Interview with Ray Parker
By Katie Cunningham
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My first question for you is kind of classic: How would you describe yourself? When people ask, “What are you?” what do you say?

Ray: When people ask me what I am, I usually go, “Oh, well, you know, I’m half Japanese. My mom is Japanese; my dad is white—Welsh.”

Do you get that question often?

Ray: Quite often. People get me mixed up with a lot of different cultures—so I get, “Are you Pacific Islander?” “Are you Hawaiian?” “Are you Mexican?” I get Mexican quite a bit, but sometimes I get Brazilian or Puerto Rican. And my mom even says sometimes, “Are you sure you’re our son? You don’t really look Japanese. You look Mexican.” But I’m pretty fine with it.

Are there any things that you find particularly difficult about being multiracial?

Ray: Not really. Growing up, I had a good base, so to speak. We always had Monday group with a lot of other people who were like me, hapas. I grew up in Boise, Idaho, so we had quite a few people, a surprising amount, like maybe four or five there that were half Japanese, half white, so it was very cool. And growing up, you know, I had that kind of cultural identity, and I identified with both. It was very nice.

Is your father’s Welsh heritage pretty strong? Did you guys do a lot of cultural stuff with your Welsh heritage?
Ray: Not as much as my Japanese heritage. My father’s parents are heavily Latter-day Saints, or Mormon, so we used to, but not so much anymore. We honestly don’t do that much.

Are there any things that you find particularly exciting, or invigorating, or rewarding about being multiracial?

Ray: Yeah, there are a lot of rewarding things, like being able to go through and see a different culture from a different perspective. You get a lot of different experiences, like being able to eat Japanese food, or whatever it might be, as well as being able to identify with something else, which is really nice. To tell you the truth, I really like it, and it definitely has had an impact on what I’ve become today. I wouldn’t have it any other way.

Do you feel like being multiracial changes the ways that you relate to your communities and your parents’ communities? Do you feel like being multiracial changes the way you feel when you’re in an all Japanese or all Welsh community?

Ray: It definitely does, but I don’t really mind it at all. I notice it’s there, but wherever I go, I just feel comfortable where I am. Honestly, I haven’t really ever felt any kind of social pressure or awkwardness.

You mentioned that in Idaho, you hung out with other people who are in a similar position. Do you feel like you create communities with people who are also multiracial, and that’s an important part of your relationship with them?

Ray: It definitely is. People just tend to seek out people of a similar background. It is interesting to see and interact with other people that are multiracial, especially half Japanese and half Welsh people. And it’s interesting, because you have a lot of different talking points, and you can really relate more, usually, as multiracial people to other multiracial people, as opposed to straight Japanese, or straight Welsh people.

What is your family story?

Ray: I’ll start with my dad’s side. So my great-great-great-grandparents were from Britain, from Wales. They settled in the U.S. They became Mormon in New York and moved across the Oregon Trail, and eventually settled down in Salt Lake City, Utah.

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From there, my great-grandparents moved to Nebraska, and moved all around, different places: Wyoming, Utah, Nebraska. My dad grew up in Logan, Utah. From there, he joined the military, straight out of high school, and was stationed in the Pacific. This was right after the Vietnam War, and he was stationed in Hawaii. That’s where he met my mom. So that’s my dad’s side.

Back to my mom’s side. Basically my mom grew up, went to school, was born and raised in Japan, in Osaka, Kyoto region. When she was eighteen, she wanted to get out of Japan and go to college in the United States, so she settled on Hawaii. They both [my parents] went to BYU Hawaii. And they met there. They got married there, and then decided to move to Boise, Idaho. My dad got a job there in computer sciences. So I was born there, grew up there for fourteen years of my life, and then we moved to Seattle.

Tell me about your family traditions. How are all of your cultures represented (or not represented) in your traditions? Are there any ways that your traditions “blend” or change to adapt to your family?

Ray: We do have different traditions, and they might not be set in stone, but usually we do go back and forth between the Japanese and Welsh traditions. So every Boys’ Day or Girls’ Day, or whatever it may be, we pull out the little dolls from Japan and set them up. It’s one of those things that we do in Japan, so my mom tries to carry that on. But to tell you the truth, we don’t have many heavily set traditions. We’re not very heavily rooted. Being multiracial definitely does skew the balance, but it’s a good balance, you know? We tend to make our own ways, so it’s different, but interesting.