

tracing her roots

SENIOR AVERY WHITE
TRACES BACK HER IN-
DIGENOUS HERITAGE
IN A FAMILY TREE

Coming from a mixed family of Pueblo, Hispanic, and white heritage, one of the ways senior Avery White remembers her heritage is with rocks: pieces of turquoise, stones, or other precious minerals that were handed down from previous generations. They are among a couple of inherited trinkets that have special significance to White.

"There's one necklace that I got from my great-great grandma. It's long [and] silver, with jade in the middle of it," White said.

The jewelry and turquoise connect her to her Native American heritage. However, as a mixed person, White grew up seeing many different cultures and perspectives in her family.

"On my mom's side, we're Hispanic and Native American. We typically say Anisaze, but we're mainly Pueblo and we do have a little bit of Navajo. On my dad's side, we're white," White said.

Although they have identified as Native American all their lives, White and her mother are not enrolled in a tribe. This has inspired them to start a project showing their mixed heritage and tribal affiliations: a family tree, reaching back through multiple generations.

"We're tracing back our entire family tree. We're doing it digitally on a website because we're trying to get officially registered with the tribe, but with the tribal registration, they don't let you register in more than one tribe, and because it's such a mixture of tribes, it's hard to pinpoint which tribe it should go fully into," White said.

While working on the family tree, White was able to learn interesting things about her family and her own identity.

"It was super cool how far back we were able to date it to, and how many different tribes there were. For most part of my life, I believed I was mainly Pueblo Taos, but then we found out we're mainly Pueblo San Ildefonso by just looking at names," White said.

However, the process of getting enrolled has proved frustrating.

"You have to be born into the tribe [to be enrolled], and my mom was not because her mom, my grandma, had mixed heritage. It's a little bit dumb how they make you go through such a big registration process to be in your culture that you're already involved in," White said.

In addition to complex tribal affiliations, figuring out her cultural identity and ethnicity as a mixed person has been an ongoing challenge for White.

"It's almost isolating because of how mixed it is. I don't know which [culture] I fit into completely. Whenever you sign up for a college application, it's like: what's your ethnicity? Hispanic or not Hispanic? And for race, it's either you pick either one or you hit two or more. It doesn't always give you the opportunity to elaborate. Finding my identity with that has been difficult these past few years."

For White, being mixed in a largely white community has warranted unwanted assumptions from others.

"I would go out in public with my dad and people might not understand I'm his daughter because he's white. People obviously make stereotypes about anyone who is not white, especially in a town like Castle Rock where there's not a lot of diversity," White said.

Despite the confusion of identifying herself to others, White is grateful to have grown up in a mixed household.

"It influenced a lot of the way that I was raised and how I interact with my family. [I noticed] differences when I talk to someone who is fully Hispanic and someone [who is] fully Native American. It's really helpful communicating with my family and understanding their cultural experiences. A lot of it comes down to religion, because a lot of Hispanics in my family are Catholic, whereas some of the Native Americans in my family follow traditional religions," White said.

Although social stigmas about mixed heritage and bureaucratic red tape often make it difficult to show her identity fully, White continues to be proud of her unique heritage. Whether it be in inherited jewelry, in family trees, or in familial traditions, her culture means more than what can be represented on paper.

native american heritage month facts

1. While the terms Native American, American Indian and Indigenous American are all used, most Native people refer to their identity with their individual tribal name.

2. There are about 326 Indian land areas (reservations) and 175 languages spoken in the U.S.

3. There are 574 federally recognized American Indian and Alaska Native tribes in the U.S., the largest of which are Cherokee and Navajo. The largest Alaska Native tribes are Yup'ik and Inupiat.

4. American Indians were granted citizenship and voting rights in 1924 as part of the Indian Citizenship Act, although it took 40 years for all 50 states to recognize their voting rights.

5. The U.S. Constitution may have largely been based on the Iroquois's constitution, "The Great Law of Peace."



Senior Avery White is Native American, Hispanic, and white. Historically, these cultures have not always gotten along, but White appreciates how they merged throughout her family history. "Mexicans and Native Americans used to fight quite a bit. I think it's cool that they came together," White said.