



Gratz Insider, January 2017 - Story Continuation

[To return to the newsletter, close this page.]

Movies@Gratz: ‘Little White Lie’

“I grew up in a world of synagogue, Hebrew school, bar mitzvahs,” says Schwartz, as the film’s narrator. It’s a life she depicts through a combination of photographs and home movies from her childhood, a life that many in the audience at Gratz could relate to.

Even at a young age, however, Schwartz sensed that there was something different about her. Her parents ascribed her swarthy complexion to her Sicilian great-grandfather, a story that Schwartz believed, but one repeatedly called into question as she grew up.

The questions increased when Schwartz entered high school in the more racially diverse town of Kingston. When asked by other students about her racial identity, Schwartz insisted that she was white because that was what she had always been led to believe.

“If you looked too closely at it, it didn’t make any sense, so we didn’t look,” Schwartz explains in the film. “We found ways to see what we wanted to believe.”

However, college at Georgetown University was eye-opening for Schwartz, which she described in the film as being like “Race 101.” Accepted into the university as a black student because of a photo she had submitted with her application, Schwartz was welcomed into the black community there. After freshman year, she mustered up the courage to confront her mother and finally learned the truth about the identity of her biological father. But it would be years before she opened up to the rest of her family about her racial identity, especially her dad, who had divorced her mother when Schwartz was in high school.

Schwartz led a post-screening discussion of the film at Gratz during which she said, “I’m in it for the conversation.” The truth is this film raises a number of potential conversations and issues, and the Gratz audience was ready to tackle them. Hands shot up throughout the crowd as the audience engaged in a lively Q & A with Schwartz.

Given the filmmaker’s unique perspective of living in both black and white worlds, her film offers a very candid and thought-provoking treatment of race. In the film, she describes being of mixed race as “a category of being black,” and not, as “a category of being white,” which was reflected in her experience. While white people at times questioned her appearance, she was immediately accepted into the black community at Georgetown as a black woman.

For me, what resonated most strongly was how the denial of such an obvious truth, such as a child’s race, could become so entrenched and widespread. In the interviews woven throughout the film, friends and family members admit to having questioned Schwartz’s racial identity, but they never acknowledged this issue openly with her while she was growing up. She lived a modern-day version of

the Hans Christian Andersen fairytale “The Emperor’s New Clothes,” with all the people who mattered in her life simply ignoring the obvious.

Schwartz describes this film as her “therapy come alive.” For viewers, this intricately connected montage of family photos, old video footage, personal narrative and live interviews presents a powerfully honest picture of what on the surface sounds like a rather implausible story. It’s a poignant portrayal of a daughter’s search for truth after living a life of lies.

Look forward to more “Movies @ Gratz” in the coming months. For more information on “Little White Lie,” including how you can watch it, visit [the film’s website](#).