

Up Close and Personal With Amanda

By: Marc Alan Znaniiecki

There is a flavour of fear in love. To love someone is a risk; a risk that one morning I might awake and find they are no longer accessible to me. For this reason, loving a woman had always been difficult for me to do in the early years of life. I did not become easily or seriously attached to any woman until I was in my late twenties. I sometimes think that my past experiences, which were riddled with rejection, dejection, despair and loss, often repressed my feelings for others.

In the autumn of 1992, when I was an eighteen year old senior in high school, I witnessed my grandmother slowly erode over a six month period into a feeble shell of a woman from the cancer which plagued her. The time between being told she was ill until her death, helped to alleviate the bearing of her loss a little.

In the summer of 1994, my only niece, who was also my godchild, departed from the world after only two years seven months and fourteen days with us. Her exit from my life was sudden and without warning. One warm summer day, her heart had stopped, and in many ways, mine did too.

During the spring of 1995, still attempting to grasp and cope with the incomprehensible loss of my only niece, I had formed a relationship with Kristi, a girl with whom I had graduated high school. She often would call me and we would make plans to do things together, sometimes in the midst of other friends that we shared inclusively and exclusively.

My very good friend Bill was getting married that summer. I asked Kristi to join me as my date, to which she accepted. Then oddly enough, during the reception of the wedding, I realized that my date was the communal date of all my single friends (Miguel, Jim, Rich, and Bob). Every time I had asked her if she would like to dance, she had already promised someone else to dance next.

I thought perhaps that I had made her mad for some unknown reason. If such was the case, I decided to tread softly and pondered what it was I had done. For the very last

dance of the evening, I danced with Bill's 14 year old niece/godchild. I savored that dancing opportunity with envy, as an event with the specific someones whom Bill had in his life and whom I missed very dearly in my own.

After the reception, I drove Kristi home and she apologized for ignoring me and reassured me that I had done nothing to incite her anger or indifference. She even asked if I would like to see a movie at the drive-in the following night, and my spirit rebounded as I accepted the invitation.

At the drive-in, Kristi seemed distant to me. I bluntly asked, "What is the deal with you lately? Why do you treat me as if I am a leper? What is it about me that you lately treat me as if you don't want to be around me?"

"Well..." she hesitated, "I really like your friend Bob."

The words echoed loudly with disbelief in my ears. "So..." I stammered, "The last three months of being with me and asking me to go out with you," I stopped in mid-thought with resigned realization, "were for the sole purpose of landing Bob?"

"You're a nice guy, but not like Bob," she said. "He's smart, funny, good-looking and a great dancer." I felt my body shriveling and sinking into the veneer cushions of my car.

"Well," I began. "Bob, Jim and Rich are scoping girls in Jim's car about three rows back."

"Oh good," she said as she left the car with the door thudding shut behind her. I felt as alone without her as I did with her the past two days.

About five minutes later, she opened the door and plopped into the seat, sobbing heavily as the tears ran down her cheeks. "I told Bob about my feelings for him and he told me he never wants to see me again."

I said nothing, while dishearteningly relishing Bob's rebuff of her.

"He said that he could never have any feelings for anyone that has hurt Marc as badly as I must be doing right now." She paused.

"I haven't hurt your feelings!" she stated emphatically and almost questioningly.

“You’re right,” in that moment I was proud to be Bob’s only friend that never had sex with any of his girlfriends, while he dated them or thereafter, “I have no feelings,” I whispered almost inaudibly.

That sense of internal emotional deadness seeped and lingered into my being for quite some time. With no real direction or focus in my life, I merely ambled from day to day, engrossed in my own self pity and enthralled in my own disinterest to attempt to make my life appear any brighter or more jovial. I moped and brooded alone within my pains and heartaches. I became reclusive, spending much of my time engrossed in my studies and locked behind my bedroom door for fear of being hurt any further.

On a cold November night in 1995, I met a new employee four years my junior. As the main usher in the movie theater, I was to train her to do the job that was mostly associated with guys.

She wasn’t the least bit intrepid of treading into a realm that was dominated by people other than her gender. I didn’t really talk to her much more than I had to. It was strictly a business situation, but that did not deter her from talking to me and sharing her perceptive input on situations that might arise or questions that she had. She informed me that she was the baby of her family with older brothers whom she had to contend with, thus making our lot seem paltry and insignificant in regard to intimidation.

Amanda was an attractive, gentle, young woman with long flowing natural blonde hair that draped the sides of her face, adorning her visage with perfect arcs like flowing waterfalls. Her smile shone within the contrast of her succulent scarlet lips. I was often captivated into staring deeply into her tender, loving hazel eyes which sometimes would appear blue or green depending on what other colors she happened to be complimenting with them.

Those piercing, stunning eyes gave her a sense of duality. She was a vision of femininity that also had a minor macho alter ego. Any job I did, she also did ...sometimes even better. If I picked up a 35 pound bag of popcorn seeds, she would pick one up and also a box of Goobers, taunting me with, “Big tough man can’t carry anything more than a girl can?”

I could “thread up” a movie in less than 30 seconds. (“Thread Up” is the term we cinema folk referred to setting the film in a projector and to and from the automated take up and winding reels to play for a show.) After two months, she was timing herself clocking at roughly 35-45 seconds to do it. She was competitive, but in a manner of good, joking spirit.

Amanda did not back down from challenges or physical confrontations and sometimes even pursued them. On one instance, she had asked a customer to take his feet off of the seats. He became irate and blasted a few insults about her gender and her in specific. She told him to leave and he told her, “Make me.”

The incident was made aware to me only when I saw a storming Amanda emerge from the auditorium and saying, “Some prick just called me a dumb bitch because I asked him to take his feet off the seats. Then I told him to leave and now he won’t. I’m gonna get a broom and beat his ass outta here.”

Little did we know, our Manager was standing around the corner and she rounded the corner and said, “Take me to him.”

For some time, I had a stalker named Lorie, a girl with whom I attended grade school and high school. She would show up at the theater and hand off her number for me to call her, something I weaseled my way out of by saying that it was not permissible to mix business with social lives.

After two months of hoping she’d give up, I told her that her that I simply could not be a boyfriend or date or any other relationship. She said that we could be friends. I said, “I don’t see my family much, let alone my friends. I just don’t have the time.” Lorie was unabashed by my attempt to dissuade her interests in me.

Cornered like a rat, Lorie said, “Come on, Marc, just go out with me.”

“But I have a girlfriend,” I panicked. “And she works here with me, so if you don’t mind, please don’t ruin it for me.”

“Oh,” Lorie said, “I won’t give you up that easily. I’ll do things for you she won’t.” She walked out the door and into the public areas of the mall.

Amanda had overheard my conversation with Lorie and asked, “What’s with her?”

“She just a girl that won’t leave me alone no matter how many times I tell her ‘No’”.

“Okay.” Amanda said. “I’m goin’ on break now.”

Twenty minutes later, Amanda returned. “Marc,” she called me, “that girl shouldn’t bother you anymore.”

“Why’s that?”

“I just tracked her down in the mall,” Amanda paused, “and I told her ‘Marc is my man!’ Then I grabbed her by her shirt and said, ‘You better just back off or I’m gonna fuck you up and smash your face.’ Then I told her to find her own man.”

“Thanks.”

“You just let me know if she bothers you anymore.” She said as she winked at me.

From that incident, a relationship was forged between us, and I felt better than I had in so long a time that it was almost like being resurrected from the dead. I opened up to Amanda and together we shared our hopes, our dreams, our pains, and our uncertainties. She was a great friend and a most trusted counsel.

I once aspired to be a journalist as my dream endeavor. Amanda told me that she’d like to be a television newscaster. She had the looks for it whereas I had them for radio. We wanted to make a difference and spread truth to the world. This common bond and similar dream we both envisioned drew us closer together. We also had many other interests of commonality.

On a more serious level, she and I had discussions on a variety of provoking problems in our lives. She shared her troubles with men and I opened up to her about my sorrows, insecurities, and failings with women, living and dead.

Her trouble with the opposite gender was that she had an overabundance, and I, a famine. She sometimes seemed to have a boyfriend for the sake of having a boyfriend like many high school aged youths. I still found comfort in my semi-solitude.

Amanda and I had become very close. Our friendship was filled with love and nurture of each other. I remember the times with her when I was sad, depressed, and brooding over my losses, in which she did things to keep my racing mind from dwelling on what cannot ever be fixed, like pretending to need help restocking and keep me with her so that I would not be alone skulking about.

Most of the other workers still kept their distance from me and allowed me space to do my job alone, but Amanda persevered in getting me to be an active participant with the staff as I once was in the past. She was always telling me jokes and asking if I knew any. I was the king of jokes at work when I was in high school, and she inherently seemed to know that it eased my sorrow, if only momentarily.

My favorite joke she told me was, “What do you call a pregnant virgin?”

“A fucking liar!”

Amanda and I flirted a lot while we were working, and like little school children, we would pass each other notes at work written on paper, napkins, or anything else we could find to write on. I would write her little poems and she often wrote me little pick me ups. On one of those notes to me, she wrote, “You are a wonderful friend, person, and man. Don’t ever let anyone tell you different. I love talking with you and if ever you feel the need to talk just call me on my cell...”

Some of the poems were adorations and others were pure love and desire. I didn’t think she ever took them seriously. In regard to my writings, it was once asked of me if I ate a thesaurus. I said, “Amanda, you get to be my guinea pig. Tell me what you think.”

*You dwell
As the soul resident,
Of a place inside my heart
No one has ever been
Including me.*

*I know of its existence,
 Only because your presence
 Prevails so strongly there.
 Through our times
 Of pain, of laughter, of fear and of love,
 We've heartily accepted
 Each other's frailties and imperfections
 Which resides inside our beings.
 Your lush sea of flaxen tresses
 Intensifies your empyrean gaze
 Of emerald tranquility and hypnotism.
 Your luscious maroon lips
 Exhibit kind words
 Which are more enticing
 Than any suffocating kiss
 I've ever shared with a woman.
 More than any other,
 You are my most trusted confidant,
 My friend, whom I tell my deepest secrets
 And display my overly suppressed feelings
 Of sorrow, rage, fear and love.
 You are the reflecting insight
 Guiding me through uncertainty
 And lifting my weights of dismay.
 You are a tender, passionate and loving woman,
 Whose vigilant attention to my wellness,
 Is impossible to reciprocate
 As you justly deserve.*

Amanda said, "I need to get a dictionary unless you want to tell me what the ten dollar words mean." The meaning of my poem was not moot. I loved Amanda a lot, perhaps too much to be in love with her.

In some ways, I envisioned that my niece would have grown up to be much like Amanda. They both shared the perceptions of innocence with their milky smooth complexions. Amanda appeared to be the type of woman which I was never to experience with my niece. I hate to think of her as a surrogate niece, since the degree of love I have had for both of them has always been honest, genuine, and true. Both could make mistakes and be wrong, just as both could be easily forgiven for any action. We were like family together and blind to each other's frailties and faults. There will never be any replacement for my niece as shall there never be replacement for Amanda in my heart, mind, and soul.

Amanda's boyfriends would come and go. She and I were very blunt with each other and openly frank about our lives and activities. On the occasions that our conversations turned to sex, she and I could discuss our experiences and not feel ashamed or dirty about those incidents.

She shared with me that she and her paramour were intensely engaged in intercourse, and I don't mean conversation, for a good duration of time. Afterward, he commented, "I've not had that much of a rigorous workout since basic training." She was infuriated and kicked him out of the bed and told him to find another "workout partner".

She asked me if she was overreacting, to which I replied, "If it's considered such a task of a job, maybe he needs to find another place of employment."

She giggled and hugged me tightly. "You always make me laugh" she whispered in my ear then kissed me on the cheek.

A few days later, I was in the time clock room with about five minutes to waste before clocking in for my shift while staring down the clock, hoping that I had some extra sensory perception or superpowers to speed up time.

She came in wearing her street clothes and said hello to me and then began to change clothes in front of me, disrobing down to her intimate lingerie. I turned my head and gaze away from her and had to ask her, "You do know that I can see you?"

"Yeah," she said, "but it's only you."

“What does that mean?” I wasn’t sure what to make of that comment, while I still looked away.

“I don’t feel a need to hide anything from you because we are friends and my body is nothing compared to what I’ve shown you in my heart.”

“Oh,” I conceded sheepishly, still unable to peer in her direction.

She walked into my line of sight, shoeless, holding her black dress pants on, still unzipped and unbuttoned, with one hand while tucking in her white dress shirt to obscure her teal intimate apparel, “We get off at 6 tonight. Do you wanna go to a 7 o’clock show?” she said while finishing her composure of clothing into order.

Like normal, I had no plans so I accepted. “Sure, I’ll go.” I never thought of it as a date, just two friends going to watch a movie together.

The movie I saw with Amanda starred Michelle Pfeiffer as a young woman who wanted to be a news anchor. She had no formal training and expected to get the job via her looks and her resolve to never give up. She met an older journalist, played by Robert Redford, who took her under his wing and helped her acquire the skills needed to be the type of journalist she dreamed of being. Their story and the plot was one of love, passion and romance within the backdrop of losing that love coupled with a hit song from Celine Dion.

For Amanda and me, our story was one of love. We loved each other. Of this I am certain. Our love was not convoluted in the sense that it was dependant on the over-sexualized aspects of love that many people our age had sought of one another. I simply loved and adored the emotive spirit who was encased by the physical beauty before me.

I walked her to her car after the movie and she said, “I love you, Marc.” No sooner were the words spoken that she draped her arms around me kissing me full on the lips in an awkward passion that I recognized as my own gracelessness.

She withdrew from our embrace. “What’s wrong?”

“I’m not ready,” I said, unable to look her in the eyes.

“That’s okay,” she said, seizing me in the harbor of her arms to shelter me from the frigid storms and seas I feared so vehemently. I did not want to lose her and was sure that an intense romance would have resulted in my losing a great and wonderful friend whom I loved so exceedingly.

On September 4, 1999, I attended the wedding of Amanda’s brother to a friend and co-worker of mine. Amanda looked radiant in her periwinkle blue bridesmaid’s dress. Of course, she always appeared unblemished and beautiful to me.

She and I danced to Shania Twain’s *From This Moment* and I vividly remember the soft touch of her hand clasped within mine and being aware that her other hand was gingerly raking the lower portion of my shoulder with her fingertips on my back. The warmth of her breath on my neck sent energizing shivers down my spine. Our bodies swayed and moved in unison to the beat and rhythm like the gentle waves of the sea crashing serenely into the shore.

I said, “It’s getting late and I need to be at work early in the morning, so I’m gonna head out.”

She said, “Come on Marc, just stay a little longer and have one more dance with me.”

I hugged her and kissed her on the cheek and said, “I promise we’ll dance again real soon.”

On September 26, 1999, I worked the morning shift as the Manager of a video store and at six o’clock, I began my late night shift as Assistant Manager in the theatre in which Amanda and I had met.

My boss said to me, “Did you hear the news, Marc?”

“What news?”

“Amanda died in a car accident last night along with three of her friends.” He said.

I made no response, just blankly stared at him and thought, “How could that light of a woman, I thought to be inextinguishable, be doused and launched from this earthly realm?”

“It happened sometime after midnight this morning.” He said.

Unable to look him in the eyes, my eyes covered to the floor and I said, “I’ll take care of the projection booth tonight.” I hid myself in the projection booth of the theatre all night, allowing the moist tears to waterlog my face. In that dim, empty space of the projection booth, I pondered and remembered with illumination, the wonderful friend and radiant love that was lost to the remainder of my days on earth. I wanted to revert back into the dominion of darkness from which she helped me escape; and I almost did.

I did not share my feelings of losing Amanda with anyone. I was asked by one of my friends how I was doing. I lied, “I’m alright.”

I showed no real emotion in the presence of anyone until the night of her wake. I could not find the strength to smile or articulate the uncontrollable swelling feelings inside me.

When I offered my condolences to Amanda’s mom, beside that closed silver casket, I realized that she had more reason than anyone to be suffering and ailing from this loss. A vital piece of her existence, the very flesh of her flesh, the bond that can only exist between mother and child, was torn from this world. Yet, she stood with the same resolute determination to be strong that Amanda also possessed when confronting conflicts in life. In that instant, I had an idea as to who was the parent that Amanda took after and most resembled.

Some months later, I saw her mom. She told me, “Amanda talked very highly of you, and she really liked you.”

I did not know what to say and stood silently.

She added, “While I was going through Amanda’s personal items, I came across notes and poems written to Amanda from you.”

I acknowledged it without resistance. I couldn’t deny it. She had the written proof. Amanda was my inspirational muse. “I don’t need to tell you how special she was

because you already know.” I said, “She was a very special woman to many people, myself included.”

I felt better knowing that even though this great love was gone, I was loved by her. My written messages to her and my feelings for her were not simply torn and discarded as with other women. She had valued something in them to keep them, thus valuing something, perhaps someone, in me.

That night, I wrote another poem to Amanda.

*I saw her
Alas,
It really was not her
I only wished she was.
Unfortunately,
She was another.
With the same golden crest,
Innocent cobalt eyes
Tenderness in her cheeks
And illumination in her smile.*

*With every corner I turn,
I see her.
Yet,
To my dismay
Always
She is another.*

*Ever so similar
And still not the same.
I fear that I am going insane.*

*For three months,
Has she been gone.*

*Only remaining in my heart
Blissfully haunting my dreams
And reminding me constantly
That she is gone.*

*Never to be
As we were before,
Or could have been,
Only to be
What we were back then.*

As no amount of words could adequately encompass the being she once was; no amount of words inked and positioned precisely on paper could ever express her loss in the lives, the hearts, and the dreams of everyone who loves her, my self included. I cherished Amanda; I just did not fully realize it until after she was gone.

Her presence, and lack thereof today in my life, taught me that love is not a painful aspect of living. Nor is it something to fear. Love is a beautiful gift to not be squandered or avoided or forgotten. I gladly accepted the love of another woman and I married her. Our first child was a girl. I had contemplated naming her Amanda, but realized there is no substitute for anyone in this world.

Amanda always will have a place reserved in my heart. I cannot forget the promise I made to Amanda that last night with her. I still owe her a dance, the dance I patiently await to share with her one day in Heaven, along with all the other loves which I shall have there waiting for me.