# What ever happened to all the Indians? I asked my mother on a Friday morning ride home from the library. I was five years old. The library’s main draw for me had always been a large, colorful mural located high on the lobby wall. As a white New England girl with colonial ancestors the dark skinned Indians and their exotic dress took my breath away. The highlight of my library excursions was sitting in a chair and gazing up at the Indians on the wall as my mother chatted with the librarian checking out our family’s weekly reading supply. Oh those poor Indians, my mother said, sagging a little as she shook her head with something that looked like sadness. Why? What happened? I turned in my seat, alarmed. They drink too much, she answered. My heart sank. They were lovely people she said who became dangerous when they drink liquor. I could not believe what I was hearing. Dangerous, this would have been the last word I would have applied to my horseback riding, nature loving friends. Dangerous from drinking I asked? Yes, it’s so sad. They just couldn’t handle it and it ruined them really. This made no sense to me. My parents drink liquor. Some friends and family drink quite a bit actually. How could something like liquor bring down an entire people? People who loves grass and trees and lakes and horses, the stuff I loved? I must’ve pressed her for more because my mother, who along with my father sought to protect my siblings and me from anything upsetting, went on to tell a tale in vivid detail. I never questioned this narrative truth or fullness despite its dissonance with the peaceful images in my books. My mother, full of kindness and empathy told it to me. I don’t question that she believed it. She told me a version of a story as she had heard from someone else who also likely believed it. I had no other more complete historical context in which to place the story about a nearly extinguished culture now neatly tucked away on isolated reservations I didn’t know existed. I had minimal knowledge of how native peoples have long flourished in their own cultures before white Europeans decimated them with theirs. It made me wonder how many lies and half-truths I’ve swallowed and in turn inadvertently passed along in my lifetime.

Excerpt from:

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