



Crush: 26 Real-Life Tales of First Love

By Andrea N. Richesin

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Readers will fall head over heels for this nostalgic and irreverent collection.

Twenty-six bestselling authors return to the teenage bedrooms, school hallways and college dorms of their youth to share passionate essays of love lost and found and lessons learned along the way. Whether heartbreak or hilarious, their soul-baring honesty reminds us to keep reaching for true love wherever we can find it and for as long as it takes. Their intimate reflections will fascinate and move any reader who remembers her first love.

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Crush: 26 Real-Life Tales of First Love By Andrea N. Richesin **Bibliography**

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Editorial Review

Review

From the cringe-inducing crush to the heartbreak of unrequited love, this buoyant, nostalgic anthology features 26 authors chronicling their experiences with that certain tugging of the heart and its impact on their lives. --Booklist starred review

This fun, sometimes racy anthology collects 26 first-person tales of naive romance. There's something here for everyone who's ever fallen desperately, foolishly in love. --Publishers Weekly

It's full of hope, pain, ugly truth, and great beauty, sometimes all at once. Twenty-six wonderful writers bring all they are to the proceedings, and by the end, you'll be wishing for Volume II. --Adriana Trigiani

Funny, bittersweet and true. I can't imagine anyone reading this collection and not finding something in it to love. --Lynn Weingarten

With humor and courage, these twenty-six writers remind us of the infinite numbers of ways love can make us feel so alive yet so vulnerable. --Diana Joseph

About the Author

Andrea N. Richesin is the editor of *The May Queen* (Tarcher/Penguin, 2006) which was excerpted and praised in the New York Times, the San Francisco Chronicle, Redbook, Cosmopolitan, Bust, Daily Candy and Babble. As a follow-up to *Because I Love Her*,

she is editing a forthcoming father-daughter anthology (Harlequin, May, 2010). She has worked for Thomson Publishing in London, Red Herring and Edutopia magazines, and McCann- Erickson in San Francisco. Visit her at nickirichesin.com.

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I was sixteen the first time I fell in love. He was one year older with long hair the color of honey, a rakish grin and bold blue eyes. On our first date, he took me to a dinner theater to see Neil Simon's *Last of the Red Hot Lovers*. Afterward, he pushed me against my parents' front door to kiss me, scratching my cheek with his stubbled chin. He told me he had never felt this way before yet I kept asking him to prove his love to me. So he offered grand romantic gestures: poetry and carefully drawn portraits, a turquoise ring and impassioned mix tapes. To meet my conservative parents on Halloween, his costume was a T-shirt emblazoned with the symbol for anarchy. He could not have been more irresistible to me.

As suddenly as it had begun, it ended with a phone call. I was too humiliated and stunned to ask for an explanation. My mother told me to mourn him as if he were dead, which was difficult as I passed him daily in the hallways at school. Holding his hand, I had felt invincible, all the problems of the adult world far, far away. I fell in love many times afterward, but never with the same fierce feeling of abandon and certainty. I knew that love was vulnerable, a fragile aspiration I might crush if held too tightly.

Like most teenagers who've been crushed by first love, I found an imperfect path back to trust. We've all had our hearts broken and know that sinking feeling the next morning when you realize you're on your own again. You don't die of a broken heart, you only wish you could. So I suppose my mother was right, it is like a minor death—the loss of a dream, and the realization that love doesn't last forever.

Although wrestling with the demons of unrequited love is devastating, a crush can also boost a wounded ego, save a marriage, and make one feel alive. It has the power to transform a shy backward kid into a bold adult. It's not only an education for a person naive in the world, it's the joy of a fantasy you may or may not choose to pursue. Crushes can live in our heads for our own secret enjoyment, but they also encourage us to take risks we might not have imagined. Falling for the wrong person, wounded, love doomed, we still search for our soul mates even when it seems they may be impossible to find.

These twenty-six contributors offer glimpses of their first love experiences in all their joy and sadness, and how they influenced their growth as both women and men. In many cases, their crushes expanded their worlds and became the means by which they burst out of the narrow and boring cocoons of their youth and into the world at large. We recognize our own loneliness and longing to connect in their tales of heartbreak and thwarted desire.

In Jacquelyn Mitchard's incredible essay, she recounts her blissful first love, barely consummated, but which consumed her for years. She concealed the passion she felt for the young boy turned soldier in his confessional letters she kept hidden. Their secret love remained sealed away for twenty years before she confronted it again. A young Ann Hood is mistaken for an older woman when her elder brother's friend, the boy in the white VW Bug, zooms into her life. They form an unlikely friendship that lasts over thirty years. Both Mitchard and Hood take comfort in the histories of their forbidden loves, that still reminds them of the young girls they once were.

The impossible idealism of love when confronted with its messy reality makes it easy to surrender to the fantasy of a crush. It allows us to exist in a sort of imaginary world with the object of our affection. In Daria Snadowsky's "To Sir Anthony, With Love," she sees the C. S. Lewis biopic film *Shadowlands* starring Anthony Hopkins and falls head over heels for the elderly actor. She discovers that "you can project all your fairy-tale illusions on a superhuman persona and fabricate a perfect, consequence-free relationship precisely because it is unattainable. I knew my make-believe life with him would serve as an ideal distraction from my humdrum nonlife in ninth grade."

Steve Almond also recognizes how we cling to this larger fantasy of who we might be to our lover and to ourselves. He thinks, "If I could be good enough for her, I could be good enough for myself. Such is the absurd fantasy that animates all our crushes, young or old." Through her correspondence with a former crush Heather Swain learns that "we created realities about each other that worked for us at the time, which in the end is what 99 percent of crushes turn out to be." When David Levithan was ambivalent, his crush helped him to face his true feelings. Levithan's essay reveals how seeing his crush free himself helped him to do the same. He confesses, "I want to remember him as he was, even if that memory's vague, and perhaps even wrong. Who he was to me matters so much more than who he actually was." According to Levithan, "the difference between a crush and love is its viability." If a romantic union doesn't last, was it merely a crush and nothing more?

The contributors learn to deal with this inevitable rejection, and although it has made trusting again that much harder, they are wiser now. Brendan Halpin is bewildered by the refrain most teenage boys must hear, "I like you as a friend," which surely must sound like the kiss of death from the lips of a girl he's yearning to kiss. Melissa Walker and Tara Bray Smith pine for the anointed golden boy from afar. In shy journal entries, doodlings and hidden diaries they detail all their devotion they can't express to their beloved crushes. Their romantic lives take a serious toll on their self-esteem and all their insecurities would seem to melt away with his approval. Through their writings, they honed their boyfriend fantasy: a handsome prince who would whisk them away from the tedium of trudging through their bored schoolgirl lives.

Trapped in an adolescent body, many young lovers turn to music to vent their frustrations and get them through their heartaches. Brendan Halpin identified with the role of angry outsiders in youth anthems that inspired passion, rebellion and longing. In Emily Franklin's mix tape, she remembers all the songs that rang true for her many relationships. Through her starstruck daydreams of Duran Duran, Katherine Center perfected the fantasy version of herself. Like most young girls, when her days were filled with feelings of teenage inadequacy, she listened to Simon Le Bon croon just for her. As she explains, "Duran Duran...will always have my devotion for teaching me about how stories offer comfort, and the imagination can create hope."

The power of a forgotten memory, i.e., a whiff of perfume, taste of beer, such nostalgia for a first crush can send us back in time. Robert Wilder returns to his suburban neighborhood when the adorable Liz Thomas seemed to represent all his heartfelt longing and teenage dreams. In an innocent game of spin the bottle, Wilder gets to kiss the girl and become a little less nerdy and a lot bolder in his affections. His nostalgic reverie is mired in the loss of loved ones, his mother and neighbors as he remembers them as they once were when they were all still young. Catherine Newman takes us on a Patrick Suskind-induced olfactory trip down memory lane. Through sniffs of freshly laundered clothing or Anais Anais, she remembers the particular smell of desire. After the birth of her two babies, she finds that "love will fill us up and spill over and we won't be able to grasp it. We can't grasp it still."

Kitty Pryde's profound influence on Christopher Coake also has the superhuman ability to power kick him back in time. When he steps into a comic book shop and picks up an old copy of *The X-Men*, he can return to his adolescence, but also something much more complex, "the ability to reach out my hand into the images in front of me; to make the unreal real." Rebecca Walker must make a difficult decision when she discovers that her dear first love is in the hospital. In the end, she determines "there are certain moments in life that should be remembered, encased in the magic of another time and space, and left alone." Perhaps preserving our pasts is another act of kindness to ourselves to be able to draw on them when we need a treasured memory to get us through our own difficult experiences.

The self-destructive acts we commit for love can often send us on an emotional tailspin. Katie Herzog movingly recounts her terrible struggle with addiction and how it caused her to lose the great love of her life. Steve Almond pursues his lady love until she is revolted by his advances. Through such exploits, they try to prove their devotion to their crushes as much as to themselves that they're worthy of love.

A few writers punish themselves by choosing the wrong partners again and again. Kerry Cohen's tattoos are painful, visible reminders of her lost loves and her endless quest to satisfy her desire for connection. She chose to hurt herself before someone else could do so. To Cohen, "a tattoo was proof of something, a suggestion of hidden things." At first, Jon Skovron's Sally Bowles-inspired temptress challenges him to face the world, to act and work, and leave his solitary days reading in his room behind. He is drawn to her larger-than-life persona and finds a respect for this damaged creature he longs to save, if only from herself. In Melissa Febos's haunting essay, she explains how she tried to protect her boyfriend from her sexually adventurous past, but her attempts didn't keep the ghosts at bay. She learns that it's futile to hide your past from your lover if you want him to know you for who you truly are. Most astutely she observes, "We want our loves to ourselves; we want to occupy the parts of them that belong to other people, other places, things that cannot be exiled because they are already gone. We harbor this desire out of selishness, but ultimately, perhaps out of fear."

Sheila Kohler falls for the eternal bad boy, her Mr. Rochester, as she puts it. Hers is a more mature love, not the fantasy she dreamed of, but one of betrayal, love spurned and infidelity. Our hearts break for Kohler as she endures her husband's longtime dalliances. Finally, after years of neglect, she forges a meaningful

partnership with her new husband. Laurie Faria Stolarz wonders what might have been in her essay. Her breakup also means the end of possibilities—of another life. In Rebecca Woolf's "Before It Gets Complicated," she questions the risk of seeking companionship outside her marriage when she randomly meets her childhood best friend at a bar twenty-six years later. She writes, "The fairy tale has taught us that true love means never having to lust after anyone else." Woolf realizes she's not willing to risk what she has, that some risks are too great.

In Coake's searing essay, he teaches his students about the meaning of first love and how our perspective can change with age and experience. He believes they may already have learned that "some loves we can measure only through the magnitude of their loss."

The truth is we all have our hearts broken, but we learn to try again, to keep reaching for new love wherever we can find it. In each of these tender essays, the talented contributors recognize that risking themselves makes life worth living, that the pain they feel from a broken heart keeps it beating. It beats, even when the world seems to have stopped. It beats on and on and then one day it quickens again.

Andrea N. Richesin San Rafael, California July 2010

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Katy Pinkham:

As people who live in typically the modest era should be up-date about what going on or info even knowledge to make these people keep up with the era which can be always change and progress. Some of you maybe will certainly update themselves by examining books. It is a good choice for yourself but the problems coming to anyone is you don't know what type you should start with. This Crush: 26 Real-Life Tales of First Love is our recommendation to cause you to keep up with the world. Why, as this book serves what you want and wish in this era.

Horace Godbolt:

A lot of people always spent their very own free time to vacation or maybe go to the outside with them friends and family or their friend. Were you aware? Many a lot of people spent many people free time just watching TV, or perhaps playing video games all day long. If you want to try to find a new activity that is look different you can read a book. It is really fun to suit your needs. If you enjoy the book you read you can spent 24 hours a day to reading a e-book. The book Crush: 26 Real-Life Tales of First Love it is very good to read. There are a lot of folks that recommended this book. These people were enjoying reading this book. When you did not have enough space to deliver this book you can buy the e-book. You can more very easily to read this book from your smart phone. The price is not to cover but this book has high quality.

Larry Swartz:

Reading can called head hangout, why? Because if you find yourself reading a book particularly book entitled Crush: 26 Real-Life Tales of First Love the mind will drift away through every dimension, wandering in most aspect that maybe mysterious for but surely will end up your mind friends. Imaging every single

word written in a book then become one web form conclusion and explanation in which maybe you never get prior to. The Crush: 26 Real-Life Tales of First Love giving you an additional experience more than blown away the mind but also giving you useful facts for your better life in this particular era. So now let us explain to you the relaxing pattern is your body and mind will probably be pleased when you are finished reading it, like winning a game. Do you want to try this extraordinary paying spare time activity?

Gretchen Meehan:

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