to school that morning with Eliza, my BFF. As we walked to East Side Middle I shifted our conversation to the usual homework schedule. We made it to class and we were actually the first ones there for once. Mrs. Garcia asked us to take a seat as she was wiping off the chalk board. Everyone started to pile in as it drew closer to the end of the homeroom. The bell rang and we started our math lesson. Mrs. Garcia droned off on the pythagorean theorem. As math finally ended we started off to english and the day went on as usual. I went home and my mom asked me to dig out the garden. As I was digging though, I found a time capsule.

Chapter 3: The Woman

As I opened it a giant blast of energy surrounded me. I saw colors of blue, green, and purple flash around my eyes. “Mika”, someone had called my name. As I turned around to look I saw a woman with round black glasses and her hair was in a tight bun. She had those half-moon spectacles that old ladies sometimes wear. Her hair was dark brown and she had a stern look on her face. “What are you doing out here, child. Jiro and his daughter Yoko will be here soon. We can’t let them think that we’re not worthy of keeping you.” Mika thought to herself that “Jiro and his daughter Yoko”, were probably some version of child protective services in this alternate dimension. She took a look at the house, only to realize that it looked almost exactly like her house in New York. Where were her parents and her brother Oliver? Where was the garden and the luscious backyard? Where...where was she?

Chapter 4: The Arrangements

Mika finally entered the house. She saw a young teenage girl sitting at a table, knitting a scarf. On the mantel she saw a calendar showing the date, May 9th 1943. The front door creaked open and a tall slim man with a collage aged looking girl walked in. This must have been Jiro and his daughter Yoko. The woman who had told her to come inside immediately rushed to give them some tea. The tea steamed out of the glass china cups. “We’ve come to discuss her arrangements, Sachiko”, the man gestured his head towards me. “In order to make her your own, you have to sign this waver.” The woman or Sachiko signed the waver before even reading the fine print. The man, after eating a couple of biscuits, left with his daughter. “Mam”, I started, “what was that about?” “Dear, you are afraid and tired. Clearly it has been a long day for you. You need rest.” She told the other teenage girl to tuck me in for the night, though there was a worried look in her eye. The girl asked me how I was so

brave. I simply replied, “I don’t know what you’re talking about.” “Right, you don’t remember that your own parents died in that fire. We should thank the gods that you’re alive.” What fire, I thought to myself, but decided not to ask her and pretend to know exactly what she was saying.

Chapter 5: Our faith

The next morning I was given grainy bread and milk. I didn’t complain as I was starving. Suddenly a knock came on the door. Sachiko opened the door and two men wearing military uniforms walked in. “You’re Sachiko Kayamamoto, right?”, one of them said, looking at his paperwork. Without a reply he said, “you and your daughters are coming with me.” We all were led in chains out of the house to another home. A horse house. The first few days were rough, mucking out the stalls, sleeping in the hay, they said there wasn’t enough “room” in the camps for us. We were called enemy allies by the soldiers in the camp. The cold, harsh weather caused diseases. I looked at the rusting clock as it showed the time, three fifty three AM. None of us were brave enough to ask the soldiers where we were going. If we did we’d have already known our faith. We were led into a gate. Belongings were confiscated before we entered, not that we had anything left. Japanese people were led in chains.

Chapter 6: The Camp

We changed into coats and then number stickers were put on them. “This is your new name”, the soldier said. I looked down at mine to see the number 52566. Then we were led into the camp. Barbed wire surrounded the area. Guards surrounded each little house. We were taken inside the house. It had shelves, which were our beds, and that was about all. There was one public restroom which everyone would share. We were assigned work in the camp. If we misbehaved or tried to escape we would die. The soldiers stood there with guns making sure we did everything according to the camp rules. We ate food from the mess hall, which was unkept and smelled rotten. I was put to work on cleaning. Everyday we were being watched. As long as you survived, you were okay. I watched a child being shot just because she couldn’t work anymore. I watched as the mother tried to plead with the guards. I watched as the mother was then shot for not leaving her child. I watched, but I didn’t do anything. I was a bystander to the discrimination at the camp. I got to know the teenage girl more and more. I learned her name was Lillith, and that she was adopted by Sachiko a long time ago. She kept me close, we only had each other and Sachiko after all. People who couldn’t work anymore died. I started to notice all the discrimination in the world. I wondered why I was kept from the truth. I couldn’t

bear to see anyone lose their lives anymore because of these stupid rules. Lilith and I were talking about the greetings we would get once we were home. Then a guard came by. The head wanted to make “room in the camp”. Grief flooded me, as I realized we wouldn’t be returning home, but then the guard said, “I only need one of you”. As I couldn’t bear to see Lillith die, I volunteered myself. Lilith looked at me with teary eyes as she would see me for the last time. Then I heard a bang and saw the black abyss. I woke up to find my mom. She took one look at me and then the time capsule and whispered, “you found out.” I remained silent, scared to admit what I had done. “ The girl, Mika, saved my life. My true name is Lillith.”

Sequel

No one I know survived the camp. Sachiko hung herself as soon as I died. It broke my heart.