

I originally wrote this story as part of a writing prompt. The original prompt listed biographical topics to include and work into a story. One was to write about the first time one made love, but I am not about to write on that topic, at least not in a piece I will read on the radio. Instead, I wrote about my first true loves.

I was born and raised near the Mississippi Delta, with strong connections to the fertile lands to the South. Our house was on Avon Road, many miles from the mud brown river, and I went to school across the street at St. Agnes Academy. A Catholic girls school, St. Agnes was run by Dominican nuns. My feelings about the nuns is better left for another tale. Suffice is to say that Sister Anne Raymond, Sister Suzanne, and Sister Anne Regis are surely saints, but Sister Georgine Marie, Sister Maria Patra, Sister Mary Gregory, Sister Mary Claude, and Sister Jane Agnes were a different breed altogether. But, I get ahead of myself

Bobby Treadwell was my first “true love.” I’m guessing I was six and Bobby was seven. Our romance consisted of my being dared to kiss him, chasing him around the yard, and his subsequently inviting me as the friend his father allowed him to ask to go the state fair. The day dawned breezy and clear— a perfect autumn day. Dressed in my adorable pinafore with butterflies embroidered on the frilly straps, I could barely contain my excitement as we walked into the Fairgrounds crowded with rides, prize games, and people. I was on a real date and, after the fair, we were going to an Osiris Cotton Carnival party! As it turned out, the date consisted of me, standing on the sidelines with Bobby’s father while Bobby rode all the scary fair rides with his older brother and his older brother’s friend, and later that day dancing the Bunny Hop at the Osiris party. Hardly surprising, Bobby didn’t invite me to the fair or anyplace else again, and our love affair ended without ever beginning.

My second “true love.” was Michael Miller, and that affair didn’t end any better, but it did last longer even though it did remain unrequited throughout its duration. St. Agnes was an all girls school, and St. Dominic’s school for boys was on the same property with an adjoining playground. The unwritten but nun-enforced rule said girls and boys were not to cross the imaginary dividing line between the playgrounds. We, naturally, did our best to test the limits of that rule most days.

I was in the seventh grade and too young to even dream of strolling hand in hand with my love along the Avenue des Champs-Élysées in Paris or throwing coins in Rome’s Trevi fountain together. In the seventh grade, all I cared about was BOYs! And, one of the best places to be near boys was a basketball game, especially if you were a cheer leader. Although I’m fairly smart, my grades were just, and barely just, good enough to allow me on the St. Dominic’s cheerleading squad. Since I was not a favorite of Sister John Allen, I was only a substitute, but to my good fortune, and to my friend Mary O’Ryan’s poor fortune, her grades were too low and grounded her from the squad. I got to cheer almost every game.

Michael Miller was tall and lanky with jet black hair. He wasn’t spectacularly handsome, but his horn rimmed glasses made him loveable, and he was a star basketball player. I don’t think it was his game that grabbed my heart, it was just him. How could I tell him of my love and win his? We weren’t even having girl/boy parties yet. Co-ed groups sometimes went to movies together on Saturday afternoons, but that was it for commingling if you didn’t live in the same neighborhood.

I thought and thought and came up with a brilliant plan. My little brother, Malcolm, went to St. Dominic’s, and Malcolm could be my messenger of love. I must write Michael a love note and send him a gift, and Malcolm could deliver my token of love on the playground. But, what would be

an appropriate gift? A boy wouldn't want flowers I might pick. A ripe luscious peach might do the trick, but this was more than fifty years ago, and it wasn't August so out of season fruit wasn't a possibility. Ah! but perhaps better, I had a stash of Nabisco Devil's Food cookies. What could be a better route to Michael Miller's heart than a moist cookie/cake surrounded by two icings— a very light marshmallow and a hard dark chocolate one. (Note: these are not the SnackWell low-fat cakes you can buy today. These were delicious!)

I had neither a typewriter nor a secretary. Besides, a love letter must be handwritten. So, I wrapped the cookies in wax paper, and penned my note. How did I convince Malcolm to deliver this note? I have no idea, though my sister, Julia, suggests I likely resorted to bribery. Nevertheless, despite Malcolm's assistance, I got no response. So, I sent another note with M&Ms this time. Again no response. I think I tried only one more time, perhaps with Oreos. For some reason, I think this display of affection may have embarrassed Michael, and it's possible I received a request to stop, but I cannot recall these details. I either heeded his request or realized my efforts were in vain, but my love was strong, and I continued to hope.

I saw no reason to keep my love a secret. So, I shared my sentiments with my sister, Julia, and all my friends at school. To my consternation, they all decided that they were in love with Michael too. Julia even wrote a poem about him:

*Michael Miller! I dream about him on my pillow
Each day with him is a chiller
Each dream a thriller*

Michael Miller, Oh My! Oh My!

*When he hears someone lie
He jumps clear to the sky
And acts as if he's going to die*

*A great athlete is he
Although without glasses he cannot see
He stings my heart like a bumble bee*

*Love birds jump from limb to limb
Singing that's him that's him.*

Michael chose Patricia Carrigan over me, Julia, or any of our other friends. My love lasted through the 7th grade and into the 8th, and then faded away as so many grade school romances do.

Unfulfilled romance, so devastating then, is simply amusing now, and gives me great pleasure to remember.