

# My birthday surprise at Blackberry Farm

Today is my birthday! My husband asked me what I'd like to do today and I said I wanted to go BACK to Blackberry Farm. A year ago was a BIG birthday for me and it's hard not to reminisce about the fabulous surprise birthday trip to Blackberry Farm in Walland, Tennessee.

Traveling to Blackberry Farm <http://www.blackberryfarm.com> has been on my bucket list for years. Situated on a pastoral 4,200-acre estate in the Great Smoky Mountains, Blackberry Farm is one of the most intimate luxury hotels and as a result, can be challenging to get reservations.



My sweet husband secretly worked behind the scenes for nearly 8 months to coordinate and organize the birthday of the century. I thought we were meeting our college son for a

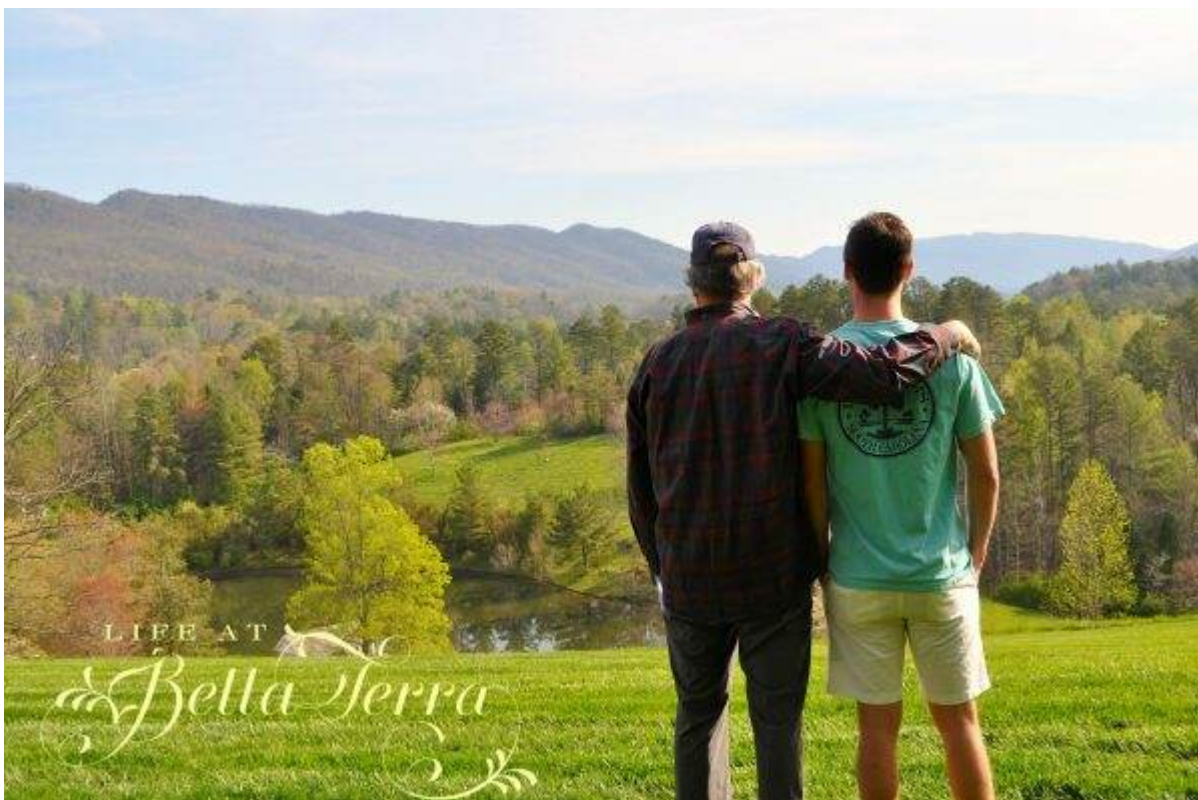
family weekend. I should have suspected something when my husband happily agreed to make the travel reservations (not something he has EVER done).



The biggest surprise was that my husband planned all of this. He has never been a birthday person. Truly, for the last 22 years we've been married, birthdays have sort of come and gone without a lot of fanfare. It was a little hard for me to understand at first because I am the type of person who wants to celebrate everything, and in a big way. But, out of respect for him, I've kept his birthdays low key and haven't expected much for mine. So I truly had no idea he was capable of or had the desire to plan something this extravagant and then to keep it a secret for so long.



We flew into Knoxville and spent the first 2 days with our son who is a student at the University of Virginia. Family and friends, who came in from all parts of the country, surprised me at dinner on our second night and then we all celebrated for two more days in this beautiful place.



Blackberry Farm has an amazing spa (best pedicure ever!), horseback riding, fly fishing, archery, hiking, wine and food tastings, classes, and entertainment. All the food grown on the farm is used by the incredible chefs and nothing is served out of season.



I can't even begin to describe the level of service. We've been to fine hotels, but our experience at Blackberry Farm was more than that. We felt like we were in someone's beautiful home, treated like favorite family. To share this experience with people I love was more than anyone could hope for on a special birthday.



Scott arranged for our group to meet Blackberry Farm's master gardening legend, John Coykendall. We had a Farmstead tasting tour where we learned all about the garden and heirloom seeds while tasting delicious food and beverages made with the ingredients from the farm.



Another blessing was having my siblings and their spouses there. The last time we been together as a family was for our parents' funeral. It was so nice to be in such a lovely setting for a happy occasion. It was fun gathering at the end of the day for dinner and hearing about everyone's adventures at Blackberry Farm.



Just when I thought it couldn't get any better, Scott presented me with 3 beautiful leather binders, filled with birthday letters and wishes from all the wonderful people I had met over the course of my life.

So even though this year will be a quieter celebration, I am deeply grateful for my wonderful family and dear friends. I am one lucky gal!

*Mary*