

First Love

My first “true loves” were Michael Lee McConnell and David Alan Morgan. I met them both within a month of each other in the spring of 1977. I was fifteen.

My first two lovers had been girls. I loved them but did not have the passionate connection that I later experienced with Michael and David. I think it was because they just weren't freaks like me.

Michael, David and I were all geeks. Outcasts.

I can remember sitting on my front porch in Moore, Oklahoma, starrng up into the stars and wondering if there would ever be someone who could love me. I had this feeling that somewhere out there, someone else watched those same constellations and asked the same question. The longing so profound it was sometimes hard to breath.

I began attending geek events when I was thirteen. My mother discovered there was a Star Trek club in Oklahoma City. It was over an hours drive away. Mom really knew I needed to connect with someone like myself. So she drove me all the way to a small public library on the North side of OKC and sat in the car reading a book while I went into find out if there was anyone out there like me.

I made friend. I found out there was an entire network of geeks like me. They had formed clubs – Starbase OKC, Starbase Tulsa, Starbase Enid and even, Elk City Landing Party. I began corresponding with other teens and adults around the country. (There was no email – computers still took up entire buildings.) The mail became a lifeline. We made little booklets where each person put their address and interests on a page and passed the booklet on to others. We found other like us in the pages of these homemade books. I learned all the buses and later highways that would take me to gatherings of folks like me.

I also discovered that I was attractive. At school in Moore, I was called “dog” and other unflattering epithets. I was awkward and didn't know how to “act like a young lady.” My hair was short and curly, my body language open and masculine, my style without artifice or even tact. And by both inclination and poverty, I had no sense at all of fashion and no interest in make-up. I wore hand-me-downs from the church. When I could, I made my own outfits – all of them science fiction, fantasy or comic book costumes.

I was the original ugly duckling. Among “mundanes,” I was at best ignored, but more often tormented and ridiculed. But with other geeks, I was suddenly popular – especially among geek boys. Of course, I could count on one hand the number of females at most geek gatherings – most of them older than me. Among my own kind, I was beautiful. I was admired and courted. I was overwhelmed.

I was Captain Atkins. With the support of my mother, I started my own club that met at the local library. A dozen or so teen and preteen boys joined. I was the only female among them. I also began visiting other clubs. So it was that I came to a small piece of nowhere in Western

Oklahoma known as Elk City. The Elk City Landing Party was run by Ron Moore and consisted of a half dozen boys. My mother had even bought me a dress to wear while traveling. So when I stepped off the Greyhound bus, I was quite noticeable. The dress was a favorite for years and usually got me nasty looks from little old ladies. It was russet colored with a full skirt, tight bodice area and three-quarter sleeves with embroidered trim. The most striking aspect of it was the extremely low-cut V-neck. I wore knee high black leather boots with thick two-inch heels. I actually wore a bit of make up for the occasion.

My friend Ron met me at the station and introduced me to his best friend and “second-in-command,” David. David, like Ron, was older than me – nearly eighteen. I was instantly nervous about him. He had hair that was like mine in color but long, curly and wild. He wore tight hip-hugger bell-bottom pants nearly the same color as my dress. He wore a black leather jacket – the sign of a “hood” in that place and time. I actually refused to sit between them in the large bench front seat of the car. (I would later learn that David had been just as put off by me at first.)

We met the rest of the club, all younger teens and spent the day doing things only teens would find fun. We played with the CB in the car, we did athletic games in the park (I changed to slacks for that) and talked about science fiction. Later that evening, David, Ron and I hung out in his room talking seriously about our lives. I had found myself fascinated by David. He moved with grace, his smile was beautiful, and he was very intelligent. Still young and having never done more than “kiss a boy” (except with girls), I slept alone in a place provided by Ron’s parents and returned home the next day.

When he came to visit with friends later, I kissed him. Every romance novel about electric shocks and fireworks, yep. It was a chaste kiss by grown standards but it blew me away. The connection was intense. David and I began writing long romantic letters and making plans to see each other again. His first letter to me was written while he sat in a tree by the creek at sunset, comparing me to sunrise.

Back in Moore, I began to make plans to go to the next Starbase Tulsa meeting. Starbase Tulsa was the big club with lots of adults as well as young people like me. I had met another boy at a gaming convention in December. He had even kissed me – not chastely either. He went by the name Damian (real name Bob) and was seventeen. He lived in Tulsa and his parents said I could come visit. Strangely enough, my geek world was like the Peanuts gang – I remember very few of the parents. Most geeks I knew then were not only outcasts but also abused or neglected by their parents.

Damian met me at the Greyhound station and then took me around to meet some of his friends. I grew impatient and angry with him as the day wore on. He was showing me off like a prize he had won. I felt like a livestock on display at the county fair. He kept calling me “His Little Dawn” in spite of my express demand that I was neither his property nor did I consider myself “little.” I insisted that at the meeting that night, he would treat me as a friend and not a possession. I also insisted he do nothing that would embarrass me. I was actually pretty nervous about this group and wanted to be accepted on my own right not as his plaything.

He managed to blow just about every agreement he made with me in the first hour of the meeting. That evening included something called a “slave auction” as a fundraiser for the club. Each person willing would volunteer a service such as cleaning your car, making a craft item or some such thing and then they would be auctioned off to the highest bidder with the money going to the club. I had thought that it would be a good way to show support of the club I had just joined to volunteer. I forbid Damian to even bid on me. I didn’t like the “way that would look.” But when a buddy and rival of his did bid on me, he rose to the bait and got into a bidding war with him. The howls of ribald laughter left me feeling shamed. I was furious. Damian won the bid but I told him tersely that he could forget collecting on it.

Meanwhile, something else had been happening for me. During a quieter part of the meeting, a man brought out a toy. It was a real robot – something we had never seen outside the released Star Wars. But what really caught my attention was the young man sitting next to him. When I looked up and found him watching me, I was spell bound. Like an old movie, I felt instantly drawn to him and we continued finding each other’s eyes, smiling shyly at each other.

At the end of the meeting I found myself admiring a robot along with the young man. Michael introduced himself to me and the chemistry between us was so intense that I felt I could barely breathe. I wanted more than anything to learn everything about him.

Michael was ten months older than me, age sixteen. He was eloquent, animated and shy. He had golden blond hair, fine, straight and loose to his collar. His face was boyish, his eyes blue. He was so intelligent that I felt awed by him. He also had what I have come to recognize now as very queer body language. He used his hands and body language to talk in ways I had never seen a male move. He was charming even to his potential rival, Damian, inviting us both back to the after-the-meeting party at the club president’s house. I quickly accepted and off we went, catching a ride with an adult at the party. (None of us had cars then.)

At the party, I spent the entire time in animated discussions with Michael and Damien. Michael never left Damian out of the conversation. He seemed curious but not threatened by the fact that Damien’s repeated attempts to “stake his claim” to me. It was clear to him that my eyes lit up when I looked at him and neither of us was willing to walk away from each other.

When the hosts finally ended the party, we found ourselves standing on a dark suburban Tulsa neighborhood. We had no car and there were three of us standing under the stars and streetlights. I looked up at the beautiful warm evening and declared that I was going for a walk. Both young men looked at me in mixes of confusion and amusement before shrugging to each other.

I knew that Damien wanted to leave Michael then and there. I also knew I could not imagine that. I also had no language for even bringing up the topic let alone how to resolve the conflict. I didn’t want to hurt Damien but I felt compelled to be with Michael. So I strode off into the Tulsa night with my two escorts. We played a round or two of bowling at a local alley. We walked all night long. We walked to Damien’s house and stopped to get me a sweater. Damien left us alone for a few minutes standing in his living room. His family, who I never met, was asleep. I walked up and stood before Michael. Michael stared into my eyes. I leaned into him

and kissed him. A gentle chaste kiss. Michael froze like a statue, eyes wide. I retreated. Looking up at him with confusion, thinking I had made a mistake. He looked down at me and simply said, “You are the first person to kiss me.” Incredulous, I asked, “what about your mother.” He shook his head. “No, only you.”

I was stunned. I had never even imagined a person could live sixteen years without being kissed. My family was always affectionate. I had been kissing girls for years, and had now kissed six boys. Then Damien came back with the sweater and we continued our long night conversation and hike.

At sunrise, I found myself the focus of a favorite male geek past-time – puns. This time the two of them competed for the most clever or bad puns about “dawn.” We were in a park with a small stream. I walked away from them to stand looking at the colors and peaceful place. The two young men were talking – their first time without me in the conversation.

Michael walked over to me and stood next to me watching. Finally, he sighed and said, “I think I should leave.”

I turned and said “I don’t want you too.”

“He does.”

“He doesn’t own me,” I answered.

We ended up eventually walking Michael home. Then Damien and I ended up having a “talk” about what was going on which primarily consisted of his demands and my refusal to agree to them. Later I went back to find Michael.

Michael and I were alone. I remember kissing for a long time. I remember being intoxicated by his scent, his breath, his taste. But he had to work and I had to get on a bus to be back in Moore in time for school the next day. The bus station was near the hotel where he worked as a “bellhop” and spent every moment I could with him. We made plans for him to come visit me the next weekend.

I was now in two relationships (having ended with one with Damien). Michael and David both sent me beautiful love letters and I wrote back happily. I had told Michael about David. I made the mistake of telling David about Michael, and he quit writing me.

That first weekend with Michael was like a miracle. I had made arrangements for us to go on a picnic to the wooded lake area on my father’s relative’s farm. We were completely alone, on a sunny day on a blanket in the woods. We spent hours exploring each other.

Michael had never kissed before. But he had had sex. He had played with boys before. I had played with girls. Now, we were learning about each other. We touched, we kissed, we tasted, and we talked. It was gentle and powerful.

Michael and I spent every weekend we could together. Summer was coming, but the big problem was that I was moving to Florida in July. I was going to spend a year living with my cousin Tammy and my aunt and uncle.

From July to December, we wrote letters and spent too much time on the telephone. We shared everything. We were both dating other people and we were still very in love. Each experience with others was something to share with each other, a way to teach ourselves. I never felt jealous, nor did Michael ever show me any jealousy. I felt accepted by him.

When I got off the bus in OKC for Christmas vacation, he was waiting with my mom. He spent a week with us before returning to Tulsa. It was wonderful. Two days after he left, I got a call from David – he wanted to visit.

David arrived and the energy was still there. I was still in love with him too. We had a wonderful visit and when I returned to Florida at New Year, I now had two again. David never asked about Michael and I had learned not to bring it up. David became jealous whenever I even mentioned other guys.

I dated other people when I was in Florida. But I never shared myself with them. Yes, I “made out” but I refused to do anything more than what was called “heavy petting” back then. No one would enter me except someone I loved. I had to fight for that several times. And I knew that when I returned to Oklahoma, I wanted both of them.

I got to fly home from Florida on June 10th. Michael was at the airport with mom and my sisters. That evening we went for a walk on a starlit summer night. It was warm and soft and clear. We found a spot behind my old elementary school and began kissing. Soon we were making love. Both of us had condoms. We both knew what we wanted.

I can remember lying on my back with the cement of a patio under me and the feel of his body on mine. Michael was “well built” and the first time hurt. But I wanted him so badly and loved him so much, the pain was only part of the excitement of it. I remember his face above me, surrounded by stars. Now there was nothing we did not explore with each other.

The next week I met David. David and his buddy, Ron had moved to OKC. Near where I lived. I could drive now and picked David up in my mom’s Oldsmobile. It had a big back seat. With Michael, there were no pretenses. We both knew what the other had and had not done with others. We talked about everything.

But David would not talk about others. His jealousy wouldn’t let him learn about me. I was nervous. He was older than me by nearly three years and a “tough guy” – into martial arts, living on his own. He liked Bruce Lee and Elvis Presley. I didn’t want to seem like a child to him. I tried to be tough, casual, and worldly. It was the wrong thing to do. We “did it” but we didn’t make love. He was sullen, withdrawn. It had been his first time. I didn’t know.

So much we didn't know or understand. I guess that is true of most teens, but being geeks, I think it was often worse. We had no models for what kind of people to be, having rejected most the mainstream ones. And we had few communication skills.

By the end of the month things had gone from difficult to impossible with David. Although he had met and liked Michael, he was eaten up by jealousy. He demanded I choose between them. I said he had to choose to accept me as I was or not. I would not choose between two men I loved. He would not accept it.

Meanwhile, Michael and I were working on Starbase Tulsa's second annual convention, Okon. We had a hotel room together and had been spending lots of time together. At Okon things got really strange. The first night in our hotel room, I later found out that Damien had brought a gun and was sitting outside planning to kill us. Apparently, mutual friends talked him out of it. But something was also very wrong with Michael.

This was the 70s and a lot of my peers used drugs. I drank some but mostly abstained from all other drugs. I said I liked my "highs natural." I tried pot with Michael, promptly threw up and then had trouble breathing for a week. I was allergic to pot. Michael had been smoking more and more of it. He changed personality when he was high. He went from polite to arrogant. He was frankly obnoxious when he was stoned. That summer he I found out he was using much stronger drugs now. It got nasty when I found a large amount of cocaine in our hotel room – and I flushed it down the toilet. I would not have the stuff around me. I could share him with any person, but not with the drugs. He was changing before my eyes and I felt helpless to stop it.

Then came the blow that sent him over the edge. First, his mom caught us sleeping together. Actually, really sleeping fully clothed on the couch where we had fallen asleep watching TV. We never had sex under her roof. She was a very nasty person. She started calling me slut and whore and ordering me from the place. Michael defended me and left with me.

Later that week when he returned home, he found his mother had moved. She had taken his younger brother and sister and left only his stuff and a note. Her new boyfriend didn't want him to come with them and they had moved out of state. Michael was seventeen, and now he was homeless. Michael stayed with friends. By the Fall, he was using so much that I couldn't be around him anymore.

I had lost both my first loves and had vowed not to love. I wanted sex but not love. I took to sleeping with adult men I picked up. These were not relationships, this was fucking. I was desperately lonely and wanted to be held. I rarely saw a man more than once. It was the disco era and it was easy to find sex. Yet, it never had the magic of those times with Michael or even, David.

Two years later, I would find myself drawn back into their lives again – though not their lover. I was still active in the Starbase clubs and had driven up with friends to the Tulsa meetings. David and Eddie were there. (Eddie was the first friend I made at that long ago first Star Trek club meeting.)

We got to talking afterward. David had gotten married the previous winter. He had been in a “Job Core” program and married a girl he met there. He had actually called me before he did it and tried to get me jealous. He had told me he was marrying her even though he didn’t love her but was trying to help her out. I told him I thought that was disgusting.

While I had withdrawn from them, Michael and David had become friends. I had tried to tell David back then that they would make great friends, but his jealousy had never let him see that. Now the irony is that I had lost them both only to have them finally discover all they had in common.

Anyway, Eddie, Linda and David were rooming together in Tulsa. I dropped them off before heading back to OKC. They invited me up but then Linda saw me and tried to attack me. Her jealousy apparently rivaled David’s. I was told that she burned all my letters to him and all photos he had of me. She actually chased my VW Bug as I pulled away.

A few months later, David and Linda showed up at a Starbase OKC meeting. This was my home turf now and I was there with my D&D buddies. Linda came up and apologized for her earlier behavior. I befriended this very messed up young woman. I actually began hanging out with David and Linda most that summer. We saw the “Empire Strikes Back” together. David and Linda had the worst relationship I ever saw – mutual suspicion, verbal abuse and insanely vindictive. It was sad.

That next month we all went to Tulsa together for another meeting. (Tulsa and OKC are connected by a 110 mile turnpike.) We had begun to worry why no one had seen or heard from Michael in a while. After the meeting, we went over to Michael’s grandparent’s place, where we had found he had been staying. They wouldn’t talk to us. So we slept in my VW Bug that night and tried again in the morning.

That morning I explained to his grandparents that we were Michael’s best friends. (Strangely true even then.) They let us in and told us what had happened. Several weeks before, Michael had gone to visit his mother somewhere in Kansas. When he returned home, he was in some sort of catatonic state. He hadn’t eaten, spoken or otherwise moved from the bedroom he had there in over a week. They had no idea what to do.

I went in and found him there. I pulled him out of bed, bathed him, dressed him and forced him to sit at the kitchen table where his grandparent’s served us breakfast. I forced him to eat and finally got a reaction from him – cursing me. Given his zombie like behavior, it was an improvement. We told his grandparents we would take him with us and we did.

Back in OKC, Michael stayed with David and Linda in a flat on the south side of OKC. It was summer so I had time to spend with them. I was working a fast food job in the evenings. Each day I would come and work with Michael, trying to bring him back to himself. It worked. And he cursed me for it. The first thing he did when he came of the state, was find drugs again.

By the end of the summer, Michael and David were too busy getting high together for me to stay around. I helped Linda get it together enough leave David and saw her off. David and Michael

were roomies again and I left them to each other. I could stand to look at them by this point. I would rather have sex with a stranger than either one of them high.

That fall, I was a “freshman” at the University of Oklahoma in Norman. I was part of the OUSFA – OU Science Fiction Association. Like most the clubs, there was a public meeting, at that time on campus, and then a private party at an adults’ house afterward. I liked the group and felt more at home there than I had ever before. (In no small part due to the graciousness of Cathy Ball, the host of such social events.)

Then David moved to Norman and started attending meetings. We had never stopped being friends even when were angry with each other. But the end of that college year, we were spending a lot of time together and I had finally given in to the chemistry between us and slept with him again. Linda may have been bad for him in many ways, but apparently the extra sexual experience had been good. He was now an amazing lover. It felt like it should have from the beginning.

That summer I found my own apartment. Then David “lost” his apartment. I said he could stay with me for a while. So began our nine month hell of living together. At first it was nice to have company and the extra help with the bills and, of course, the sex. Problem was I was still avidly non-monogamous. And jealousy drove David crazy. I became so tired of the drama that I decided to be monogamous to please him. Big mistake. I found that jealousy is not helped by monogamy. Where before if he accused me of having sex with someone else, I could look him and say that was none of his business. Now I had to try to prove what had not done. Trust me, it can’t be done.

It poisoned the relationship. I lost most my friends. He trusted no one. Any social occasion was always followed by a fight. Anyone or anything that made me smile seemed to make him unhappy. I had dropped out of college and was working for a local newspaper. Then, as if things weren’t bad enough, Michael moved to town.

By this time, Michael had done so many hard drugs that his brain had undergone a dramatic change. Gone was the intelligence and charm. He could hold not a conversation. People who met him then thought he was “retarded.” He knew my name, but he could not remember what we had been to each other. Do you have any idea what is like to look at the person you once gave your soul to and have him not remember? It made me so wretched that I had to fight nausea around him. To make matters worse, he was still attracted to me and kept making passes at me.

I had no gift for talking about such things then. I don’t believe anyone in that club knew the history of David, Michael and I. I am sure they saw me as being mean to “poor Michael.” I saw my worst nightmare. My dad had been brain damaged in a hit and run accident in 1975. He was institutionalized in a locked ward in the state hospital only blocks from where my first apartment was. And now Michael had the same slack jawed, dull-eyed and sallow skinned visage as my dad. Neither of the men I had loved most in my life even knew who I was any more. And the third, David, was becoming increasingly abusive. As I had become depressed and less interested in sex, David insisted on it anyway. If I refused, he would wake me every half hour until agreed.

When I didn't "enjoy" it, he would become angry, saying that was proof that I was sleeping with someone else. I wasn't.

David never struck me, but he took to striking objects around me. The wall, the door. One argument in the car while I was driving on the highway resulted in him putting his fist into the passenger side front window, shattering the glass. I was afraid of him and I was miserable. Finally, I had taken all I could. I handed him his shoes and told him to get out.

The next day he spent hours trying to convince me to take him back. I explained over and over again how unhappy I was. It made no difference. Then I realized he didn't really care if I was happy, he just wanted me back. We didn't even speak for the next year.

Our friends spent the next year trying to figure out which parties to invite Dawn to and which to invite David. Finally, I showed up at one I knew he would be at. I would not leave him out of my life, but I did not want him as my partner. We actually continued to see each other casually for a couple years until I moved to California in 1984.

Last I heard, Michael had joined the Hari Krishna. I don't know if it was true but I really hoped he found a way out that self-destruction. I have no idea where he is today.

I last saw David in 1990, when I went back to Okon that year to see old friends. He looked like a man who had seen a ghost. And although I can say that I have never stopped loving either man, the desire for him was gone. A few years ago I looked him up and found him in New York. He never really accepted who I was, let alone who I became – but neither did he reject me.

I did fall in love again – several times. It does seem to always happen in at least pairs for me. I am blessed to have loved and still love many men and women. I mourn what became of Michael, but I realize now that the early days of our relationship set a standard by which all others would come to be compared. If I couldn't have an equal, non-possessive, intellectually and personally challenging relationship – then I would rather be alone. I am glad that I have been blessed with two life partners and several lovers who more than meet that challenge.

Dawn Atkins
Feb. 22, 2004

Side note: For those who might catch it, Michael Lee McConnell was born Dec 7th. Troy is actually, Michael Troy McKee and was born Dec. 6th. Lon is born Dec. 3rd. Something about those beautiful Sagittarians.