

Fifty Years of Love and Resilience

As it was for many, the Free Speech Movement was a transformative incident in my life that led me to question established modes in our society and to work for social justice. For me, the FSM also shaped my interracial, 50-year-long love story.

When I left my multiracial, middle-class neighborhood in L.A. and headed off to the University of California at Berkeley in 1963 at age 17, my absent father told me to study hard and to find a nice brown-skinned guy to marry. In my first year, I met few other African-American students, but I did get involved in the campus community. My first sense of being part of a larger social and historical context was the day John F. Kennedy was shot. When the news of President Kennedy's assassination swept the campus, many students found their way to the student union. The chairs and sofas were quickly taken, and, as the news was broadcast over the intercom, the floor filled up with students as well.

In the midst of floor-to-floor solemn people, one man rested his head on a woman's torso. An art student at the time, I thought them an interesting image and began to draw to pass the time and take my mind off the tragedy. Some people may say of their beloved, "I loved you before I knew you." I can say to Rob, "I drew you before I knew you." Within days, through a dorm-mate – the woman in the drawing – I met Rob. He was White, but he shared my passion for discussing the momentous events around us. We also shared a love of the outdoors and adventure. The appreciation for the outdoors is evident in one of his early poems to me,

"If I could live on grassy slopes
And see the world through pines,
I'd culminate my fondest hopes
And build a home yours and mine."

And our love of adventure was evident in the motorcycle accident we were both recovering from in 1964.

When the Free Speech Movement began on Berkeley's campus in the fall, I was a second year student, both idealistic and naïve. I was also a risk taker. I don't really know what drove me to get involved. Maybe it was my inability to be present in the contemporaneous marches for civil rights in the South. Perhaps I was stirred by the rousing rhetoric of the First Amendment, having only recently begun to think about what it meant. At a transformative age and viewing the inequities around me, I know I wanted to rebel against a materialistic and discriminatory society.

By then, Rob and I were engaged, so we joined together. As fervent young people, we felt strongly that individuals should be able to speak their minds, even if we weren't sure what we wanted to say. With hundreds of fellow students, we marched into the campus administration building and stayed to be arrested.

That evening in 1964, Sproul Hall was a risky place to be, especially after the building was locked for the night. Rob and I were followers, not leaders, yet a series of small events led us to be more noticed than we had planned. That first night, we were photographed sitting under a registration table. Others may have been planning. We were studying. Yet the headline near the photo in the San Francisco Chronicle screamed "Headquarters of the Rebels." No doubt, the image of the interracial couple and the big Afro heightened the novelty of the scene.

I learned then the power of labels not self-chosen. The larger lesson was still to come. After our arrest, stories came out in major newspapers around the nation. My trust in the printed word was waning, and I began to reject these symbols of a corrupt media

presence. But my interest was piqued when a *New York Times* appeared among our companions while we were in jail, for my father still lived in New York City, where I'd spent my early years. I had not decided whether or when to inform him of my arrest. I remember looking over shoulders to get a glimpse of the story. The reader said, "Who is Jean Golson?" Hearing my name, I was suddenly very interested in reading each detail of this arrest. I also wondered, and I still do, why this faceless follower was chosen out of hundreds to be specifically named by the *Times*. But as I drank in every detail of the story as told by the *Times*, I realized immediately that the story was not mine. A journalist had merged a standard arrest and my name.

From then on, I lost faith with the media, even though I wrote for newspapers for a few years myself. Eventually we both lost faith in "the cause." But we never lost faith in each other. In the first weeks of our marriage, Rob and I experienced labeling and prejudice first-hand. On our honeymoon in 1965, we took a bus trip through Nevada and Utah. Although we had eyes only for each other, we did notice a woman walking the aisles and talking to the other passengers. As she came even with us, I heard her say "...and they even have the nerve to be wearing rings." We hadn't realized that Utah, like Virginia and 25 other states, prior to the Supreme Court's Loving v. Virginia decision in 1967, still prohibited "miscegenation." But our love has outlasted the label.

Over the years, Rob and I picked up that marriage license, a few degrees, and experiences of being not-your-typical married couple. We joined communes, lived out of a VW bus, had children, and finally settled down in rural Oregon. Robbie became a forester, I an educator. We are proud that all three of our children serve the public interest, as a government lawyer, a civil engineer, and a schoolteacher.

In keeping with my anti-establishment past, I continued to practice and teach skepticism and activism. Years later, when I became a teacher, each licensing period required extra work to explain my arrest. Yet, as a teacher educator, I am able to draw on my experiences of standing up for what I believe is merciful and compassionate. I volunteered in prisons and advocated for the right-to-life. I have marched with others and walked as a solo picket. I know I am willing to be arrested for what I believe in (Moule, 2012a). And, as a graduate student and, later, university professor, I wrote and taught on social justice as an *action*, not just an idea to embrace (Moule, 2012b).

On a personal level I continue to push myself. I recently finished climbing Mount Kilimanjaro solo, after my guide became ill and turned around, and I am currently learning to fly a plane. Rob continues to support and nurture my adventurous nature.

How much of my drive comes from that moment of going limp and being arrested? Did seeing my name and photo in the paper propel me to not be afraid to be named or to stand alone? Regardless, as Robbie and I enter our 50th year of marriage, the shared experience of pursuing freedom and justice, the bonding and solidarity of a joint cause helped us in our long journey (Moule, 2013)

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