

Melissa Stencil

HERE ARE 5 ARTIFACTS FROM MY CULTURE:



1.) ETHNIC IDENTITY

I identify as a Caucasian American. My dad's family is from Germany and my mom's family is from England and Italy. Culturally speaking, my family would fall more under the "white" culture of America than any of these respective ethnic identities, however.

2.) FAMILY

My immediate family consists of my dad (73), my mom (53), my grandma (79), my grandpa (83) and my twin sister, Michelle (23). My grandparents raised Michelle and I equally with our parents and are considered second parents to me.

Additionally, my dad is twenty years older than my mom, which also heavily shaped my upbringing.



3.) RELIGION

I was raised as a Christian and really took on my faith as my own during my time in college. I developed a personal relationship with God and learned more about God's heart for the poor and marginalized of society through the InterVarsity Christian Fellowship at USD.



4.) EDUCATION

I come from a very privileged educational background. I went to the charter school that my dad taught at for elementary school and then went to a new middle school and a new, public, college preparatory high school. I attended the University of San Diego (USD) for my undergraduate degree from 2012-2016.



5.) LEARNED EXPERIENCES

It was during my time at USD that I learned about the social injustices present in our society, my complicity in them as a white, upper-middle income citizen, and my role to play in dismantling them. I partook in a six week urban missions trip in City Heights and Tijuana to learn more about God's heart for social justice and applied to Teach for America to continue my journey of using my privilege to benefit others.



ANALYSIS

Being raised in a white, upper-middle class family, I was raised with many cultural biases and privileges that were invisible to me growing up. It was through pursuing my liberal arts education and my Christian faith more deeply that I was made aware of the privileges granted to me based on my race and socio-economic background. I became aware that two teams exist in our society: 1) The team that dominates society and reaps the benefits of the system they created, and 2) the team that is oppressed by the dominating members of society and is disadvantaged because of their lower social position in the created system. I belong to team one, but God's vision for His Kingdom is that those on team one would level the uneven playing field and elevate those in team two. Using Jesus's incarnation as a model for my life, I have worked to position myself closer to the team two of society and use my privileges to empower those in team two to eradicate the social inequalities in our nation. Joining Teach for America has been the outlet I have pursued this calling through, working to close the educational achievement gap by teaching preschool in a low-income school district.