



The reading list for high school students is a little different these days. There's still Shakespeare, but there are also works by such authors as Amy Tan and Sandra Cisneros, literature that reflects students' cultural heritage.

"They were strangers, and they were willing to see me."

Maria Trudeau, on seeing her half-sisters, Roberta "Bert" Railey and Christina "Tina" Hildebrand



Dana R. Bowler / Star staff

Maria Trudeau, center, goes through a family photo album with her twin half-sisters, Mary Christina Hildebrand, left, and Mary Roberta Railey, at her Camarillo home on Tuesday. Trudeau had not seen the twins in 58 years.

Home-service

Three sisters reunite after 58 years apart

COUNTY

Trudeau feels profound gratitude to her daughter for finding them and to her stepisters for visiting her. "They were strangers, and they were willing to see me," she said in her quiet way. Time and distance may, yes, be formidable forces. But they have nothing on the human heart.

Trudeau never forgot them, but she also married young and had the first of her five daughters at 18. She and her husband, Tom, moved to California in 1962 and settled in Santa Monica. Trudeau was widowed four years later when Tom died in a car crash. With five girls to raise, she attended college and eventually started an income-tax business. She later fell in love with client Oscar Williams, and they moved to a home in Old Town Camarillo.

Trudeau's daughter, Robbie Epifanio, saw her mother getting older and felt that her 75th birthday approaching it was the right time to try to finally locate the twins. In the late '90s with the Internet databases growing by the nanosecond, she searched

the same time," Bert said. "It's a twin thing," Tina explained. She lives in southern Arizona, 300 miles from her sister's Nevada home. Tina wondered at first if it were a hoax. But as she read the details in the letter, she realized this was the real deal. Bert was in shock. "I felt like I was in a trance. I couldn't absorb it."

Within minutes the phone calls were exchanged and the reunion was set.

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A quest for lost sisters fulfilled

Almost 60 years ago, Peggy Hogan Valines swore her husband, Francisco, would never see his twin girls again.

Hogan's angry vow might have lasted forever except for a triple-threat she could not have foreseen:

First and foremost: A big sister's determination to see her younger half-sisters again.

Second and never to be underestimated: The will of a devoted daughter to make her aging mother's fervent wish a reality.

And third and essential: The invention of the Internet.

After 58 years, Maria Trudeau was reunited in her Camarillo home last week with her 59-year-old half-sisters Roberta "Bert" Railey and Christina "Tina" Hildebrand.

Trudeau was 15 when the twin daughters were born to her father and his second wife on Christmas night 1945 in San Juan, Puerto Rico.

Trudeau adored them from the moment she saw them. "They were like my own

Daughter's tenaciousness unites mother with her twin siblings

children; they were living dolls," she said.

She even named them. Since Peggy did not know she was expecting twins, she had picked out the name Roberto for a boy and Christina for a girl.

So Maria suggested they christen one Mary Christina and the other Mary Roberta.

Trudeau's Girl Scout troop earned merit badges bathing and changing the girls in the peaceful nursery where Peggy had painted scenes of overly curious kittens ensnared in yarn.

The marriage between Peggy and Francisco was more like a war zone. Because of his philandering, it imploded when the twins were about a



Colleen Cason

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year old.

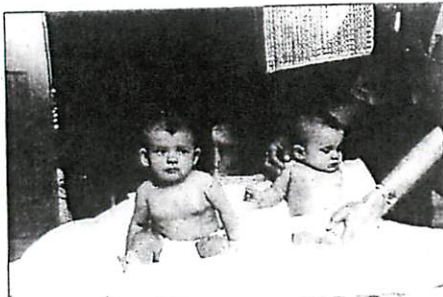
Peggy moved back to her native Virginia and remarried. Adopted by their stepdad, the girls were given his name.

They were told he was their father. They learned otherwise when they were 9. The truth was spoken during a nasty argument the twins happened to overhear.

It was then they remembered a young man named Frankie had once visited the family. They had been told he was their brother. Frankie is Trudeau's full brother.

They tried to pry more information about their father's family from Peggy, but she kept the secret to her death.

She died when the girls were just 14.



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