



# Learning about the pangs of love

I knew I had to be her favorite. She would let me clap the erasers and take down the swings in the playground behind the school at the end of the day. I would walk to school a few minutes early so I knew I would be the first one in the classroom to have some time alone with her. Miss Taylor, my first grade teacher.

I was a lucky kid growing up in Newport. Instead being consigned to the roughness of the public elementary school, Cranston Calvert, or the scary nuns of St. Joseph's, my parents had enrolled me in Miss Collings School, a private school housed in a spacious Queen Anne with an enormous beech tree in front.

I started combing my hair. There were only ten or twelve of us to a class, unlike the barbaric cattle pens a few blocks down, Cranston Calvert and Thompson Junior High, where there were always fights and disciplinary problems. If you were a discipline problem at Miss Collings, you were gone.

Miss Taylor wasn't much taller than I and she had a cute little figure. Don't say boys in the first grade don't notice things like that — they do! At least this little boy did. She wore pencil skirts that zipped up the back and perfectly ironed white blouses that buttoned up the front and high heels. She had shiny brown hair that she wore up sometimes and sometimes down where it fell below her shoulders in soft waves.

Clapping erasers on the back steps at the end of the day and taking down the swings and bringing them inside: such things were not work when you did them out of love. I wasn't even canny enough to think that I was doing those things for a better grade.

Miss Taylor could've asked me to clean her oven or mow her lawn or wash her car, a sensible little Ford Falcon. Anything. I would have done anything for her. I loved her with a pure "I want to hold your hand," kind of love. Actually, that's not

entirely true. I wanted to cuddle her. Hold her. I wanted to be close to her.

When Valentine's Day approached, I made her a Valentine. I cut the heart out of red construction paper and decorated the edges with white doily paper, pasted on the back. The front took a lot of pondering. Finally I drizzled some glue that read: "Happy Valentine's Day!" and sprinkled silver sparkles on it. Beneath that I wrote my first name in blue pencil which I outlined with a white grease pencil to give it some extra oomph.

At the end of the day, after I'd taken down the swings, I dawdled long enough so that it was only the two of us left inside. I handed her the Valentine in a white envelope I'd made myself out of two pieces of typewriter paper, with her name written cursorily on the front.

"Why thank you," she said. "It's beautiful. Thank you so much."

I don't know exactly what I expected, but somehow ... more? A hug? A certain extra-soft expression in those brown eyes? I don't know. Probably something I'd seen in movies on TV? That she'd fling herself on me? Or at least melt. A kind of demure melt. I could've gone with that.

I loitered outside beneath the beech tree, giving her a chance to perhaps come up with a more enthusiastic response. She was probably overwhelmed. While I waited, a red Triumph TR-3 pulled up to the curb and she came rushing down the front steps, whisked by me and nearly jumped into the car, which was driven by your standard issue "handsome man."

I was stunned. My face felt hot. I didn't know what to do with myself. Finally, I began walking my broken heart home with a new knowledge that's never changed: Love hurts. It does.

— Charles Pinning, an occasional contributor, lives in Providence.