

At the end of the conversation—I can't remember the exact topic; she'd called to wish me luck on something or other—I cleared my throat and said, "Well, listen, I was just thinking, uh—I know you don't want to go out a lot because of your children, so, uh—I thought I would come over to your house for dinner."

From then on, I began going to Vicki's house for dinner nearly every night—as often as my schedule would allow. Some evenings I arrived early and had the chance to spend fun time with Curran and Caroline before their mother got home from work. Sometimes I would bring friends of mine along with me, and Vicki would obligingly cook for them as well. She loves to cook. And with her southern roots and Lebanese heritage, she really turns out some delicious meals.

Vicki would put the children to bed around eight, and as she came back down the stairs we would often hear them calling, "Mommy, Mommy, Mommy!" The first time this happened, Vicki began to apologize for it, but I interrupted her. "Oh no," I said. "I think a child calling for his mother is the most beautiful sound in the world."

We really had an old-fashioned courtship, and I loved it that way. During those autumn evenings, Vicki and I would talk as she cooked. We talked during dinner. And then, after dinner, we'd talk some more. I usually headed back to my house by 10:30 or so—we both had work the next day and Vicki had to get the children off to school in the morning as well—but I knew we'd be together the next evening anyway.

We really took the time to know each other and we grew very close. As the months went on, I realized that I loved this woman very deeply and that my love for her was overcoming all the defenses I'd built up in myself against the potential heartbreak of marrying again. One night, as Vicki and I were listening to *La Bohème*—we both love opera—I asked whether she wanted to go to New York to hear it performed. She quickly agreed. But the date for the performance was two months away. I had decided to propose to Vicki at the opera, but I wanted to surprise her. So I waited—

for two months. And in the meantime, I made sure that we spent more time with my children and my sisters and sisters-in-law.

I asked Vicki to marry me—and she said yes—during the performance of *La Bohème* at the Metropolitan Opera in New York on January 14, 1992. We decided to keep our engagement quiet for a while, while we worked out the plans for our wedding. In mid-March, I felt the time had come to tell Kara, Teddy, and Patrick, and Vicki felt she should tell Curran and Caroline too. Everyone was asked to keep the wonderful news to themselves, but secrecy was too much to ask of then six-year-old Caroline. She told only “one person” in her kindergarten class, and he told his parents, who apparently worked for the *Washington Post*!

We announced our engagement in March and I gave Vicki an engagement ring in April when we were visiting my sister Pat, who had rented a house for Easter in St. Croix in the U.S. Virgin Islands. We were snorkeling at Buck Island Reef—named by President Kennedy to be part of the National Park system in 1961—where I had placed the ring for Vicki to find near a coral head. I’m just thankful that a big grouper didn’t swim away with the ring before she saw it.

Our wedding, a private ceremony with our immediate families, took place at my McLean house on July 3, 1992. As a wedding gift to my bride, I did an oil painting of daffodils. The two of us had been reading William Wordsworth’s poem “Daffodils” together several weeks earlier, and it was one of the readings we chose for our wedding. The poem begins, “I wander’d lonely as a cloud / That floats on high o’er vales and hills / When all at once I saw a crowd, / A host, of golden daffodils.” The wildflowers lift the poet’s spirits, and charm him by the way they seem to dance in the wind in a long line beside a bay. When later he lies in solitude on his couch, the image of the flowers returns to him: “And then my heart with pleasure fills / And dances with the daffodils.”