

## Two Celebrations

In July of 2006, Gerard and I returned to Maine for our annual visit. This was so much fun for me, catching up with my family, friends and showing off my sweet, romantic boyfriend. Everyone loved my new companion. Since our visit coincided with his birthday, my dear friend Annmarie and I cooked up a plan to throw him a surprise birthday party.

She was kind enough to donate her home for the event and decorated it with banners, balloons and streamers. She baked an eye catching chocolate cake since that was his favorite flavor. When we walked through the door Gerard saw the banners and balloons. He looked shocked. Then Annmarie's daughter, who absolutely adored him, came running over to hug him. The cat was out of the bag.

It was a splendid day. The weather was exceptionally beautiful; one of those picture-perfect Maine days that make all Mainers remember why they lived here. Especially when they're freezing their buns off in the dead of winter. The bright sun shone down with temperatures in the 70's, and no humidity at all (so very different from Florida summers). Big puffy white clouds skirted a deep blue sky on a gentle breeze.

As the festive afternoon wore on, the party became louder and more lively. We had the usual Maine cookout fare; hot dogs, hamburgers, potato salad, corn on the cob. There was a present for Gerard from Annmarie (ah, hello – this IS Maine!) lobster (which in Maine we call LOBSTAH). It is one of Gerard's favorite foods. He had plenty since it was a rare five-pounder. It was gigantic! He ate almost all of it himself. I insisted he share a little with me, which he agreed to whole-heartedly. After we all ate, family members came up to me to say goodbye. They had to take off early. This seemed to startle Gerard who said, "Can you hold off for just a few more minutes?" Then in a louder voice, he said, "Everybody, can you come into the house for a minute please?" As everyone looked around curiously, he motioned with his arm for everyone to follow him.

I asked him, "Why do you want everyone inside?" I thought he was going to thank them all for making it such a special day for him. He appeared a little nervous as everyone gathered in the living room. Each wondering what this might be about, including me.

When everyone was assembled inside, he asked them for their attention. He gently took my hand and led me to a chair.

I was getting a little nervous, so I asked him, “What is going on?”

He looked directly into my eyes. Holding my gaze as well as my hand. He said rather confidently, “Will you sit down please?”

I cautiously lowered myself into the chair. He turned his back to me. I saw him take something out of a jewelry box. At this point I let out a gasp, he going to propose to me! My face felt all flush, my heart began to race wildly as I waited for him to say something.

Gerard got down on one knee and lovingly held my hand in his. Then he presented a magnificent diamond ring in his other hand. The partygoers gasped and I heard someone say, “Oh my God!”

Gerard continued to hold both of my hands while he said so tenderly, “Deb, you are the best thing that ever happened to me. I can’t imagine my life without you. I love you with all my heart.” His gaze dropped for a second and I could see tears welling up in his eyes. When he looked up again, he said, “I want to spend the rest of my life with you. Will you marry me?”

I soaked in the moment. I breathed in all the love in the room. All my family and friends gathered around us. This wonderful man was on bended knee asking me to marry him. I think had fallen in love with him quite some time ago. Now he was asking me the one question I had wanted him to ask me for a long time. This was the perfect moment on a perfect day.

Being the jokester I am, however, I seized the moment to tease him. I answered him by tilting my head to the side, looking up to the ceiling and saying, “Well, I’ll have to think about it.” The room erupted with laughter with comments like, “What’s there to think about, woman! Marry the guy! Say Yes!”

Gerard looked panic-stricken, not knowing if I was serious or not. So I eased his mind by saying, “I love you too, and would love to be your wife.” Then, with such total relief on his face, he slipped the beautiful diamond onto my shaking left hand. Still holding hands, we stood up together, fixated on each other as if no one else was in the room. Everyone began to cheer as he gave me a huge bear hug of an embrace and a very long, seductive kiss. Everyone whooped, hollered and clapped, pleased with this passionate end to a very romantic proposal.

People started coming over to congratulate us and wish us well. My son was the first to open his arms and give me a big hug. “I can’t believe he proposed!”, I said in a rather shaky voice.

“Well, I can, mom, because earlier in the day he asked me for my blessing. I told Gerard I had never seen my mother happier in her entire life, so please go ahead and ask her.” It meant so much to me that Gerard asked for my son’s permission, just like in the good old days.

Next, Annmarie came over to me and gave me a huge hug. Then we both started to cry. “I think am still in shock!” I confessed. “Not only did he propose, but he got down on bended knee in front of everybody dear to me. Doesn’t every woman dream of a proposal like that?”

“Oh, Deb, I am so happy for you. You make a great couple and you have never looked more content. You know, I love Gerard, I think he’s perfect for you. Congratulations!”

Not only had I been hiding birthday presents from him, he had been hiding an engagement ring from me. His proposal made the party much more memorable for everyone. My teary-eyed friend Bob, took pictures of the proposal and said it gave him goose bumps. I asked if he could make copies and he said, “Yes”. This became one of our most treasured possessions. My friends and family said they felt very honored to be able to share such an amazingly special moment with us. It was a day I’ll never forget.

*Content subject to change during editing.*