

A Valentine's Day proposal that was—and wasn't—a surprise

When I say I knew John was going to propose, I'm not boasting about my great detective work.

I mean I *knew*.

We had met with Fr. Lawrence Adamczyk that morning about celebrating our wedding.

We had reserved the Cathedral of Mary Our Queen and booked the reception site.

And John had made reservations at a restaurant for Valentine's Day dinner.

I don't need to be surprised to enjoy myself—and neither does John.

As we drove to the restaurant, John and I were giddy. I hadn't seen the ring, and we were happy and excited just to be together.

When we arrived at the restaurant, it was packed.

No worries. We had a reservation.

Except—oops—they didn't seem to have it.

Or maybe they had it, but they didn't want to seat us.

We waited for a half-hour in a crowded room. There was no sign we would be seated.

We were impatient. It wasn't that we were hungry. It was that this ring was burning

a hole in John's pocket. And we were so eager to begin our life together. Love may be patient and kind, but waiting for a table for more than a half-hour? That's not something we can do.

So we left.

And as we drove away from that restaurant that disappointed us, I wondered where John would propose.

It wasn't just Valentine's Day. It was a Saturday evening.

Where were we going to go without a reservation? I imagined John telling me that he wanted to spend the rest of his life with me as we ate greasy French fries in a fast food parking lot.

That would have been...OK. But that evening I was hoping for something just a little classier.

So we drove. And drove.

We ended up in Catonsville. I was living in Baltimore and John was living on the Eastern Shore, so there was no reason we should have landed there—in the town that would unexpectedly become our home three years later. But there we were.

And suddenly one of us noticed The Candlelight Inn.

We had never been there, but it looked like a romantic place. We went inside and asked, and—astonishingly—they had a table.

It was lushly furnished, quiet, and dimly lit. Someone even took my coat. And they seated us at a sweet table by a window.

Sometime during that elegant meal, John mentioned that he might go down on one knee, and I wouldn't let him. I didn't want him to draw any extra attention.

Then he made the most beautiful, personal, loving proposal, just to me, while everyone around us ate, oblivious to our quiet joy.

He knew I would say yes—and I did.

Then we ordered an enormous, decadent chocolate dessert, and John pretended to help me with it.

It was a perfect evening—made even more special because it hadn't turned out exactly the way we had planned. As I look back on it, I think of how our married life has led us down paths we hadn't expected to take, especially the journey to China to adopt our two sons.

Maybe God was trying to show us even then—in a small way that didn't matter much to anyone except us—that “When the Lord closes a door, somewhere he opens a window.”

Tonight my valentine has to work late, and that open window will be at the drive-through. As a special treat to our sons—and so Mama doesn't have to cook—we will be picking up meals-with-toys and taking them home.

Romantic? Not quite. But there's no reservation needed. And I know—again without any great detective work—that our two sons will be as giddy as their parents were when we were driving to that Valentine's Day dinner nine years ago today.