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The Company of Friends: Welcome to Our Book Club

An Open Letter from Monique Truong

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When I was in the fifth grade, I had a spiral notebook with an orange cover that I wrote in every day. In an elongated, wobbly cursive, I chronicled the injustices of my young life: My mother won't let me wear makeup (not even lipstick!); my best friend was suddenly no longer my best friend (for no reason whatsoever!); the boy I liked was caught passing notes in class (to another girl!). That, dear readers, was my first foray into sustained narrative. Please rest assured that I have greatly improved since then and now use far fewer exclamation marks.



+ ENLARGE IMAGE

I still have that notebook. The blue ink of the Bic ballpoint is fading. The orange cover has long since disintegrated. My memory of the little girl who filled its lined pages, though, remains clear. She was on the verge of discovering something almost magical -- we adults would call it "therapeutic" -- about writing: It makes you feel not so alone.

I already knew that this was true of reading. In

I share this with you because at the heart of *Bitter in the Mouth* is the story of another life-changing friendship, one that begins when two 7-year-old girls exchange letters all summer long, even though they live in the same small town and their homes are only streets apart. It's a friendship that endures and renews even as the two enter their thirties. Along the way, they ruefully note that "a friendship ... could be based on what we shared and what we allowed each other to keep to ourselves." It's the "keep to ourselves" part of the equation that fascinates me most. What we withhold, whether by choice or by circumstance, is often the true story, the one that inevitably defines us and those around us.

The pages of *Bitter in the Mouth* are not the same as the orange spiral notebook of my youth, but they are based on its contents. Writing the book made me feel as if I was in the company of friends. I hope that reading it will make you feel the same.

--Monique Truong
Brooklyn, New York

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zsquaremom wrote:

I just picked up the book today and am excited to start reading. I can relate to reading things that I wrote when I was younger and looking back to see how I have changed since I was much younger.

8/5/2011 04:01:58 PM

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