

A Special Christmas Gift



December 2012

Surprise Visit, December 2012

On Friday December 7, Molly and I were invited to join the Shepard family for a pre-Holiday get-together at Antonio's restaurant in West Chester. The dinner reservation was for 7pm and we were to meet them at the restaurant.

Around 6:15, we received a call from Elizabeth asking if we could drive her and the boys as Chip had got stuck in traffic on his way to pick up Hayley after her swim practice at school. No problem, so we finished getting ready a few minutes early to accommodate the slight detour to their house.

As we were pulling into the parking lot at Antonio's, Elizabeth handed Molly an envelope which she said Cyndi had sent and should be read before we sat down to eat. However, it was dark by now, Molly didn't have her glasses to hand so she simply carried in the envelope, unopened, and we checked in for dinner. To our surprise, Hayley and Chip were already there (in fact he told me that a Manhattan was on order!); Elizabeth had been texting Hayley for updates as we drove but had received no reply so we were expecting a late start to the meal

What we were *not* expecting was for three other guests to suddenly appear from behind a dividing wall in the bar, each with a gift-wrapping bow on their heads! S-U-R-P-R-I-S-E. Cyndi, Christopher and a very excited Samantha had traveled from Sacramento that day, had been picked up at Dayton airport by Elizabeth earlier in the afternoon and the "swimming practice" was all part of the elaborate set up to provide Molly and I with our Christmas Present from California.

We had absolutely no idea that this arrangement had been made (about a month ago it turns out) and everyone—including three equally excited cousins—had managed to keep it a secret through the days and weeks of planning. Needless to say we were thrilled and couldn't imagine any better gift—to have Cyndi, Christopher and Samantha in Ohio when we weren't expecting to see them until late February and to have the whole family together, not only for this meal but throughout the weekend until an afternoon return flight to Sacramento on Monday.

What followed was a wonderful three day surprise during which we not only had Christopher, Cyndi and Samantha in our home but also had additional "whole family" gatherings, including a Sunday evening dinner that Elizabeth prepared for all of us at her home. Again, this was our Christmas Gift and we could not have imagined anything better.

Had we opened and read the card that Cyndi had sent we would have seen the poem shown on the opposite page. Would that have told us what was "inside" and exactly where was "inside" as we opened up the card? We would certainly have been intrigued and perhaps a little puzzled to read the words (as well as touched by the beautiful words) but we doubt that would have suggested what was waiting just inside the restaurant. We feel sure that the S-U-R-P-R-I-S-E would not have been given away.

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We didn't know quite what to get, your Christmas lists were sparse;

We wanted something really great, to show how much we care.

We pondered hard not once but twice, then we thought some more;

Something dull would just not do, not something from a store.

Your Christmas gift now lies inside; we hope you will agree;

It's at least as good as one beneath the Christmas tree.

Love, The Widges
Chris, Cyndi & Sammie



Friday Evening Dinner at Antonio's



*Saturday Breakfast:
Time for Grandma
to play with stickers*



Time to decorate the tree

On Saturday, as we saw, Sammy and Grandma put up our Christmas decorations, before we all went for a Skyline lunch. Then, Christopher, Cyndi and Samantha went to visit with Chris' old friend George. Later in the day the five of us met up again for dinner at Sultan's in West Chester.



Sunday December 9

Molly went to Church, Bob took a walk and Sammy and her parents caught up on their sleep. When Sammy got dressed and had had a very light breakfast, she and Granddad went for a 3/4 mile walk around the neighborhood. Sammy insisted on walking backwards for a good part of the way so Granddad had to warn her of any impending objects in her path—such as fallen trees, elephants, giraffes and the like. Fortunately she was walking forwards when we saw a huge rabbit running “very fast” across the field in front of us.

We all enjoyed another Skyline lunch before Sammy took her afternoon nap and the rest of us watched a slide show of the trip to Europe that Christopher, Cyndi and Sammy had taken this past Fall.

There were some very interesting pictures and discussion of Dunkerque, Calais and Brussels taken during their visits to the V1 and V2 Rocket factory, the Evacuation site, the EU headquarters and Brussels city buildings and Plopsaland! This is a theme park based on the popular characters from a European children's show. Not quite Disneyland but Sammy enjoyed it!

From France they returned to England via the Chunnel and spent time in Brighton (Quote” The main reason for the entire trip since Sammy's middle name is that of the city”) and then drove to the apartment in Ilkley where Molly and I spend a lot of time. In fact, we were supposed to meet them there but Molly's surgery forced us to cancel that trip. Christopher and family did, however, get to meet some of his extended Hillery family from the area.

About 5pm we left to drive to the Shepard's home where we enjoyed more time together as a family and the meal prepared by Elizabeth. It was almost 10pm before we left for home.



Elizabeth surprised at the sink

Shortly followed by





Kitchen talk



Cupcakes for dessert



.....with a very special one over-loaded with sprinkles for Sammy

Monday December 9

Cyndi had arranged a VIP Tour of a local potato chip manufacturing plant for this morning and Molly and I and Elizabeth were invited to join them. The factory is in Dayton which, coincidentally, was where Christopher, Cyndi and Sammy were to fly home from later in the day. So, the five of us drove to the plant and met Elizabeth there at 10:30.

The General Manager took us on the tour during which we followed the progress of arriving soil-covered potatoes right through to packaged chips ready for shipping. We were also given a sample box containing nine large bags of Mike-Sells Classic Chips.



Following our tour we all went to the Dublin Pub (apparently a favorite of Christopher and Cyndi) in downtown Dayton. By this time the weather had turned from the rather balmy conditions we had experienced over the weekend to cold (around freezing) and windy and we thought that Sammy might get her first exposure to snow. However, it simply stayed bitterly cold as we left the pub and drove to Dayton airport. Ironically, by the time Molly and I got back home there was a brief, but intense, snow flurry so Sammy came very close.



Lunch and a final visit with Auntie Liz for this trip.



Now it was time for the flight home, so we said our farewells to Christopher, Cyndi and Samantha and thanked them once again for a wonderful Christmas Gift.

There could be nothing better!



