

Still Censored After All These Years

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I faced my first writing challenge at age sixteen when the embryo of a true story was struggling to come out of my mind onto paper. Showing my story to anyone else seemed unthinkable at the time, but I wanted to write something that I would be proud to keep. I had just moved to Canada from the United States with my family in Centennial Year: 1967, the hundredth anniversary of Canada as a nation.

I wanted to write about my relationship with a former classmate, a Chicana that I would never see again. She was two years older than I was, and I knew that she was too savvy and full of life to be happy in the small town in Idaho where we had both lived. I still had a painful crush on her.

Sifting through my memories, I realized that the crush had probably been mutual. A full-page cosmetics ad featuring a pink-cheeked, brown-eyed model who looked like an upscale version of me had graced her bedroom wall when she had pulled me in there to talk to me alone during a party at her house. When another party guest rudely burst in and pointed out that the resemblance of the fantasy image to my real self, my friend denied it furiously.

I needed words to express my regret for what never happened between us, and for the words we never said to each other.

My problem was an imaginary audience of White Anglo-Saxon Protestant readers who seemed likely to see the girl I had left behind as an ethnic stereotype and our relationship as an essay on race relations. As a girl writing about myself and another girl, I was not sure I could be taken seriously no matter what words I chose. I was not even sure what kind of