



## **Flutters of Infatuation**

**by Lylanne Musselman**

***Nonfiction***

We've all had that experience when we have somersaults in our bellies from a touch or a certain look from someone, but there's something about that first time, that first flutter that tells us that we're onto something good.

That first flutter for me came when I was fourteen; her name was Debbie. She was a seventeen-year-old high school senior, who worked at my uncle's restaurant in a small East central Indiana

town. The family restaurant became an integral part of my coming of age since it opened when I was nine, and being there most of my waking hours away from school, I worshipped the ground most of the young waitresses walked on.

I had a string of crushes at the restaurant: Nancy, brunette with brown eyes. I remember singing Van Morrison's "Brown-eyed Girl" when it came on the radio, pretending I was singing to her. I thought of her excessively, yet innocently at ten years old. I still have black and white photographs taken in back of the restaurant of her in shorts and a sleeveless blouse standing in front of my uncle's 1967 silver Corvette convertible. Was this the beginning of a pin-up mentality?

A few years later there was blonde, brown-eyed Beth, who was quick to smile, and had a boisterous laugh for someone that was a mere 5'2". She was Catholic, which made her forbidden all around for this Methodist minister's great-granddaughter, but it didn't stop me from writing her letters and poems; in fact, this was my first inkling that writing would be a powerful and important part of my life; especially powerful as it backfired on me when Beth betrayed me by showing my written words to my mother.

I was crushed, embarrassed, and confused. I remember 'the talk' I had with my mother in my uncle's office. She said this was a time that I was vulnerable and contributed my 'odd' behavior as being at the threshold of entering high school – Delta High School – a new consolidated school, and leaving the security of my small town junior high.

Through my tears and confusion I remember leaving the office for the dining room, walking to the juke box, dropping in a quarter to hear Creedence Clearwater Revival's "Looking Out My Back Door," and to this day when I hear that song it reminds me of that troubled time and my feelings for Beth that I was unable to explain.

That awkward experience with Beth didn't stop me, as there were always plenty of other waitresses for me to talk to and hang around: Laura, Susan, Kay, Mary, Elaine, Cecilia, Melba, Lynn, Lynette, and so on.

Then, my freshman year, Debbie was hired and I found her more fascinating than all of the others. It didn't hurt that she paid a lot of attention to me either and I ate that up. Debbie was taller than most of the others, and she had silky, shiny, long brown hair that would swish back and forth just above the bottom of her white mini-skirt uniform when she walked. She had the biggest, bluest eyes I'd ever seen – and eyes have always been something I've been attracted to.

Her only downside was that she had a boyfriend, Mick, who would come into the restaurant and sit at the counter beside the waitress station so he could watch her every move on the weekends. As fate would have it, she enlisted him to help me with my freshman algebra, a subject I found as geekish and useless as I did Mick.

One Monday evening Debbie asked me to ride with her to Marion to take textbooks to Mick that he'd forgotten to take back to college with him. Of course, I was eager to go anywhere with her. I knew my parents would leave the restaurant before we returned from Marion, so that meant I would get to ride with Debbie another thirty minutes longer, a grand total of being alone with her for at least two and a half hours; that might not sound like much, but it seemed like heaven to me.

She drove a 1969 white Ford Thunderbird with a blue interior. Her car was as clean and smelled as good as she always did. I never really knew what I wanted from Debbie, but at fourteen I knew I wanted to be as near to her as I could.

Since I opted to stay in the car, she didn't stay very long with Mick when she took him the books, so we decided to get something to eat at the local A & W Drive-In. It was like a dream sitting in the front seat of that T-Bird, drinking root beer, talking and laughing with Debbie as the warm evening air drifted through our open windows. It was as if we were on a date! The night even got better as we drove towards my parent's house, giggling like the school girls we were, and singing along with the radio: "Jeremiah was a bullfrog," "Making friends for the world to see," and "Going down the stoney end..." songs we both enjoyed.

Then Debbie did something, as we drove from Marion to Eaton down that dark country road past cows grazing in silhouette, that I've never forgotten – she grabbed my hand and held it – like a boy would a girl. I remember that mere touch taking my breath away, making my heart race, surging electric impulses all around my young body. I'm not sure I've felt the intensity since that I felt at that moment – well, maybe so – but her touch was such a thrill! I loved it, but I knew it wasn't exactly what I was supposed to be yearning for.

When we pulled into my parent's driveway, still holding hands, I remember dreading having to leave. I didn't want to let go of her hand. We looked at each other for a long time, the dashboard illuminating our faces – I knew I wanted her to kiss me, but I was scared of what that meant – and of my parents catching us. I also knew as I slowly got out of her car that I could never share with anyone what just happened.

I felt a loss as she pulled out of our driveway, headlights shining in my face. I couldn't wait to see her again in hopes of re-enacting that sensation. And, there were a few times at the restaurant that we'd sit at a table and steal a touch of each other's hands; for all of the happiness it brought, it still had the element of fear – after all it was 1971.

Debbie gave me her 8 x 10 senior picture and it sat on the headboard of my bed for years after that spring. In fact, not to be out done, Laura and Mary gave me their 8 x 10 senior pictures too – this made me feel like I was in demand with the “older” women. But it was Debbie's first move, as harmless as it was, that left its impression; a sensation that was never matched by a man's touch throughout the next 24 years.

Debbie went on to marry Mick years later, and I went through more men than I care to mention before the age of thirty-eight when I was finally able to accept and embrace that time when I was so innocent, yet, on the path to the lesbian I really was. Now, whenever I hear Three Dog Night's “Joy to the World,” Elton's “Friends,” or Streisand's “Stoney End,” it takes me back to that white T-Bird alone with Debbie, and those first flutters of a wild ride I have never forgotten.