

*The World's Most Romantic,
Unique & Fun Dating Ideas*

*300
Creative
Dates*

by Michael Webb

Important Notice

300 Creative Dates

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300 Creative Dates

The world's most romantic, unique and fun dating ideas

Young and old, single or married, people date. They may go out on a dozen dates. They may have thousands. As the adage goes, variety is the spice of life. If your dates are always the same, it is likely that your relationship is getting a little bland.

People from all over the planet continually ask me to give them ideas to help create a memorable date whether it is their first or to celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary. They want to keep the fun and excitement in their relationship and know dating is perhaps the very best tool to do that.

I've compiled hundreds of the most creative dating ideas for you. Most of the dates in this book are low on the budget, costing less than \$20. Be mindful, not all of these ideas will work for you. We are all unique in our own special way. Find the ones that will work and adapt them to your particular style and situation. Let this book inspire you to create your own exciting dates.

Keep this ebook handy. Refer to it often. Never stop dating.

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Tips for Successful Dating

There are some basic guidelines you should follow to ensure that your date is as successful as possible.

Be Flexible

When scheduling a date, try your best to plan for problems to crop up. If you are going to a concert that begins at 8:00pm, don't plan on arriving at 7:55pm. Try to put in a 30-minute cushion in case your date is late, you have car problems, you run into traffic or something else happens. Being late can cause a lot of stress on a date. Arriving early gives you time to relax and have a good conversation while you wait.

If you are planning an outdoor date, try to have an indoor backup plan in case of inclement weather. Don't let a date get ruined because you can't have your picnic at the beach. Have your picnic in your living room instead. Or go bowling.

Realize that unavoidable things happen. You might lose your tickets or the restaurant might have lost your reservation. Don't let these situations get you steamed. Show your date that you have class, composure and a sense of humor. Laugh it off.

Use Your Senses

If you want to have a really successful date, try to include as many of the five senses as possible. Here are just a few examples.

Taste – good food, eating wild berries, nice wine or champagne

Smell – candles, fragrant flowers, food grilling, mints

Touch – sand in your toes, waterfalls, a gentle back massage, a warm fire

Sight – sunsets, beautiful gardens, tour of a historic building

Sound – a live band, birds chirping, waves crashing, waterfalls

Make It Personal

The ideas in this book are just a guide. If you know your date's favorite colors, music, movies, restaurants, hobbies, etc. you can make the dates even more meaningful. Perhaps you should do the "Favorite Date" as one of your first so you have this information on hand.

But just because someone has a favorite restaurant, don't get stuck in a rut by going there all the time. New experiences will add pizzazz to your relationship.

Surprise!

Almost everyone loves a good surprise. Build up the anticipation for a date by keeping certain elements a surprise. Maybe you can send clues for the date throughout the week. If it is a rather "simple" date, don't play it up too big, otherwise your date might be disappointed.

I think surprises always add to the mystery and romance of a date. It tells me that my date has taken the time to plan something in advance.

What NOT To Do On a First Date

On your first date (and future dates) you want to make a good impression. Here are some things you want to be careful NOT to do:

- Forget your wallet
- Talk about all your previous relationships
- Brag – few things are more offensive than someone who is so full of them self
- Chew tobacco or reek of cigarette smoke
- Get drunk
- Talk about sex or make physical advances
- Be late

Dinner and a movie (how ordinary)

Creative Dates

All date ideas are written by Michael Webb unless attributed to another author.

Pick a Date

Write down a list of possible date ideas such as dinner at a certain restaurant, a visit to the Planetarium, a day at the zoo, etc. Go take photographs of the places or collect their brochures.

Once you have developed your film and have all your brochures together, put items from each date idea in separate envelopes. If all the dates take about the same amount of time, pick up your date and tell them that each envelope is a different date. Once they chose an envelope, you will let them open it and the date will begin.

If the various dates would occur at different times of the day or require different kinds of dress, let your date pick out the envelope a few days or a week in advance so the proper arrangements can be made.

If the date goes well, tell him or her that you have other envelopes that need opening and you hope he or she might be interested in another date.

Hometown Tourist

One of the first dates Athena and I had when we relocated to North Carolina was a tour of our new hometown. On the first Saturday of each month a one hour guided tour gives highlights on the old parts of the city.

After we finished the tour we realized that we probably now knew more about the local history and sites than most people who had been living there for decades.

Most cities have regular tours, some guided and others are self-guided. They make a great date for two people who might like to know a little bit about the city in which they live.

Registering Your Vote

If you and your sweetheart think you really know each other, here is a date idea to see how well you know each other's tastes when it comes to items for a home.

Go to a local department store that has a bridal registry. Print out two copies of the form and each of you spend a couple of hours voting for your preferences for linens, glassware, small appliances, etc. Next to your preference on the registry form, write down the item you think your partner would choose as his or her favorite.

When you are both done, go over your choices and tally to see who had the most correct guesses of their partner's favorites. Loser takes the winner out for dinner or dessert.

Strike a Pose

If you are seeing someone you have gotten close to and would like to have his or her photo to display, go on a modeling date.

Go to a picturesque location such as a park, natural area, botanical gardens or even downtown sidewalks. Bring your camera loaded with film or purchase a disposable one if necessary. Then spend the morning or afternoon taking snapshots of your date. If you want you can take turns photographing each other and maybe have a stranger take some photographs of the two of you together.

Take the film to a one-hour processing place and have lunch or a snack while you are waiting. If you ordered doubles, you can split up the photographs and begin enjoying the memory of the day spent together. If you planned ahead of time you can even present your date with a wrapped gift (a picture frame) at the end of the date.

Catching Up On the "News"

Back in college one of my most creative and fun dates was with a girl who had me meet her in the middle of the college track one night (it was well lit). She arrived with a brown paper sack that included a bottle of sparkling apple juice, some cheese and crackers and a copy of The Weekly World News.

We took turns reading aloud stories and headlines of the bizarre and ridiculous tales that were in this tabloid. We read about three-headed babies, the boy who was raised by wild pigs and the definitive proof that JFK and Hitler were still alive and living together in Argentina.

We managed to get in a few sips of juice and some mouthfuls of cheese and crackers in the few moments we weren't laughing hysterically.

On Parade

A couple of times a year the builders in our community open up their recently completed homes for the public to view. One of the events is called the Parade of Homes.

Although we weren't in the market for a new home Athena and I decided to make a date of touring through about a dozen of the 100 or so homes open throughout the city. They ranged from moderately priced homes up to mansions and the tour was free. Not only did we get to view different architectural styles and neighborhoods, we also saw many

different decorating styles. A majority of the builders hire professional decorators to make their homes look best. After all, the builders are competing for prizes.

We really enjoyed going through the various homes and speaking with each other about the features we really liked and those we didn't. We took mental notes of ideas we might like to incorporate into a house should we ever build one in the future. I liked one house that had a gas fireplace at the foot of the bathtub – very romantic!

Take along a picnic lunch and stop at one of the parks around town. You might even come across a development along the tour that has a gazebo or picnic tables.

On Tour

When Athena and I lived in Southern California we enjoyed visiting the Showcase House of Design. Many large cities across the U.S. have such fundraisers. A local charity organizes with the owner of a very large home or mansion to allow them to have local architects, designers and landscapers take over their home for 4 to 6 months and give it a complete makeover. These professionals donate their services for the exposure it gives them and an entrance fee is charged to tour this historic property that most people would never get to see otherwise.

When we moved to North Carolina we discovered the Historic Candlelight Tour and the Neighborhood Christmas Tour. In a couple of historic neighborhoods throughout the area, several residents would open up their homes on a particular weekend and the local historical group sells tickets to be able to view half a dozen or more local homes with tons of charm and character. Often some of the owners have plates of cookies or other treats to enjoy along the tour.

Keep your eye open for these unique tours. They make wonderful dating opportunities and they cost much less than a dinner and a movie.

Going Once, Twice

My wife and I like to furnish our home with antiques. We have found that one of the best ways to get a good deal on them is at auctions. There are many types of auctions – and most are not as highbrow as Sotheby's or Christies – so you don't have to worry about feeling nervous. And despite what you see in movies, no one will think you are bidding if you are picking your nose.

Most auctions we have attended have some sort of concessions stand where you can get sandwiches and drinks. We have even been to one that served complimentary champagne.

It is advisable to get to the auction house before the auction begins so you can inspect the items you might be interested in bidding on. The "good stuff" is usually auctioned off

somewhere in the middle of the event. If you stick around until the very end, when most of the crowd has left, you can often get great bargains. Remember that there is usually an extra 10% (and tax) added to winning bid.

If you keep your voices down, you can hold a pretty decent conversation during the auction process. It's fun to guess what each item will eventually go for. It's amazing to see what junk people will actually buy.

If you are in the market, perhaps you could have your date help you pick out some pieces to decorate your home. Or maybe give your date \$10 and see who can get the best deal of the night.

You can find out where the auctions are being held by searching the Friday or Saturday classified section of your hometown newspaper or calling up auction houses in the Yellow Pages.

Dating in the Aisles

A large bookstore is within walking distance from our home. This store has it all - a music section, magazines, computer software and a nice café.

Sometimes Athena and I will walk over there for a "date." We spend time browsing in our favorite sections, coming back together from time to time to report on what we've been looking at. Some of the areas we will explore together like the travel books or the humor section. It's fun to take a book on jokes or poetry and read aloud to each other.

When we get bored of reading we head over to the music area. Here you can don some headphones and listen to 20 different CDs that are being featured. At some time during our "date" we plop down in the Café and converse over a cup of hot tea, coffee or a cold flavored spritzer.

An hour or two in a bookstore helps spark communication between couples. It's a terrific way to learn more about the interests of your partner and to unwind together.

Made From Scratch

Nearly every summer we would make homemade ice cream at my grandparent's house. There is nothing like it in the world. The ingredients are very simple: cream, vanilla, sugar, salt and ice. While going out for ice cream can be a nice date, staying in and making ice cream is a super date.

Whip up a batch of vanilla ice cream and have a variety of items you can mix in to create some premium flavors. Chop up some candy bars, mix up a small batch of cookie dough, or find out your date's favorite flavors and have those mix ins all ready to go.

You might want to also plan a long walk or a tennis match afterwards to burn off a few of the calories.

Head for the Hills

Most people make the wrong assumption that you would only be interested in going to the mountains in the wintertime if you wanted to ski. There is so much more to do.

Many “ski” towns have wonderful shops, cafes and even quaint Bed & Breakfasts to make the mountains a wonderful place to spend the day or weekend even though you won’t be hitting the slopes. Here are some activities you might want to do instead:

- Go ice skating
- Build a snowman
- Drink hot cider
- Soak in an outdoor hot tub
- Go on a sleigh ride
- Take a hike
- Rent snowshoes

The Star Treatment

For my son’s first Mother’s Day I created a stepping-stone for my wife. I mixed up the cement, put it in a container and when it had set for a while, I took my sons tiny feet and pressed them into the cement and wrote Mother’s Day 2000 below it. The gift was a big hit.

If you and your sweetheart are a pretty tight item, you can mark one of your special events (like the anniversary of your first date) by having a Walk of Fame party. Have some friends over and then have you and your partner mark the occasion by putting your hand and feet prints in wet cement, autograph and date it.

A Free Lunch

Who says there is no such thing as a free lunch? Every time I go visit our local Sam’s (warehouse club) I am amazed at the number of items available to be sampled. The last time I was there they had salad and salad dressing, pizza, chicken wings, hot pockets, cookies, pies and sports drinks. I probably even missed a few. The gourmet grocery store near our house has an even better selection of freebies.

If you wanted to, you could have an entire meal just by sampling everything they are offering. This would not be the ideal first date, or a date with someone who does not have a sense of humor and adventure. But, if you combine it with a fun purchase at the store (say, a badminton set) to try out afterwards, then this could be a really memorable date.

Sock 'Em

If you have children or nearby nieces and nephews, this could be a great date to try out with your mate.

Round up a few stray socks. Find some that have lost their twin or who is on their last leg (no pun intended). Get some yarn, old buttons and some needle and thread too. You are going to make some sock puppets.

You can make the puppets as gifts for children you know or you can write a little story that will feature your sock puppets and then you will be able to perform a puppet show for the children when you are done.

Snow Canvas

A few years back I used a fresh blanket of snow to write a love note to my wife with red Kool-Aid and a squirt bottle. If you both get in on it, it could be a fun date.

Go find a nice size "snow canvas" for each of you to work on. One that can be seen from your house, the highway or other elevated place is ideal. Another great place is on the side of a hill.

Create your "paints" by mixing different flavors of Kool-Aid or drop food coloring into water. Have three or more squirt bottles (sports bottles will work ok, but not the best as they squirt out a lot).

Bundle up and go create your masterpieces. Take photographs if possible for memories. Then come back and warm up in front of the fireplace or with a mug of hot chocolate.

Bring Back the Sun

Brrr! It's cold outside. At the end of Winter I am really missing the sunshine and the warm rays. Having grown up in Southern California, Athena is even more eager to see it get back into the 70s and 80s.

Just recently, when Athena was out running some errands, I pulled a surprise on her.

I cranked up the heat and prepared the house for her return. First I lit some coconut-scented candles (smells like tanning lotion). Then put on some Beach Boys music and whipped up some frozen drinks, decorated with little umbrellas brought home from a Chinese restaurant.

Once the house warmed up, I put on my Hawaiian shirt and shorts, blew up our beach raft and a couple of beach balls we have and put them in the middle of the living room. Sporting my shades, I waited for Athena to discover her tropical paradise.

Clowning Around

This idea is not for the faint of heart or the overly shy. But it will probably be one of your most memorable dates ever.

Take your date to the local thrift store and the two of you will purchase the most hideous, gaudy or outlandish outfits you can piece together. Once you have assembled your wardrobes, go out to a public event and stroll around together in your new digs. Act as if everything is completely normal and see what sort of stares and comments you can notice.

Be sure to take some photographs of the two of you in your ensembles. You will want to share the memories with others.

Decisions, Decisions

If you are tired of making all the date decisions but are the only one who will show any dating initiative, here's the perfect date for you.

Send your sweetheart an invitation for a date. However, create the options in multi-choice so they have to make the decision for once. Here's an example (be sure to create your own):

Let's go out for dinner on:

- Thursday
- Friday
- Saturday
- Sunday

at:

- Burger King
- Waffle House
- The Shiny Diner
- Maldonado's

followed by:

- Playing on the swings in the park
- A jazz concert
- An air hockey competition at the arcade
- A banana split at the malt shop

Wash & Wax

There are some people who just love to keep their car shiny and new. You see them out in their driveways, washing and waxing nearly every weekend. That's not me. To me, washing the car is a chore. However, if I had my beautiful wife out there with me, it wouldn't be so bad. We could turn on the radio, talk a bit and maybe even squirt each other a little with the hose.

Offer to wash and wax your date's vehicle with him or her one weekend. Bring over some snacks and maybe a video to watch after you are finished.

Pet & Go

Several weeks ago, we arrived at a restaurant and were told that the wait would be about an hour. We decided to walk to the other stores in the strip mall to check them out while we passed the time.

We meandered into a pet store and even though neither Athena nor I am a "pet person" we stayed in that store for nearly 40 minutes, having a great time.

We pet the puppies and held the kittens, saw some bunnies and talked to the parrots. We observed all the reptiles and tarantulas and then we toured the aquariums that were filled with hundreds of varieties of fish. The only thing we didn't get to see was a snake being fed a rat (which I would have thought was cool, but not all dates would).

It was a great little side date that had a lot of the benefits of having a pet without any of the responsibilities. And certainly cheaper than the zoo.

Cartoons and More

Saturday mornings were one of my favorite times as a kid. My mom would sleep in late and I could eat as much cereal as I wanted, watch cartoons and play video games.

Invite your date over one Saturday morning to watch cartoons and eat Cap'n Crunch, Trix or some other sugary children's cereal. Wear your pajamas and slippers and after cartoons build a tent in the living room out of sheets to play in.

Digging Up Dirt

One summer growing up my mom enrolled me in an archaeology course. After a brief introduction on digging techniques, we spent most of the class time out in the field. Each of us was given a three-foot by three-foot square to excavate. By the end of the course, I had dug down my site about two feet and I had unearthed dozens of arrowheads, lot of pottery shards and other Indian artifacts in the southern Louisiana soil.

If you have a sweetheart that is a bit adventurous you might consider an afternoon of searching for Indian artifacts, dinosaur bones or interesting rocks. Find out what “treasures” can be found nearby and bring along a picnic lunch.

Favorite Date

If you are interested in taking your date out to his or her favorite restaurant or you wanted to rent one of his or her favorite movies, you need to know what those are.

During one of your dates, give your darling a sheet of paper and a pen. Call out 10 or 20 categories for each of you to list your top 3-5 favorites. Suggestions would be restaurants, movies, musical artists, meals, television shows, books, and so on. Be sure to list categories that would have relevance to your relationship – for example if you knew one of their favorite musical groups was coming to town, you could purchase tickets for an upcoming date.

After you finish your lists, compare notes and see if you have any favorites in common.

Rock Holiday

By Jeff Weeks

My girlfriend and I are in college, and we never have the cash to go to a nice romantic restaurant or anything so we made up our own little holiday based on the simple things.

We call it "Rock Holiday."

For this annual event we go out to a fast food restaurant, see a dollar movie, exchange rocks, and explain why we picked the one we picked. You might not think of a rock as a romantic gift, but there are many ways to make it romantic: make your own rock in a tumbler, find a rock that's heart shaped, find a brittle stone and make it heart shaped, etc.

The things that can make this gift so special are the creativity, the simplicity, and the fact that you have to work for it and put your heart into it. The first rock holiday, I searched a riverbank for almost two hours to find that perfect rock.

Running a Telethon

When I was back in college, several people from my office volunteered to work one night at the local public television station, answering the phones and accepting pledges during their fund drive.

It was a lot of fun helping out in this way but what I did not expect was the great meal they served their volunteers. A local restaurant donated the food (who I am sure got a nice tax write off) and it was delicious.

Talk about a cheap date. A great meal for free and both of you helping out a worthy cause. If your date isn't interested in "volunteer work" then that might tell you something right there.

A Great Pick Up

Even if you are having an ordinary date, you can make it creative by your choice of transportation. You don't need a limousine to impress your date. Try picking her or him up on horseback, with a moped or having a motorcycle with sidecar.

If you won't be going far you might consider renting a tandem bike or a golf cart. How about a scooter or roller blades?

Winery Tour

I believe that 48 of the 50 states have wineries. So a winery tour is probably just a few hours away at the most for the majority of people.

While some find the tour of the wine making plant to be interesting, I go to wineries for the wine tasting and the atmosphere. Most of the wineries I have been to have beautiful grounds and an attractive showroom to showcase their products.

The majority of wineries offer free or reasonably priced wine tasting in hopes that you will like their product enough to purchase a couple of bottles or even a case. A few of the larger wineries have cafes on their premises that serve great meals to complement their wines. Otherwise, bring along a picnic basket and be sure to be clear of alcohol before you drive back home.

Been to Lizard Lick?

If I were a betting person, I would wager that nearly everyone hasn't been to at least a dozen cities or towns that are within an hour's drive of their home.

Get out a map and together with your date write down the list of towns neither of you have ever been to (driving past it on the Interstate doesn't count as being there). Cut up the paper into strips with one town on each piece. Put the strips in a hat and draw out the city you and your sweetheart are going to visit.

If possible, do a little bit of research on the Internet about that town to see if there are certain historical sites, gardens or cafes that you should try to see.

And no, I still haven't been to Lizard Lick, North Carolina.

Child's Play

When was the last time you were in a large toy store? I was there the other week and they have all sorts of fun things out to play with; Lego bricks, trains, robots, telescopes, science gadgets and more. I definitely think you could include a toy store in your plans for a fun date.

You might want to start off the date with a Happy Meal (you might need to have two a piece) or a visit to Chuck E Cheese or some other children's restaurant.

Play around with the games for a while and maybe you can search out a favorite childhood game that you don't have anymore but you would like to play with your date.

Date With Grandma

If either you or your date's grandparents are alive and live not too far away, consider setting up a "date" with them.

Ask your grandparents if you and your sweetheart could come over (they might even make you a nice home cooked meal) and talk about family history. Plan in advance some questions that you would like to ask your grandparents like "what was your first job and how much did you make per hour", "what was your first date with each other" and "what sort of dates did people go on back when they were our age."

If all of you have time, you might want to look at some old family films or photo albums. They might even have some of you splashing around naked in the bathtub.

One additional consideration is to tape the conversations with them to keep to share with your grandchildren some day.

My Own Private Holiday

Back in 1996 I created my own holiday. It's called National Resurrect Romance Week (second full week in August). It's now listed in many different directories and calendars. Each year radio DJs and newspaper reporters across the country interview me about my holiday.

Have you ever thought about creating your own holiday? You don't have to try to get it made "official." Just use it as a theme for your date.

Perhaps you could proclaim today to be National Day of the Duck. All your date activities could revolve around ducks. You could dine at a Chinese restaurant and feast on Peking Duck. You could take bread to the city pond and feed the ducks. If there are no ponds, visit the zoo and search for them there. Buy a couple of rubber duckies and race them down a nearby stream. To end the date you can go to the video store and rent a documentary on ducks, *The Mighty Ducks* or find a Donald Duck cartoon to watch.

If you want to go all out, you could create a fake newspaper story about the holiday you established and fax it to your partner at work. Or write it up and send it to them via e-mail. Who knows, perhaps you could tell a local reporter about your holiday and they might write it up for real.

Happy, Happy Hour

When in college, a few of my friends and I would head over to a nearby restaurant on Friday nights for Happy Hour. While most people probably went for the drinks or the hopes of meeting someone, we went for the food.

The buffet table was filled with hot wings, meatballs, vegetable sticks, cheese and crackers, and many other hors d'oeuvres. We ordered an inexpensive soda and then headed over to the table to load up our small plates. We got away with "dinner" for under \$2.

If you are looking for an inexpensive, yet fairly interesting date you might want to consider going to a nearby Happy Hour. Now if you start ordering alcoholic drinks at \$4 a pop, the date suddenly becomes a strain on the wallet. Just because everyone else is drinking booze, you don't have to be so spineless to cave into social pressure. A glass of coke or juice will quench your thirst even better than a rum & coke or Vodka Martini.

I'm not against alcohol. I'm against people equating romance or dating with spending a lot of money. That's why a lot of couples quit dating after they have children.

Go to your Happy Hour and then when you get home finish off the date with a fresh margarita you made yourself or some other drink that cost 1/10th what the restaurant was going to charge you.

The Strawberry of My Eye

Spring is probably my favorite time of year. It's when the birds sing their most beautiful songs on my window ledge. The flowers and trees here in North Carolina are at their majestic peak. And it's time to pick strawberries!!

Spending an afternoon picking the crimson fruit with Athena is a rewarding date. We pick a few strawberries and then eat one. Pick some more, eat some more. Eventually, we fill up our buckets and then make our way home - where the real fun begins.

I like fresh strawberries in a bowl of cold milk with a small amount of sugar sprinkled on top. It's quick, easy and delicious. If I am not too ravenous, I might even share my bowl with Athena.

Somehow washing and cutting up strawberries doesn't seem like a chore, like preparing broccoli or cauliflower. I guess it's the anticipation of all the wonderful things we will be able to make with our two buckets of the bright red fruit. Strawberry shortcake, strawberry pie, strawberries and whipped cream, strawberry tarts and the list goes on and on.

We usually freeze about half our pickings and eat the other half in that first week. The same holds true if we go to an orchard and pick blueberries. Some people have apple or peach picking dates. It's great fun and it's healthy too.

On a Mission

Even though Athena and I have been married for over a decade, we still love to group date. It is fun getting together with friends who add to the excitement and the conversation of the date.

A fun group date to have is a scavenger hunt. Each team is given a list of items and whoever returns first with the list complete wins the game and the prize if there is any.

Some items that can be on the list are:

A cup from Wendy's

A restaurant matchbook

A "wheat" penny (one that is prior to 1954)

A book by Agatha Christie

An old-fashioned bottle cap

An interesting twist on the game is to have teams compete by taking photographs of them doing certain tasks. When all the teams have returned, take the film to a one-hour developing center while you are having lunch.

Here are some sample photos you could have them take:

One of you on a fire truck

Your group with someone with red hair

One of you on a McDonald's Playland

Someone talking with a homeless person

Next to a One-Way sign

Circle Dance

If you and your friends enjoy dancing a great group date is to organize a parking lot dance. You will need to get about 10 or more friends with cars to come along.

Arrange ahead of time to find a parking lot that will be vacant when you want the dance to take place. Have your friends park their cars in a circle, facing each other. Turn on the parking lights to light up the dance floor and tune all the car radio to the same station for the music.

Make it clear to your friends that alcohol is not allowed since parking lots are private property and you might want to have this dance again.

I'll Buy That for \$5

By Jason Greenwich

This is something that my wife, Allyson, and I did while we were dating. We were both in college, of course that means we were both broke.

We were also both tired of the typical "dinner and a movie" date, so we put our heads together and came up with an idea. We went to our local Wal-Mart with \$5 each, to purchase a surprise gift for each other.

We set a time limit of fifteen minutes, as well as a meeting place. It was hard to make \$5 go very far, but you would be amazed how fun it was.

We had to sneak around from aisle to aisle to avoid seeing each other. We were peeking between the shelves, and spying around the corners.

I'm sure that the other shoppers thought it was funny, but we didn't care...we were in our own little world.

At the end of the date, we had spent a minimal amount of money, but we had a great time. We felt like little kids. After leaving Wal-Mart, we went home to exchange the surprises that we had purchased for each other.

A Date of Rest

For thousands of years people have observed a weekly Sabbath - a 24 hour period of rest. I'm not going into all the historical and biblical details regarding this custom. I'm just pointing out how a weekly rest might be a useful tool to enrich your relationship.

Granted, if you worked seven days a week your relationship would most probably suffer considerably. Even though most people only "work" five days each week, they often slave away the other two days with a myriad of activities and busyness.

Some people are under the impression that weekends are the time to get everything done and if you weren't busy the whole weekend it was a failure. Sometimes that happens to me and I have to tell myself "Hey, I don't have to do anything today if I don't want to. I'm a grown-up and I can rest and have fun if I want." Perhaps a day taken each week to unwind, and to enjoy some good company with your family and especially your soul mate would do wonders for your relationship.

If you want to take the rest idea to the extreme one Saturday or Sunday try out a day in bed. Yep, all day in bed. That morning or the night before bring all the supplies into your bedroom. Books, magazines, cards, games, movies, snacks, scrapbooks and stationary are just a few of the items you might consider using on your "day of rest."

Say in bed and talk with each other for a solid day. Get my ebook, 1000 Questions for Couples, and learn more about each other, even if you have been married fifty years. Take some naps, gently scratch each other's back, watch a movie or a little television, read aloud to each other, write letters, play Scrabble and just rest. Your relationship deserves it.

Searching for Booty

Several years ago Athena and I invited three young boys from church to spend the weekend with us. I had arranged all sorts of games and things to do to help make the weekend fun and memorable.

The one thing the boys still talk about to this day was the treasure hunt I planned. I took an old box and filled it with candy, gold foil wrapped character coins and trinkets. I buried it in the woods near our house. I then created a "pirate's map" based on the location, soaking the map in tea and drying it to make it appear more authentic.

I found an old bottle and stuffed the map in it and just barely buried it in the yard where I knew we would be playing games. One of the boys "discovered" the bottle and I pretended that I didn't know anything about it. We took about an hour or two following the map and its clues to find where we should dig for the pirate's booty.

Even though the box wasn't filled with real gold and jewels, the boys had the time of their life searching for the treasure. Your next date might feel the same way.

One Good Date Grows Another

If one of your dates includes a bush, tree or flowers, you might have the seeds for your next date – literally. If you picnic under a wonderful old oak tree or take a walk through a field of wildflowers you might consider trying to collect some seeds from the flora from your dates.

Invite your date over to your house to try to sprout some of those seeds to plant in your yards or somewhere in the countryside. Get a bag of potting soil, some containers (Styrofoam cups, an empty egg carton or plastic gardening pots) and together plant the seeds that have some meaning to your relationship.

Hopefully in time your seeds will sprout and so will your relationship.

Million Dollar Date

Pretend you have just won the lottery or your long, lost wealthy great uncle recently died and bequeathed his fortune to you. Now go do things only the wealthy would do.

Test-drive the car of your dreams. If the salesperson asks how you will be financing the vehicle, tell them if you decide to purchase it you will pay for it in cash. They will treat you extra special that way. Go "shopping" at Neiman Marcus or some other high-end department store, picking out luxury items that will go in your new mansion. Decorate your house as if money was no concern. Of course you will need a new home so pick up a weekend paper and go to a couple of open houses in the ritzy part of town.

Find the most expensive restaurant around, dress up and go just for dessert or cocktails. If you can afford it you might want to hire a limousine for an hour or two to take you around to some of these places to make the fantasy seem even more believable.

Then go back home and realize that these things would never really give you lasting happiness. But a terrific relationship with your beloved will.

If It Was Fun Once...

By Carrie Stribling

Aahh...my most creative date. I owe this to my wonderful boyfriend. It was our 6-month anniversary...and he would NOT tell me what we were doing.

What he did was recreate our first date in a most splendid way. He picked me up wearing exactly the same thing he wore on our first date, and took me to the restaurant where we ate that night...where he had already previously ordered wine, candles, and the exact same thing I had ordered there six months ago (I don't know how he remembers these things).

Then, we drove to the movie theater where we saw our first movie and he presented me with my first of three gifts—a videocassette of the movie.

After that, we drove to the river near my house where we sat and talked for hours after the movie and I got gift number two—a photo album that he had been working on for months. It had pictures he had taken that I couldn't even recall, ticket stubs, pressed flowers, poems, and an overall review of our relationship together.

Then we drove to a nearby playground where we had gone to stargaze, and I got my third and most wonderful gift. He had written to the National Star Registry (<http://www.theromantic.com/gifts.htm>) and had a star named after me. He gave it to me with a note that read, "Since you fell from Heaven into my arms, I figured they needed a reminder of you." I have never been so weak in the knees as I was that night.

Adult Toy Store Shopping

A few months ago, Athena and I were in Chicago visiting some friends. They took us to see some of the sites in the city. We went to the Museum of Art. We saw the lake. We walked around and saw some great architecture. When we were tired and a little hot, we thought we would duck into a store to cool off a bit. We went inside Hammacher Schlemmer.

Hammacher Schlemmer is similar to the Sharper Image and Brookstone stores that have items that nobody really needs but are cool nonetheless.

We tested out all the neat gadgets and inventions this store carries. We tried the massage chairs and the foot massagers. We tested out the various hammocks and swings. We tinkered with the games, puzzles and other expensive merchandise. We "played" inside for over an hour. It is probably the most memorable part of our Chicago weekend.

Just as kids love to roam through Toys R Us, this was a toy store for adults. Now, this is the kind of window shopping I can handle.

Pot Pie Surprise

By Jennifer Perkins

Friday was approaching and I wanted to do something really special for my boyfriend. The only problem was, I was broke. Then inspiration hit.

I made a formal invitation for him and told him to be at my house by 7 and no later or we would miss our dinner reservations. I had also told him to be sure to wear a suit and tie.

When he arrived I greeted him at the door in the most fancy dress I owned. On my porch I told him where we were going was a surprise and I insisted he let me blindfold him. I put him in the car, buckled him in and began to drive.

We drove for almost 20 minutes. What he didn't know was that I was driving in circles.

Finally, we arrived to what he thought was a fancy restaurant, but actually we were just in back of my house. I led him in still blindfolded and sat him in a chair.

I told him to wait a minute, and then I lit the candles and took our potpies out of the oven. When I took the blindfold off he was so surprised to see he was back in my kitchen. We sat and ate pot pies by candlelight in our formal evening wear, and he told me it was the most romantic date he had ever been on!

How Fancy Is Your Fortune?

I recently sampled some gourmet fortune cookies from Fancy Fortune Cookies. The cookies come in unique flavors such as strawberry, lime, coffee, orange and about a dozen others. Of course they have original flavored too. All of the cookies can be hand dipped in chocolate for an extra special treat (or you can do it yourself). They will even sell you a sampler pack for five dollars.

Here's a trick for opening fortune cookies and replacing the fortune with one of your own or a piece of jewelry. Wrapped in a damp cloth, put the fortune cookie in the microwave for 15-30 seconds and quickly open it up and replace the tag.

You can use the fortune cookie to ask someone out on a date or to spice up a date you already have planned. Another use for these cookies is to blind fold your date and have them guess the flavors of the cookies you are feeding them.

Fancy Fortune Cookies can be reached at 888-776-6611.

Childhood Delights

Kids know how to have fun without spending their allowance. Why do we adults think that romance has to involve a major expenditure? Consider these "childish" dating ideas from Diane Rosener, editor of A Penny Saved newsletter.

Lie on your back and imagine what shapes the clouds look like.
Eat a bubble gum flavored ice cream cone.
Slide down a slide or swing on a swing.
Look for the rainbow after a rain.
Go roller-skating in the park.
Make a dandelion necklace.
Run through a sprinkler.
Drink Kool-Aid.
Make mud pies.
Count the stars.
Play hopscotch.
Visit the zoo.
Fly a kite.
Jump rope.
Rent Cinderella.
Build a sandcastle.

Skip down the street.
Jump into a rain puddle.
Try to step on your shadow.
Make a wish on a falling star.
Sit under a tree and read a book.
Run barefoot through wet grass.
Go to the park and feed the ducks.
Lie on the ground and watch ants at work.
Eat a popsicle real slow so that it melts and runs down your arm.

It's Bubblicious

We went to the Children's Discovery Museum for Antonin, our 18-month-old visitor. I had more fun.

One of the best parts of the interactive museum was the bubble room. There was a big basin of bubble liquid and several different shaped wands with which to make bubbles. There was even a round platform we could stand on and then have a hoop raised up around us so we were "inside" a bubble.

How about having your own bubble fest? Everyone loves blowing bubbles, no matter their age. Buy a couple containers of bubble stuff at the toy store and blow until you and your sweetheart are blue in the face.

For an even better time, pour your liquid dish washing soap into a flat pan and search the house for odd items to use in your bubble creation. An old pair of spectacles without lenses is a great double bubble maker. Some cookie cutters would work if you fastened temporary handles on the end or used with a pair of tongs. Spatulas with holes or slotted spoons are great for creating a profusion of bubbles.

The real creative type might want to go to the hardware store and purchase some wire that can be easily twisted into any assortment of shapes for your bubble festival.

My Favorite Place to Eat

Do you know where is my favorite place to eat? It's not at the dinner table and it's not on the sofa.

I like eating on the front steps of our house among the flowers. I really enjoy dining al fresco when the weather is nice outside. It's quite romantic.

We often think of dining outside when we go to restaurants but it often slips our minds when we are eating at home. To make your outside dining experience even more pleasurable, you might consider doing some of the following:

- * Invest in new or used outdoor dining table and chairs - a picnic table works great too.
- * Put up twinkle lights around the deck, in the trees or on the house for nighttime ambiance (we keep ours up year round)
- * Get some candles or lanterns that can be used outdoors (usually need a globe over the flame so it doesn't blow out)
- * Dress up the patio or deck with potted plants and shrubs (if it is a sunny place, you might try growing herbs in pots for cooking and decoration)
- * Use citronella candles or torches along with a fan to keep bugs at bay
- * Find a nice tablecloth you can use to dress up the table

Snuggler's Delight

When people take trips to other countries, they typically bring back some items that will remind them of their visit. One of our most romantic possessions comes from such a trip.

When Athena and I were traveling in Guatemala a few years ago we spent a couple hours in the local crafts market. We aren't much into "things" that simply gather dust on a bookshelf. If we ever buy items on our trips, it is usually something that is more practical in nature, not just something to stare at.

There it was, a brightly colored, hand woven hammock. It was quite large, wide enough for the both of us to lie comfortably (although, we are snugglers so we tend to get very close to each other).

When the weather is being supportive, Athena and I will go take an afternoon nap in our Guatemalan hammock. Sometimes we will bring a glass of lemonade (with flexible straws) and some cookies to snack on while we lounge in our swinging mattress, sharing our joys and woes with each other. A radio adds some rhythm to swing with.

A hammock for two. What a terrific invention for a relaxing date.

Romance Preparedness Kit

Are you prepared for an instant date? If your sweetheart came home today and said they received a promotion, would you be able to celebrate it on the spot?

I always keep a bottle of champagne chilling in the fridge. I never know when there might be some immediate need for some sparkly to celebrate with Athena. In addition to the champagne, I always try to keep some cookies, chocolates or "treats" on hand should there be a need for an instant living room picnic.

Along with having the drink and snacks on the blanket, I can light a few candles in the living room, put on a mood setting CD and presto, we have an instant romantic date.

Being prepared for romance in this way not only allows you to celebrate any and every occasion that you had no way of planning for, it's a great way to celebrate the occasions you might have forgotten (like a birthday or anniversary).

Special Interests

By Kristy Hendricks

My man is very into sports, especially golf, which I'm not a big fan of. I thought it would be a good idea if I asked him to tell me more about the sport he so dearly loves. What was intended to be a nice gesture to him, turned into an awesome theme date that I would never forget.

He was so excited that I expressed an interest in his favorite sport that he decided to give me a lesson. We spent the morning at the driving range practicing my form. We laughed and laughed, really enjoying ourselves. I could actually hit the ball straighter than he could most times. After my lesson, we went to a putt-putt course, which in the end proved to be surprisingly difficult, but we were having a great time.

I loved him more for taking the time to introduce me to a sport I formerly wasn't too impressed with. He loved me more for showing an interest in something he enjoyed.

The following week, he asked about my painting and drawing. I gave him a painting lesson...we ended up with a lot on us by the time we were through, but he's a masterpiece, nonetheless.

Camp Living Room

By Jason Greenwich

For several weeks, we had been planning on taking a camping trip to try out our new tent. Everything was ready to go when I got off work on Friday afternoon. Just as we finished loading things into the car it started pouring and thundering.

We were very upset because we had been looking forward to having a great time together. We decided that a little bad weather wouldn't keep us from enjoying ourselves.

No, we didn't go camping in the rain, but instead we decided to have a campout in our apartment. It was a blast. We set up the tent inside our living room.

We rolled out our sleeping bags, lit our campfire (candles), got out the flashlight, and opened our living room windows so that we could hear the wind and the insects chirping. The next morning we woke up and cooked breakfast outside on our Coleman camp stove.

It was one of the best weekends Allyson and I ever had.

Garage Sale Getaway

A couple of months ago, Athena and I helped organize a yard sale for the youth in our church. The funds the youth raised offset costs for a mountain trip they had planned.

Couples often don't have the extra funds for the romantic getaways they desire. Families often have a lot of "junk" they have accumulated over the years. When people get married, they often have duplicate items in need of disposal. Combine these two "problems" and you have a creative solution - a garage sale vacation.

Put together a yard sale and with whatever money you raise, take a nice vacation together. You might only earn \$100, enough for a stay in a nice Bed and Breakfast. You could possibly raise more than \$1000, which would give you a world of romantic possibilities.

If you are selling your "surplus" for such a good cause, it will be easier to let go of those unused items that are simply taking up room in the house. Your husband is more likely to let go of his shot glass collection and your wife would be more willing to part with her clothes she never wears if you know the funds might take you to some exotic locale. Furniture and baby clothes are always big sellers at garage sales.

This is not just a project that one of you should get stuck with. Make the yard sale a team effort. There will be sorting, pricing and organizing to be done. Signs to be made. Ads to be placed. A well-organized yard sale takes a lot of time and effort. However, the rewards can be quite substantial. You will clean the clutter out of your house, you'll spend time together on a worthwhile project and you'll raise some money for a much deserved romantic getaway.

Shh! We're Dating

Have you ever considered going to the library for a fun and romantic date? You know, they are not just for checking out books.

Think about going to the library for your next date to do some of the following:

- * Find a newspaper on microfiche from the day each of you were born. Read the headlines to each other.
- * Go to the children's section and see if you can locate some of your favorite books when you were a kid and read them out loud.
- * See if there are any good records or movies that you can review or check out.
- * Search the computer and see if there are any authors who share your name. Take a look at their books.
- * Go to the travel section and plan your dream vacation.

Charity Dating

All too often, dates become rather self-centered. What I want, what you like, how I look, how much money I spend on you, etc.

For a refreshing change of pace, try out a charitable date. Take the focus off the two of you and find ways to can help and serve others. It will be more rewarding than you can imagine.

Here are some examples. I'm certain you can come up with more.

- * Serve a meal at a homeless shelter
- * Go to a nursing home and visit with the residents
- * Visit a children's hospital and read stories or do a puppet show for the kids
- * Write a letter to someone you both admire. List all their wonderful attributes and then send it anonymously.
- * Go around the neighborhood and collect food for a food bank
- * Do some yard work or housework for an elderly person or someone else in need
- * Make a meal for someone who is sick

Mission Possible

By T.J Delgado

Heather Bergman received a FedEx package at work with a miniature tape recorder as the only contents inside. She pushed the play button and heard the theme music from the TV show "Mission: Impossible." Then a voice began: "Good morning Heather, your mission, if you so choose to accept, is to follow the clues left to you by the mysterious and handsome mastermind known as: Mr. Romance."

Heather and I have known each other for five years and we had just recently got engaged but today was our two-year anniversary of dating. The tape continued with instructions to approach a coworker (who I had previously set plans with) and tell her, "Mr. Romance sent me." The coworker then handed her an envelope. Within the envelope were instructions on special letterhead and very detailed clues leading her to a store within walking distance. She was to go to the store and ask for a lady named Becky and say "Mr. Romance sent me."

Following the instructions, Heather went to the store, asked for Becky and said her line. Becky handed Heather another envelope with a long stem rose attached. The envelope contained more clues to follow leading her to another store within walking distance. With each store she visited, Heather said her line and was given one envelope with a long stem red rose attached.

The final envelope sent her to a restaurant. Following the instructions, she said to the host, "Mr. Romance sent me." The host led her to a table where I was standing in my best suit with a long stem white rose and a very big smile.

Now people were staring at us. I pulled out a jewelry box, knelt down on one knee, opened the jewelry box to show my .25 cents toy ring, and asked her to marry me again. Overwhelmed, Heather began crying and shook her head yes. The people in the restaurant began clapping!

Throughout the dinner, strangers would come up to congratulate us and to take a look at both of the rings.

When the Bough Breaks

When Athena and I were first dating in college we discovered a large oak tree in a nearby park that we could climb. When we felt like being alone we would just go up in the tree and talk. Eventually I proposed to her in “our tree”.

Find a tree to climb with your date and bring along a book of poetry to read up there. Or read the children’s book, the Giving Tree.

If your sweetheart is the real outdoors type, you might even build a simple tree fort out in the woods for you two to go and have picnics and long conversations.

Everyone’s a Poet

Practically everyone I have ever met has written some poetry in his or her lifetime. Most of it is bad poetry but some is very good. But even bad poetry can be great if you are writing it for your beloved.

Get together with your sweetheart and give each other thirty minutes to write a love poem. If you like the exercise, move on to other poems or writing styles. For example, you can use the alphabet to name 26 qualities that you love about each other. You can write a brief love story featuring the two of you, each of you writing a paragraph at a time.

If both of you find writing to be “not fun” just get a couple of poetry books and read love poems aloud to each other.

Wax In, Wax Out

It's been over two decades since I last made candles. In the summer of 1976 my mom helped us kids make candles for one of our summer projects.

We bought blocks of wax and melted them in an old pan on the stove. For color, we cut up and dropped in crayons.

I made two different candles. Filling a Coca-Cola bottle with brown melted wax and a wick was my first creation. The second one was a simple pillar candle. It was made in three layers -- red, white and blue to celebrate our country's bicentennial.

Candle making is an inexpensive, yet fun and creative project you can do with your sweetheart. Now here is a secret to adding an extra special romantic touch to your candle. Buy one or more silver charms and add them to your candle. Charms come in hundreds of designs. There are hearts, angels, horseshoes, and snowflakes among others.

Over a romantic dinner or relaxing evening at home, light your candle and wait for its hidden treasure to be discovered by your one and only.

What's Behind Door #1?

There aren't as many Drive-Ins movie theaters as there used to be. Drive-Ins can be the quintessential romantic date. Just you and your date, holding hands and perhaps stealing a kiss now and again in the comfort of your own vehicle.

If you have trouble locating a nearby Drive-In, consider creating your own. Clean out your garage and put up your television or rented projector and screen. Ask your sweetheart out for a movie and then drive up to your (or a friend's) garage.

Bring in some freshly made popcorn, a few sodas and a box of Milk Duds and you're ready to roll. Just be sure to turn off the engine.

A Hunting We Will Go

Mary Lynn Mercer

Why should only kids enjoy excitement and anticipation at Easter time? How about an Easter egg hunt for sweethearts? Large bags of brightly colored plastic pull-apart eggs are inexpensive and available in grocery or pharmacy stores. They're great for hiding things in, like Hershey's Kisses or love notes. You could even put "claim checks" inside, redeemable for things like a kiss, a hug, their favorite flower, a friendship ring, tickets to a favorite sporting event, or maybe breakfast in bed.

It would be good to have these items out of sight, yet close at hand so the "claim checks" could be redeemed right away.

If it's a sunny day, you could make a picnic and a real Easter egg hunt out of it. Or, if you feel too silly with your neighbors looking on, hide the eggs inside the house.

Just Deck Him One

By Katie Sparrow

My man is a volunteer fire fighter in our town and they have drills every Wednesday night. This Wednesday night also happened to be his birthday.

While he was at the drill I took our coffee table and put it on our second story deck. Then I put the mattress to our futon out there. I gathered up about 10 candles and put them out on the coffee table. Then I got two wine flutes and filled them with Pepsi (my husband would rather drink Pepsi than anything else anyway, but especially on a week night).

I put a bunch of warm blankets out on the mattress. I got our toddler to sleep soundly in her bed and waited for my husband to get home.

When he came home I took him up to the deck and we relaxed all cuddled up in warm blankets. We did some catching up on things from our busy week and looked at the stars. We also rekindled some stars in each other's eyes.

He was very surprised. It was a great way to celebrate his birthday, for both of us.

Will Work for Culture

How would you like to take your sweetheart to a great concert, play or museum opening? A little pricey, eh? Then how would you like to go for free?

Here's how you do it. A lot of non-profit organizations (like ballets, orchestras, theatre productions and museums) rely heavily on volunteers for support. Volunteering could be as simple as stuffing envelopes or taking up tickets at an event. You get rewarded with personal satisfaction of supporting a worthy cause and - free tickets!!

If you are single and looking for someone with a good heart, volunteering is a great way to meet people who have a lot of love to share.

Family Date

By Jenn Dearwester

When I met my now husband I had a son who was 6 from a previous relationship. When he asked me out for the first time I said I would have to find a sitter he replied, no don't! So I agreed reluctantly to allow my son to go with us on our date! That Friday here he comes in jeans and a t-shirt! Nothing fancy he said casual dress! So we all hop in his truck and off we go. The three of us on our date!

I had already explained to my son that it might be boring so please keep his manners and be my little gentleman! I thought we were going to hang at the mall! First he asked if

we were hungry to which of course my son replies yes! So we pull into Chuck E. Cheese!!

After spending three hours there and having a tired son he says "To the mall?" And off we go because a 6 year old replied yes! So we go to Kaybee Toys for another two hours. It is now 9 p.m. and my exhausted son falls asleep in the truck, gets carried to his bed, and we spend the remainder of the night talking about hopes, dreams, and kids over the banana split he got at the local ice cream parlor.

My date was a success and after 4 years of marriage and another child my husband still takes us all on date night once a week.

The Long Way Home

By Anita Schultz

Every year my Husband and I take turns planning our Anniversary (our biggest date of the year). On our 11th Anniversary it was my turn. I wanted to do something out of the ordinary. I planned everything out perfectly!

First of all I took special care in picking out the clothing we were going to wear. For myself I picked out a sexy black dress with 5 criss-crossing spaghetti straps and for Him, black dress pants, white shirt and tie (he hates ties). On the morning of our special date I ironed his clothes after he left for work and I packed a bag for him. Before I went to work, I dropped off his clothes and bag with a note in his truck at his workplace.

The note in his truck said to go straight to his friend's house and take a shower and put on the special clothes. Upon arriving at his friend's house, he would receive another note that told him to drop off our son (I had dropped off our son at the friend's house as part of the plan) at Grandma's. Upon arriving at Grandma's he would receive his final note. It told him to go HOME!

At home I had prepared grilled steak, shrimp, salad and veggies. Then I had taken time to get dressed up. I had candles all over the place. I also had went to the library and picked up a wedding song CD and had it playing. The dinner was served in (my friend's) crystal dishes. The meal was better than I believe we could have received at any restaurant. After dinner we danced to the music and he hates to dance.

Supper Surprise

By Christine Bonner

Just a couple of months ago I planned a romantic evening for my boyfriend and myself. He arrived at my house, and I immediately ushered him into my car and gave him a card and little notes inside (Giving him an idea where we possibly were going). He read the first note and then I blindfolded him. I popped in the tape that I had made the night before with very romantic music on it. The first side was opera (Three Tenors).

We arrived at our destination within 15 minutes. It was a tiny Italian cafe that I had found on my journeys one day. We had a wonderful dinner and returned to the car. He read the second note, and I blindfolded him once again. I had packed a picnic dessert with sparkling apple cider and finger desserts (chocolate mousse tarts, strawberry's dipped in chocolate, etc). I took him to a Japanese Tea Garden in the center of my city and we fed each other the desserts.

Throwing a Curveball

By James Holloway

For our anniversary, I planned a special outing for my wife and me. But I had to keep my wife off balance until time to leave the house.

So that day at work, I had one of my co-workers call my house and leave a message on my answering machine saying "Mr. Holloway, your 7:30 dinner reservation has been confirmed and everything will be set up exactly as you requested." Of course she didn't leave her name or the name of the "restaurant" she was with.

Later that day I had another co-worker call my house and leave a message saying "Mr. Holloway, the credit card you used to reserve the limousine for this evening has been declined, please contact us before 12:00pm to make other arrangements or we will have to cancel your reservation." Again, I told him not to use his name or indicate where he was "calling from."

So, when my wife got home after 500pm, she picked up the messages, one about a dinner reservation, and the other about a limo that had been cancelled because I obviously hadn't gotten the message in time.

Of course none of that is what I really had planned for the evening. We had talked for months about going to see our local minor league baseball team play, but we had never gotten around to it even though the stadium is just a 1/2 mile from our house. So I decided, no time like the present. I went by early and bought Prime Box tickets, and arranged for them to announce "HAPPY ANNIVERSARY" over the speaker system. (I wanted them to display it on the big light board in center field, but they said they couldn't do that.)

So my wife was totally off balance until right before we pulled into the parking lot of the stadium. We had a great time and our team won 3-2.

Private Dining

By Mark Hughes

My wife was a history major in college, so after our first year of dating I planned a special trip. James Madison University was only about an hour from Charlottesville, so without

telling her where we were going, I drove to Monticello, the home of Thomas Jefferson, for a tour and a walk on the grounds.

I told her that I had also booked a special dinner at an exclusive restaurant that normally did not take public reservations, but knowing the head cook I was able to get us a reservation. After our tour at Montpelier, we drove to dinner.

She became suspicious when we pulled into a private, gated driveway and up to a house. As we reached the door, I knocked, and our hostess greeted us at the door. "Kelly," I said, "I'd like you to meet my grandmother." Right after her "good to meet you" response, she punched me in the arm ... exactly the response I had hoped for and expected.

After a great dinner, we went out for a private dessert and back home. My wife still talks about that as one of the few times I have been able to surprise her.

Upside-Down You Turn Me

By Suzy Erikson

When I was in college we had the best time. I remember once when we all of us roommates got dates for a dorm dance. The theme was inside out and backwards. We all turned our clothes and wore them inside out and backwards.

We invited the guys to come to our room for dinner. When they came we had paper plates and cups that were tied with strings. The other end of the string was connected to the ceiling. They were placed such that when you sat on the floor under them and then put food on the plate that it would stretch down in your lap as if you were at the table. To go along with the theme dinner had to be backwards also. We all ate on the floor with our suspended food then danced the rest of the night. I don't think any of us laughed that hard as we did that night and none can forget the way we ate.

The Mello Motel

By Cherie Burich

During the early years of our marriage finding extra finances to fund vacations was challenging at best. Our mutual agreement that I would no longer work outside of the home afforded me more time to dream about all the vacations we couldn't take.

On a frigid winter Friday morning a friend phoned to share her excitement about her upcoming trip to the Florida Keys. By the end of the conversation my eyes had filled with a tropical green hue of envy. I thought about my husband Tim and all the pressure he was under at work. Over the last few weeks he seemed so cranky tired and worn out. I couldn't think of anyone who needed a vacation more. .

The pity party I was engulfed in ended abruptly the moment I turned on the porch light of the Mello Motel. Nothing more than a wishful fantasy that was born in my imagination, was this charming bed and breakfast suite. I closed my eyes and I could see it. A beautiful cottage nestled between towering snow-covered pines. There was a huge stone chimney sporting a steady steam of smoke ascending into the still night air. So inspired by the relaxing tones of this magical place I knew I had to create it right inside of our small home.

Thoughts and ideas poured forth so quickly I could barely get them down on paper. Knowing my husband wouldn't be returning from work for several hours I was sure I had enough time to transform his castle into the Mello Motel.

I penned the logo 'Mello Motel' atop a sheet of paper and before I knew it I wrote the make believe heritage and history of the motel in two short paragraphs. The motto here was good old-fashioned R&R. Next came the motel directory followed by the Mello Motel Restaurant Menu. I planned a cozy dinner by candlelight and came up with a House Specialty for dessert. It was called Mello Jell-O which was really Jell-O hidden in clouds of marshmallow cream. Because my husband never drank alcohol I filled plastic bottles of pop with grape juice and re-labeled them Mello Wine complete with the year and date.

Slowly but surely the quaint semblances of a relaxing weekend retreat were taking shape right inside our home. Post it notes served as room numbers adorning the bedroom doors. I was having so much fun anticipating the look on my husband's face when he would soon discover this ready-made vacation that I couldn't stop. I created a spa in the bathroom with the help of lots of effervescent bath tablets. Our once boring bathtub was transformed into an oasis of invitation. Ripping the label off a plastic 7-up bottle I replaced it with my own label, Mello Champagne. I nestled it inside of the ice bucket and it rested on the ledge of the makeshift Jacuzzi.

Even the toilet seat looked official as it proudly wore a handwritten banner that read, 'SANITIZED'. Candles were strewn about the house waiting to be lit.

Before my husband returned I put on a slinky dress and carefully fixed my hair the way he liked it. His timing was perfect. Just as I was putting the finishing touches on the hors d'oeuvres tray I could hear the snow crunching under his car tires in the driveway. Sprinting from room to room dimming lights and lighting candles I just made it to the front door, "Hello honey...and welcome to the Mello Motel." I said helping him off with his coat. The day's tensions melted away as we kissed in the doorway and all I could think was... you haven't even seen the Jacuzzi yet!!

Weekend With Ronnie

By Shannon-Rasmussen

Ron and I are so busy, that often we don't get to see each other for days, even though we are married! So, as a gift for our first anniversary, I created an entire weekend for Ron.

I made a flyer that outlined many of the plans, and alluded to many surprises. Everything we did for the weekend was Ron's favorite things. Then, to build suspense for the weekend, which wasn't scheduled to happen for two months, Ron received a gift on every date that had a seven in it (since we were married on the 27th), that would give him hints about what we were going to do for the weekend.

Our weekend began on Friday after work, when we went shopping at a hardware store (he had received a gift certificate for that hardware store on a "7 date"), since that is where he is happiest (especially if I'm with him!).

Then we went home to a romantic dinner and played a romantic game with "props" which had been given to him earlier. The next morning we got up and drove three hours (listening to a special "road tape" that I had made and given him earlier) to Malibu Grand Prix for 40 laps (which, again, he had received earlier).

We had a romantic dinner at his favorite steak place, and then retired to a hotel for an evening in a hot tub. We wound up Ron's weekend on Sunday by getting up and having coffee at a coffee shop on those comfortable couches in front of a fire, and then going for a bike ride. The weekend was fun for not just Ron, but me as well.

Sitting On the Dock of the Bay

By Jessica Moore

My sweet husband thought up a unique date about a month ago. He did everything himself and I was in suspense the whole night waiting to see what was next.

First he sent me an e-card with a romantic sunset and told me what I should wear for the evening. Then he picked me up when he got off work and took me to a nearby lake. We went out onto one of the docks.

It was just past sunset and no one else was even around. The sunset was part of the idea but we were just a bit too late for that. Anyway, he laid a blanket on the dock and we sat there and had a picnic.

This was one of the best parts. He had prepared all this finger food himself and made me close my eyes while he fed me and I had to guess what food it was. Thankfully, there was nothing disgusting :) It was all foods I love. We also had sparkling grape juice to toast with. We finished our food and he went back to the car and brought out a sleeping bag. We then cuddled up under the sleeping bag and the stars. It was a very memorable night.

The Martha Stewart Date

By Kelly Legge

I think that one of the most creative date ideas I've planned was what I called "The Martha Stewart Date".

I have to admit to being a bit of a fan of hers (she has such great ideas!), so I thought long and hard about what Martha might do on a date.

I cooked an elaborate meal for my partner - Martha Stewart Style - with appetizers, salad with home made dressing, a full meal, and chocolate mousse for dessert. I decorated the table and even made the centerpiece myself.

After dinner, we baked cookies together! It was a fun activity, as it was something we've never done before. It was a chance for us to be silly and giggle together.

While the cookies were cooling, I took out all the supplies I had purchased (earlier in the week) for us to make cards for one another. We sat together cutting and pasting, gluing, drawing, and then presented them to one another, while we nibbled on our cookies.

It was a fun evening, and had all the elements of what I consider to be a good date - it had romance (a candlelight dinner), it was fun (baking cookies and giggling) and it allowed us to let one another know we really feel (with the cards we made). It was simply a terrific date!

An Apple a Date...

By Scott Ringwelski

Here in Southern California there always exist a million things to do, all going at a million miles an hour and overcrowded with a million people at each venue.

Granted, some truly enjoy the exhilaration of the metropolis, however some romantics like to find a special place to be alone, to share a moment away from the Madding Crowd.

Off toward the edge of civilization, at the corner of the high desert, is Apple Country, an unspoiled area nestled with gentle rolling hills, silence so deep it fills the ears, and endless acres of orchards speckled with little shops. Strolling on a cool fall day, bundled against the brisk breezes, one can pick apples or other fruit and produce, walk your dogs, stroll through the shops and visit with the friendly locals. It is a world apart, a place where simplicity reigns and encourages the building of richer relations by offering an environment that encourages insightful conversation.

No matter where you are, there are probably places like this: orchards, regional parks, hiking trails. Places to where the most important thing is not what you do, it's how you

grow in each other. Yes, conversation is scary. It makes one vulnerable at times, but that is exactly how strong relations are made.

One Good Date Deserves Another

By Tisha Rogers

One of the first dates my boyfriend and I went on is quite memorable. We went to Wal-Mart and bought a deck of UNO cards. Then, we headed over to the local frozen yogurt shop and bought some hot chocolate (it was winter with snow on the ground, thus, very cold). We took the drink and cards to the upstairs of the shop and started to play several games of UNO.

Since we were just beginning our relationship, we were playing several "mind" games with each other. My boyfriend "hustled" me at the game (lead me to believe he was no good and would never win). I just figured it was a game of luck, but he proved me wrong. That's why I agreed to play with him -- I wanted to see if what he was saying was true or not. We began to make wagers (bets) on the game (i.e. the loser would have to take the other to dinner, movies, ice cream, etc.) I played along just because I wanted to go out with him again and this was a good way to ensure such a thing. Come to find out, he was just in the middle of charade and was doing this to try and get further dates with me, also.

We are still together to this day and very much in love. We have fun memories of that "fateful night of UNO."

Not Just for Kids

By Liz Regan

The best date I had for under ten dollars was just two weeks ago. My boyfriend, who is stationed on Langley AFB in Virginia, took me to the Virginia Zoo when I came to visit. Only cost \$3.50 for admission each, and since it is the off-season it wasn't crowded. We brought our own video camera to capture the event on tape and stopped to share some nachos at the snack bar, which cost \$3. It was such an incredible experience to share and lots of fun since neither of us had been to a real zoo since we were kids. A fun, inexpensive date is hard to come by but this one definitely fit the bill!

Dollar Date

By Holly Gordon

On a warm day in February we went down to the bank on the James River in Virginia and walked along the rocks along the shore and in the water. We people watched. When it got too cold, we drove to the Museum of Fine Arts and walked around the nearly empty museum together, admiring the works together, making up stories. Cost: \$1 museum donation.

Free and Fun Festival

By Genie Brinkema

One Sunday, my love and I decided that we needed an adventure. But we're both students, so we don't have much money. We bought a loaf of bread and some Brie at a local store, got in our car, and just started driving. We ended up miles away in beautiful Virginia countryside where a free festival of Bach's music was going on. We went into an old church and listened to beautiful organ music. We walked around the picturesque town, browsing in craft stores. We picnicked with our bread and Brie on the church lawn. And finally, we kissed in the middle of a flower filled pasture. It was a heavenly, inexpensive, and very romantic day.

Strapped for Cash

By Michelle Robinson

Last Spring my boyfriend and I were both pretty strapped for money. Needing a day away to forget about the bills and household chores, we found a pizza place that had large pizzas on sale for \$4.99 (one topping, but we didn't mind). We picked up our pizza and a couple cans of pop, bought two kites at the dollar store, and we headed off to the state park. We ate our lunch and had a wonderful time spending the rest of the day together flying our kites. We joke with each other all the time about being "cheap dates", but it was actually one of the best dates we've ever had.

For All the Senses

By Joanna Bullard

I live in Atlanta where we have one of the best farmers markets—Harry's. The best date, especially the first, is to go wander the aisles and look at all the exotic fruit and vegetables, sample the strawberries and grapes and see all the neat cheeses and chocolates. Harry's is a bit more than a farmer's market but it provides a great place to explore someone's passions and affections for food and culture. Plus they often have 2 dozen roses on sale for under \$10! They have a great deli and fresh fruit and salad bar. It is also a nice place to shop and my fiancé and I love to go to Harry's and wander with no list and no cares.

Blue Light Special

By Chris Cairns

We sometimes go to a department store on our dates, and spend five bucks each on each other on little useless things that mean a lot. A \$0.25 light bulb because she lights up my life, a pack of matches (fire because she is so HOT) a chocolate bar because she is so sweet, a tiny teddy bear because she is so cute and cuddly. Five dollars at a huge department store can go a long way. With two people using their imaginations, and an hour at the store can be a really romantic time if you do it right.

Putting the Cart Before the Dessert

By Suzy Erekson

I remember a really fun date I had when I was single. We were asked on a double date. We didn't have much money so for dinner we brought a picnic lunch to share. It was fun because we ate it at a park.

After we were done the guys suggested we needed dessert. All of us got back in the car and drove. Only the guys knew where we were going. It seemed like a long time when finally we stopped at the airport. I asked what were doing there. The guys then proceeded to tell us the plan. We as couples had races to see how many luggage carts we could return from the airport parking lot in a certain amount of time. The airport paid you 25 cents for every cart returned. After we were done returning carts we put all the money together and went inside the airport and had enough money to buy everyone an ice cream cone for dessert.

I'll never forget that date.

For the Birds

By Roxanna Mays

When my husband and I were dating, often times we would go to the pier with a bag of oyster crackers (\$2.00!) and feed the ducks or the herons. Sometimes we would just bundle up on cold days and go for a drive out to the beach and watch the breakers! Very romantic!

Poetry and a Picnic

By Donna Foti

I think one of the most romantic dates I've ever had was when my then boyfriend and I went to the library for books about photography and on the spur of the moment, just for fun, also chose a book of romantic poems. From it came our romantic date.

We made an old fashioned picnic lunch - complete with lemonade, fried chicken, chocolate cake and blanket, all packed into a basket, and then, we found a very beautiful spot by a stream in the wooded area near our home. It was such a relaxed, romantic feeling and he actually read love poems to me as we listened to the birds sing!

I think our hurried lives in this day and age cheats us out of the wonderful romantic moments our grandparents took for granted as they courted. It was a wonderful afternoon and the feeling stayed with us for some time. I have several books of poetry in my personal library now and every so often I will read one aloud to my honey just to surround us with that sweet and tender feeling of romance.

Ants and All

By Heather Kayne

One day I decided to do something romantic for my boyfriend. It was raining outside so I decided to have a picnic inside. I cut out of construction paper a sun, trees, and a rainbow and stuck them to the living room wall. I put a picnic blanket on the floor. Then I got a bag of plastic ants and sprinkled them all around. What picnic would be complete without ants? Then we just had some deli sandwiches and cookies. It didn't matter what we ate. It was the fun of eating on the floor and pretending we were outside.

Cheaper the Second Time Around

By Charles Quinn

Though not unique, my wife and I used to (pre-baby) enjoy \$10 dates every Tuesday evening. Most cities have a theater that shows "second-run" movies--ones that have been in theaters for about 3-4 months--at a drastically reduced rate. In the popular shopping area of Georgetown (we live in Washington, DC), such a theater exists. Tickets are just \$3 each all of the time. We skip the market rate theater popcorn, and get a \$2 ice cream cone across the street. The area is just blocks from the Potomac River, and a canal runs through the shopping area, which is very romantic to walk along.

Plan B

By Liz Smith

When my husband and I were dating he called and asked if I could get out one weekend. Well when the weekend came he was short of cash due to a repair bill on his car. He thought of a brilliant idea - since I only lived about 1/2 mile from a lake he decided we would go there.

The original date was to be to a movie, dinner, then to listen to a new band in town. Well for the movie he improvised by doing his own impression of Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet. For dinner he had his mom make us a picnic lunch, which he laid out on the hood of his car on a tablecloth. He borrowed his dad's white sports jacket and doubled as the waiter. As for the band he brought along his guitar and sang to me. Needless to say that is one date I well remember.

It was also the night he asked me to marry him. He didn't have a ring so he took some little flowers that were growing beside the lake and tied them all together and placed them on my head like a halo. It has been 10 yrs now and I still have that halo! It has been replaced with gold bands but the halo is most precious.

Be Prepared

By DeWayne Chiasson

On the west coast of Canada, we have a lot of liquid sunshine in the winter though the temperature is mild so an economical OUTSIDE date involves braving the elements.

My recipe for a Date under US\$10!!!

Ingredients:

2 people in love

ONE gigantic umbrella (the type that screws into the ground)

Large blanket

One bottle of homemade wine

A loaf of French bread with assorted cheese

Some very sweet grapes & strawberries

One red rose

One hurricane candle lamp

Technique:

1. I head for a secluded spot by the ocean and have a WINTER picnic. The large umbrella comes in handy in case of rain. As the Boy Scouts say, be prepared.

2. The small lamp is a symbol of how much my love burns for my Special Lady.

3. The "home made" wine and rose adds a personal touch. The simplest things are always the best when you are with your Special Lady.

4. Enjoy each other's company as the sun sets and the sky turns to shades of yellows and oranges.

Good Horse Sense

By Jennifer Bowers

My first date with my best friend (still!) occurred six years ago - he is a very shy man, and called to ask me out a week in advance. I promised him my Saturday, and I could hear the pleasure in his voice. He informed me he'd pick me up at 6 that evening. Saturday came, and he called to tell me to dress warmly - we live in Anchorage, Alaska.

Much to my surprise, he picked me up at 6 pm driving a carriage with two horses! He'd borrowed the carriage from a close friend and he trotted us to a park about 2 miles away. From the back of the carriage he pulled a picnic basket out, tied the horses up, laid out a blanket on the grass. We had a wonderful picnic dinner (delicious egg-salad sandwiches that he made and grape juice), and when we were done eating and resting and talking, he pulled out his younger brother's kite, and together we spent the remainder of our

evening running up and down the hills at the park, flying his kite! It was my most memorable and least expensive date ever - for both of us!

Not Just Cheap - Free

By Pamela Hayes-Bohanan

When my husband and I were first married we were both in graduate school. Our combined salaries came to just under \$1000 a month. Even going to the video store was a financial consideration. One Friday night we remembered that we had two free coupons for some candy bars. We decided to walk to the grocery store and redeem them, but before we left we went through the rest of our coupons and found coupons for some free hand cream and travel size shampoo. We went to the store with our purchases and got them all for free.

The best part of the date was the sarcastic "thanks a lot" that we got from the cashier. She acted as if the money we saved came from her pocket. We got a good laugh in addition to our chocolate.

Kiddie Date Without the Kids

By John Smith

My wife and I are on an extremely tight budget and just about all of our dates have to be under \$10.

We start off by asking the neighbor to watch our son and offer to watch their kids in exchange (saves cost on paying for a baby sitter). We then go to the local library and look over their video selection and find and check out a video (most local county libraries don't charge for checking out video's just like for their books).

We then go to a local fast food restaurant drive thru and get 2 kids meals. We go home and eat the kid's meals and watch the video with some popcorn and don't have to worry about distractions from our kid.

Cup of Love

By Sherry Legault

Something that my husband and I like to do is to go out for coffee and dessert. Here in Alberta, we've got great little shops called "Second Cup" (similar to Starbucks, but more ambiance). For \$10 we can both get our favorite European coffee--usually with whipped cream on top, and then we'll choose the richest slice of cake in the cooler--we both love chocolate, so that will usually get our mutual vote. We ask for two forks. Then we sit, knee to knee, at a little round table, lean close together, and share the slice of cake. We often get different types of coffee, just so we can sample each other's. It's cozy,

romantic, and a lot less expensive than going out for dinner or a movie. And if we're lucky enough to find a table near the fireplace, all the better.

Tea-Light Time

By Kelly Legge

One of the best dates I've ever done for my now husband was very cheap and very simple, yet very memorable at the same time. I bought some tea light candles, and placed them all over our apartment (only cost a few dollars). I rented a nice romantic movie (\$5). I made a picnic supper from food that we had at home. That evening we enjoyed our "carpet picnic" while watching a movie together. It was a nice relaxing evening that only cost a few dollars.

Playing Around

By Kelly Legge

When my husband and I first got together almost 3 years ago, we didn't have a lot of money. Something that we used to do during the summer was go to the nearby playground, and play on the equipment, like kids! We always had a good laugh, and we usually ended up having some of our best conversations on these dates. And the best part for us was that it didn't cost a thing.

Dinner, a Concert and a \$2 Bill

By Nelda Porter

My husband and I don't make a lot to live on and you would think that going out would be out of the question. But instead we look for free or almost free things to do in our community. On one occasion we had 99-cent hamburgers from Jack in the box and then attended a free Air Force band concert. There are all kinds of free fun things to do if you just look for them, like concerts, plays, festivals, museums, zoos, etc. Most restaurants also run monthly specials and don't forget to check the newspaper for coupons.

UNIQUE TV/MOVIE DATES

There are two major drawbacks of going on movie dates. One, you can't have a conversation during a movie (don't you date someone to get to know him or her better?). Secondly, if the movie is a dud, it reflects poorly on you and the date you arranged. Use movie dates sparingly and when possible, make them more unique by using some of these ideas. Television dates can be romantic if you plan them correctly. And at least you have all the commercials you can talk through.

A Different Drive-In Date

We all know that Drive-In dates can be a fun and romantic experience. If you want to get really creative and knock the socks off your mate, rent a moving truck for the night.

Before the date, take some of your living room furniture and arrange it in the back of the truck. Include a sofa, loveseat or two recliners. Also put in a coffee table and some plants. If you want to go all out, include a dining room table (card table covered with a tablecloth would be fine) and two chairs. Bring along some food and some candles to eat by.

Park in the back of the theatre so your moving truck doesn't block anyone's view. If you are having dinner in your truck, be sure to arrive early enough to be able to finish dining before you "retire to the living room" for the movie.

Never Too Young

By James Macumber

This took some time to do but plan ahead. My girlfriend and I are young and haven't had the chance to experience a drive-in movie. I thought it would be extra special for a movie night rather than watch it in the living room, to watch it outside from my car, while parked in the driveway.

It was easy to hook up speakers to run to my vehicle when I set up the television a reasonable distance from the car.

We relaxed and cuddled with popcorn, a box of candy and a couple of drinks. It is times like this that you will never forget.

Beaches

By Carrie Padgett

One night when our kids were all out of town, I planned a special movie night for my husband and me.

I rented "How Stella Got Her Groove Back," although any beach or ocean theme movie will work. I sent my husband a beach party invitation at work and left a blow up pool toy in his car. When he got home, tiki torches were burning in the yard. I had inflated several more pool toys, set up beach chairs in the living room, fixed dinner, put on my swimsuit, and had blender drinks ready. We ate our dinner in the beach chairs while we watched Stella getting her groove back.

It was simple but lots of romantic fun. This was in early April while the weather was still a little cool, but that only added to the fun of the beach party.

Who Wants To Be a Romantic?

By Scottie Johnson

I believe television is a very big romance killer. My husband and I were home one night and that famous game show *Who Wants To Be A Millionaire* came on. I got this great idea.

The next night before it came on I ran the idea past my husband. We would both take pen and paper and try to guess the answer along with the contestants. Who ever got it correct got a special something from the other. After each question if you got it wrong you had to write out beside that question what you would like to do for your spouse that night.

Well that night the contestant made it all the way to the million dollar question. Needless to say with me being more educated (I didn't say smarter) I got the question right and he got it wrong. We exchanged lists and we both got to choose which idea we wanted our partner to do for us. It turned out to be one of the most romantic and challenging nights of our marriage. We can't wait to find another game show.

Weekend Update

By Colleen Klosterman

My boyfriend, Joe, is often out of town on business during the work week. When he is, he misses his favorite shows.

When he's out of town, I'll tape his shows for him. Then we'll snuggle on the couch and watch the tape together on the weekend. He doesn't miss his shows, and we spend some time together, too.

Our TV Guide

By Lindsey Townley

My boyfriend and I don't have all the time in the world to spend together (we both run very busy lives). We decided, with some compromising, to pick a few shows at the beginning of the week to watch together.

There are no exceptions; we have to be there. It gives us something to look forward to. Also it gives us a chance to plan our lives around something together, rather than plan doing something together around our lives.

Now I Watch My ABCs

By Mel

I write the alphabet on a sheet of paper. My husband and I have to start with the letter "a" and write down a romantic word for each letter, as we hear them on TV. Then we each make up a bedtime story using those words, and then tell each other. The one with the best story gets to receive a romantic interlude planned by the other.

In the Dark

By Shannon Lange

The most memorable movie event that my boyfriend and I have had was on our 6-month anniversary of dating. We had planned to have dinner at a nice restaurant, and then go see a movie. We were eating dinner, and a bad thunderstorm rolled in. As we were finishing, the whole area lost power, including the movie theatre.

We rented a movie instead, and went back to my house to see if the power would still be on in that area of town. It was not, so we sat in the dark together and had a nice long conversation, recalling the highlights of our relationship thus far, and some hopes for the future. Finally, the power came back on and we watched the movie on a blanket by candlelight. It was a horrible movie, but a far more memorable evening than if we had simply sat in a movie theatre.

Living Room Theater

By Sandi Poystila

To make movies special, my hubby and I get out the foamy, and some sheets and blankets and pillows. We lay it out in front of the TV in the living room, and light some candles, share a bottle of wine and some popcorn. Then after the movie we might even sleep there all night, kind of like a sleepover party or a camp out in the living room. It is fun.

You've Got Mail

By Stefan

My lady and I have been dating for over 9 months now. We met online in May of 2000 and met in person in Oct of 2000. She is a movie freak. The most romantic thing we did was rent the movie "YOU'VE GOT MAIL". We laid together hugging and kissing as we watched the movie, happy that meeting online was the best thing that ever happened to us.

On the Wall

By Jason Lampman

Last time my fiancé decided to rent a movie we thought we would spice it up a little. We borrowed a LCD Projector from our church and hooked it up to our VCR and stereo. We then took everything off one of our walls and hung up a white sheet. We cooked stovetop popcorn (the best) and had our big cups of Coke. It was like being in a big theater only we had a couch to snuggle on!

Modeling and Movies

By Kelly Legge

Ever since the first time my fiancé and I went to our first movie together, we always stop at the photo booth outside the theatre to have our picture taken. Our fridge is now covered with photos of the two of us from the last 3 years. It's always silly and fun, and leaves us with a little reminder of a date that we've had together. Our friends love coming over and checking out the latest set of photos that we have on display.

Your Favorite – Not Mine

By Kelly Legge

I love the movie "Dirty Dancing". Not because it's a great movie, but because whenever I watch it, I feel like I'm 14 years old again, wishing for some love and romance in my life. My fiancé, on the other hand, doesn't really enjoy this movie a whole lot. But every once in a long time, when he wants to do something nice for me, he'll bring this movie home from the video store for us to watch together, as a surprise for me.

I think that it's important to do things sometimes, purely for your partner's sake. I know I appreciate knowing that my partner is willing to endure one of his LEAST favorite movies for my sake. After all, two hours of your life watching a bad movie is a small price to pay for your partner's happiness.

DIFFERENT DINNER DATES

A Different Dinner Dance

By Amber Romel

For my boyfriend and my 9-month anniversary, I decided to do something a little out of the ordinary. So, I got my best friend, who happens to work at Dairy Queen, to set up a table with candles, french-fries, drinks, and a chicken sandwich. After that, I went to go get my boyfriend and brought him up there, all dressed up for a fancy restaurant.

Once we were there, I blindfolded him and walked him to the table where I sat him down (keeping the blindfold on) and had my friend turn on the radio/tape player in the store. Our song, "All My Life", came on and I walked over to him, took the blindfold off and asked him to dance. He just looked at me and smiled really big, took me in his arms and danced with me for about 10 minutes. After that we sat down to eat. After dinner, my friend brought us our favorite Blizzard to share for dessert.

Table for Two – Outside Please

I love dining outdoors. When Athena and I are at a restaurant that offers outdoor seating that is what we usually choose.

For a future date you could invite your partner to dinner at a great little sidewalk café. When he or she arrives at your house, they will realize that the sidewalk they will be dining on is yours.

Unless you have a friend serving as your waiter (a great idea if you can do it) you will want to prepare most of the meal in advance so you won't have to be getting up and down from the table often. To make the dining experience even more complete include menus, a vase with flowers and a sign for your restaurant.

Dinner with a Capital D

By Jeremy Janicki

For our one-year anniversary, I had to work late and missed dinner. My girlfriend was upset, but I told her to meet me on the Capital steps and we would go to dinner. Little did she know that the reason I was going to be late was because I had a little surprise for her. I set up a table at the top of the Capital steps with candles, a tablecloth, a bottle of wine, and made her dinner. When she got to the Capital, she walked up the steps and saw the dinner table prepared for her.

I explained that this was where we met one year ago. She just broke down crying. We proceeded to have dinner on the Capital steps, under candlelight and overlooking all of DC.

College Date, Kiddie Food

By David McCreary

My most creative date happened while I was in college. I received an anonymous invitation instructing me to be at a certain location in the local mall on a particular Saturday evening.

The invitation also advised that once there I would meet up with my mystery date for the beginning of a fun-filled evening (I was assured this was not a joke).

When I arrived at the mall, I was surprised to find two other guy friends who had received similar invitations! A few minutes later, a masked young lady approached us and said, "Please follow me." We proceeded to the parking lot, there we were blindfolded and taken for a brief car ride.

Once the car stopped, we were led into an apartment and our blindfolds were removed. We then saw three lovely young ladies dressed to the nines and a dining room table set for six. These young ladies were good friends who wanted to get to know us better.

Dinner consisted of peanut butter and jelly sandwiches - crust removed, strawberry Jell-O, pretzels, milk to drink and Twinkies for dessert. It was a riot! After dinner, we played goofy party games and then were escorted home. It was a night like no other.

Sample Platter

By Joshua McDonald

One night, my fiancée and I got all dressed up fancy. Then we went through the drive through at nearly all the different fast food places in town and got a different item from each of them. We got everything from McDonald's french fries to fried rice at the local Chinese place. Then we went back to her house, set up the coffee table with tablecloth and candles and ate a romantic candlelight hodge-podge dinner. Absolutely none of the food matched, but we had a blast. All of her family thought we were nuts, especially for dressing up and not going anywhere, but we had a really good time.

Menu Special

By Bill Kalmar

For my wife Mary's recent birthday we went to a romantic restaurant in London, Ontario - Michael's On The Thames. I called the restaurant in advance and faxed them a note detailing her present - a series of tickets to the Opera here in Detroit. I had the manager place the note in her menu prior to our arrival. You can imagine the surprise on her face when she opened the menu and saw a note from me wishing her a happy birthday and announcing the operas. Then the manager came over and sang some operatic arias, as is the custom at Michael's. A truly romantic and delightful evening!

Dinner in the Dark

By Amy

For our two-year anniversary, I blindfolded my boyfriend and took him out to a quite gazebo by my Uncle's pond. I had candles all around the gazebo, up the steps, around the table along with sparkling water. I had the nice plates, silverware and wine glasses. And to eat? His favorite meal, Big Mac and fries! He absolutely loved it.

Piece of Pizza

Sometimes the best dates happen at home. If you and your partner enjoy puttering around in the kitchen, you might consider having a pizza night. Making your own pizza can be quite an art.

Ask your date in advance if he or she likes pizza and what toppings. He or she will probably assume your will be having the pizza delivered.

Have all the ingredients on hand and over a glass of Chianti or some other beverage with your date, make the dough and sauce from scratch and each of you put together your own personal creation. You might even have some more unusual ingredients to try like baby corn, artichoke hearts, capers, pesto, sun-dried tomatoes and goat cheese. Or try out lamb and mint sauce.

Have some good Italian music playing in the background and when done, enjoy your pizza over candlelight.

A Sizzling Good Time

By Peter Forsgren

As I was married young and just entering my second year of college, my wife and I did not have a lot of money to spend (both of us in college). However, I wanted to have a romantic night at a restaurant and knew we could not afford the typical expensive ones I always thought we would need.

Well, I had two brothers I recruited to be chauffeurs. I simply asked my wife to wear a nice dress and I wore a suit. My brothers drove us in the nicest car in the family (not much). I had planned a dinner at a Sizzler (like a Denny's). They drove us there, went inside and set a nice table with tablecloth, good dishes borrowed from mom, and flowers.

Then they came and got us from the car and escorted us to the table. I am not sure how they did it, but they convinced the restaurant people to allow them to be the waiters. They served us nicely and then got out of the way a few tables over. The owner came and said he was willing to send out for nice champagne for our special occasion, but as neither of us drank alcohol, we thanked him and turned him down.

The dinner was great, served as best we could at the price of Sizzler. My brothers then drove us around to nice sites, like free museums and other places. We had a great and inexpensive time.

Swiping Dinner

By Erika Flanigan

When I was in college I opted to stay in the nicest women's res-hall while my then boyfriend (now fiancée) stayed in an apartment. Our campus had specialty restaurants in most of the residence halls (different theme each day), and best of all you paid for them with your meal card. My fiancée's birthday is the day before mine and since it falls in November (just before our 5 special holidays) we try to have fun on a low budget. I used an extra meal to "swipe" him into La Creperie (a French theme). It was so fun!

We were dressed to the nines. There were tablecloths and flowers on each table and all my friends got to see us decked out and having a proper dinner together! They later came over and sang to us. After the restaurant, we went out dancing. I now miss the prepaid special meals and fun times now that we are in the real world and have to make reservations and pay an arm and a leg (and sometime our first born, as it seems.)

Scavenging for Dinner

By Heather Kayne

One night I decided to do something romantic for my boyfriend, who is now my husband. I gave him 3 envelopes with clues in them. Each clue led us to a different course of the meal. The first course was the drive through window at Jack n' the Box for egg rolls and chicken fingers. Then he figured out the next clue, which led us to Coco's for dinner. Lastly, the clue led us to 31 Flavors for dessert.

The restaurants were all very close together so we didn't have to drive too far. All the clues led us on an adventure that wasn't very expensive either.

Make It Yourself

You know fondue meals have to be something special if you go to a restaurant and pay a good amount of money for food that you have to cook yourself.

Instead of spending a lot of money at a fondue restaurant, borrow a friend's fondue pot (or two) and create your own fondue meal. I am constantly amazed at the number of people who actually have fondue pots.

There are many different types of fondues. You can dip vegetables and cubes of bread on skewers in melted cheese. You can cook meat in hot oil although I prefer to simply dip cooked meat into interesting sauces. My favorite is dipping pound cake and various

fruits into melted chocolate. If your date is trusting, he or she will probably let you feed them off of your skewer.

Dinner Out At a Mouse House

By Leah

For my boyfriend's birthday, which happened to be one week before our 2-year anniversary, I took him to his favorite childhood restaurant, Chuck E. Cheese. Instead of worrying about getting older and being concerned with responsibility, he spent the whole day being carefree and playing games for tickets. At the end of the day, he had accumulated over 2000 tickets. The biggest thrill of the evening was giving those tickets to a young boy and girl who's parents only had enough money to give them 2 dollars to play with. It was a magical evening that neither of us will ever forget. And it happened, at the least obvious place.

Fit for a King

By Laura Sanno

The occasion was the "May Formal," held at my high school. My mother made me a beautiful, full-length gown and the young men rented tuxedos. It was my first date with my escort, my best friend, her boyfriend and another couple.

As a special treat, the boys had made reservations at the posh local country club. My heart flutter with anticipation, I stood in the club's restaurant lobby, as the boys requested our table. It was the late 60's, and one of the young men had hair that brushed his collar at the back of his tuxedo. We were told that this was unacceptable, and were turned away. Indignant, I said, "That's OK, we'll go enjoy ourselves at Burger King."

Obviously disappointed, my date asked if we could stop by his house on the way to the fast food restaurant. We waited in our cars for about 15 minutes, wondering what was up. With a large shopping bag in his hand, my date emerged, and kept mum as to the bags contents, which were hidden under tissue paper.

When we arrived at the Burger King and were placing our orders, my date found us a table, and when we arrived with our trays of food, he had created a table fit for a Burger "King." His mother had helped him select a square linen tablecloth with napkins, china plates, glasses, flatware and even a candlestick with a taper!

We were delighted, our table caused quite a stir, and we had a great time talking about our circumstances with some of the other diners. I felt like a princess and was so touched by my date's romantic gesture. (Pretty good for a high school boy!)

I recently attended my 30th high school reunion, and guess who was there, all the way from the West Coast? We had a delightful time reminiscing about that evening long ago.

Memories like this never fade, and romantic gestures are treasured forever.

Long Distance Dining

By Kim Norrow

My fiancé and I have a long distance relationship, so traditional dinner dates don't happen very often. Instead we agree on a restaurant or type of food and order it or make it. Nothing fancy, usually something from our favorite fast food restaurant. Then we call each other and have our "dinner date". We keep the phone bills down by using calling cards and fast food isn't that expensive, so our dates usually end up around \$20 combined. It's our way of doing something together 1,500 miles apart

Meet Me At the Median

By Perry S. Marshall

Our best cheap date was more "Gonzo" than romantic, but it was a lot of fun. We got takeout tacos and drinks, and drove to a nice neighborhood with expensive homes on each side of a wide grass median. We put a picnic blanket down on the grass between the two lanes of traffic and dined between passing cars. Lots of folks honked as they drove by and observed our culinary bliss!

Just For the Love of It

By Brian Perez

A few years ago, my wife started getting really bad headaches. After taking detailed notes on her diet, we noticed that it happened after she had something with caffeine in it, like soda or coffee.

Well, our anniversary was coming up, and I really wanted to take her to our favorite place, Ruby's, home of the world's best burgers and cherry coke, but I didn't want her to get a headache after drinking the soda (the restaurant didn't have caffeine-free Coke).

So I called the restaurant ahead of time to ask if it would be okay if I brought in a bottle of caffeine-free Coke for them to make my wife's cherry coke. They said they'd do it, so I brought it in, and my wife was able to have a couple of glasses of her favorite drink, without the caffeine and the ensuing headache. She thought I was the sweetest thing...

How Fortunate

By Brewer Bunch

It was a typical Friday night, stopping to eat at our favorite Barbeque restaurant. I didn't think anything about it when my hubby excused himself to go to the men's room. He came back and we enjoyed our sandwiches and were joking about the need to get

dessert when the waitress showed up with our "dessert". I just couldn't figure out why a barbeque restaurant was serving fortune cookies.

My husband picked one up curiously so I had to be the first to open mine ... hurry, hurry. Then I began to wonder why I was opening a fortune cookie where the only thing on the fortune was our wedding date. That was a coincidence and I wasn't sure why that date had significance for the restaurant. It took me to open the second cookie to actually catch on to what was going on! It read "ILYSH", which is our little thing! (I Love You Sweet Heart)! I finished the rest of them, totally enjoying the moment! My husband is always pulling these sweet little treats ... and it is just wonderful!

Josh's Place

By Julie

This story is about a restaurant that you won't be able to patronize, because it was created solely for me. I was in Mississippi on business. My fiancée had also taken a plane to the same city, just to surprise me. I routinely stayed at this charming Bed & Breakfast every week. All of the staff knew me, and they were most helpful in helping Josh set up this surprise.

It was on our 7-month anniversary of dating. When I finished my day's work, I arrived at the B&B, chatted with the staff for a few minutes, and then headed to my room. When I got to the door, there was a sign hanging there and it said "Josh's Place". I had to knock on the door because it was locked. He opened the door in a waiter's uniform and greeted me with open arms.

He had set up a table and chairs, with a lovely white tablecloth, candles, champagne cooling in an ice bucket, and a wonderful dinner that he and the staff had all prepared. We had fresh rock lobster with all of the trimmings. During dinner he handed me a small wrapped gift box, which contained a heart necklace. At just the right moment, there was a knock on the door, and our dessert was delivered to the room. He had made heart shaped cookies and placed them in crystal bowls with ice cream. The night was unforgettable.

Progressive Dinner Date

By Carrie Padgett

We like to go on a progressive dinner date. We stop at a Chinese Take out place for Egg Rolls, then to a Mexican place for Nacho's. Next, a nice restaurant for a salad. We're usually full by then so we skip an entree and head to an ice cream place for dessert. It's lots of fun and gives us a good chance to talk and catch up on our week.

Burger Queen

By Chanon Sasala

My boyfriend ended up taking me to Burger King for dinner before a movie one night because we were running late, and even at that it was through the drive through. He noticed how upset I was (I just don't like eating in the car, let alone being in a rush) and parked the car so we could eat at the picnic tables outside Burger King.

He ended up disappearing (saying he had to go to the bathroom) and came back out with a Burger King crown that they give out with the Kids Meals. Only this crown was inside out and in big permanent marker letters was written "My Queen" with hearts all over it and made me wear it all night long (I did protest when we went inside to the movie theater though!) Needless to say, he understood me enough to put a smile on me for the rest of the night together and yes even 6 months later I still have the crown on the corner of my bedpost.

Feeding Frenzy

Have you ever dreamed of lounging on a pile of pillows, being gently fanned with palm fronds and being fed peeled grapes?

I don't know why, but having someone else feed you is usually considered quite loving.

I recall one of the last scenes in *Driving Miss Daisy* where her chauffeur was lovingly feeding her when she was living her final days in a rest home. It was enough to choke up a grown man.

Try it this date out yourself. Get a bunch of grapes, a basket of strawberries or a pint of your date's favorite ice cream and tenderly and lovingly feed them as you rest on the sofa, the bed, or in the middle of the floor on a pile of pillows.

What's Behind the Kilt?

By Jae Campbell

I am a Scot and when I was 20 I really wanted to cheer up a female friend who I liked but who I had never actually dated though we had been to a number of activities together as a group. I came up with a plan and invited her out for a meal.

With a little help from some young friends from the local youth club I ran I got the preparations under way.

Now I had just returned from a mission for my church and was in a poorly paid job in Glasgow, Scotland at the time so everything had to be done to a very finite budget.

On the night I turned up in my kilt and had pre-warned my friend that we would be dining somewhere very posh so she had dressed up in a strapless evening dress borrowed from a friend for the occasion. We walked to a nearby park which was permanently open

and walking through the park she began to quiz me about where we were going and why we were walking since it was a couple of miles to the city centre.

As we approached the hill above Glasgow museum torches were lit by my young friends and there in the middle of the park was a table, two chairs (borrowed from our church) candles and a take away Chinese dinner being prepared by a couple of my young friends who'd agreed to dress up in suits for the occasion. They poured the fruit juice (I don't drink) and served the meals - kept warm in a cooler bag - then returned for my final surprise - as we ate they set off the fireworks I'd been keeping since last years Guy Folke's Night - a firework celebration in the UK held in November. The sky was lit up and together we had a wonderful time. Not only did it cheer up my friend but several others passing by also enjoyed it though they kept their distance but made their feelings known by waving and cheering.

Close for Comfort

By Stephanie M. Feil

My boyfriend and I have been dating for 14 months now and ever since our second date we have had a little romantic tradition of sitting NEXT to each other at restaurants. We have never once sat across from one another in 14 months, always next to each other. Most couples sit across from one another at a table so they can talk, but my boyfriend and I have always found touching a more important form of communication. Recently we have run into difficulties when we are seated in a 2-person booth (also called a deuce in restaurant terms) but we solve this problem by squishing both of ourselves onto the one seat! :) We also share meals, not only because it saves us a few calories, and leaves room to share a dessert, but also because it makes us feel closer.

Decked Out On the Parking Deck

By Patty McWhorter

Our romantic restaurant experience began when I was told to get all decked out that we were going to our favorite restaurant. So out came the black evening dress, heels, and the works. He even dressed in his best suit. Mind you - I wasn't told exactly WHICH favorite restaurant we were going to.

Imagine my surprise when we pulled up to a bar-b-q take-out place! (True enough we both DID love the food but...) Then the surprise continues when out from the back of the mini-van comes a card table, lacy tablecloth, candles, and flowers. We ordered and he set up right there in the parking lot. We definitely got the looks.

It did turn out to be one of the most romantic, DIFFERENT date nights we have ever had!

VACATION DATES

The Four Hour Vacation

By P Miller

The romantic vacation about which I'm writing about doesn't even require a trip away from home. But it IS a vacation. It's a 4 hour vacation anyone, anywhere, can do.

I wanted to surprise my sweetheart with a romantic change of pace. One warm, sunny Sunday morning, I called her and asked if she would like to go for a nice drive. Then, ahead of time, I took an old fashioned woven wicker picnic basket, packed it with our favorite foods and a bottle of wine, along with a romantic card, book of love poems, and a handful of fresh-cut fragrant ivory roses (her favorite). I hid the basket away in the trunk with a blanket.

I picked her up, and we drove into the rural countryside, following an old rustic road. It was really beautiful scenery and a wonderful change of pace from the hectic work week. I brought along CD's I had chosen of her favorite music. Then, as we passed a farmer's wheat field, I simply pulled the car off the road without explaining why, and parked well off-road. To her complete surprise, I opened the trunk and grabbed the basket and blanket, inviting her to walk with me 40 feet off the road into the waist-high field. And there, in the waving tall wheat, we spread the blanket and had an intimate, romantic meal, talking about everything and nothing. And for a little while, the rest of the world was light-years away.

I loved it because the whole day centered on her. It was as refreshing as any fancy travel agency vacation -- and more romantic -- because ever since we first met I had been interested to learn her favorite things, foods, flowers, wine, and music. And no airline to lose our bags.

A Vacation Can Pop Up Anywhere

By Randy Tipps

For my wife's birthday I planned a quiet mini vacation. It took place over a weekend. This is how it worked.

It was my wife's birthday. My wife grew up taking only camping vacations. I on the other hand, never camped before I was married. Now that's all we do as a family. My wife knows that I really would rather do something else but camp, but she also knows I do it for her and the kids. I took the afternoon when she was out and packed up all our camping gear. I went to a local campground and set up everything. I told her we were going to a casual place for dinner and that we were leaving around 6:00pm.

When we left for dinner I told her nothing and made her put a blindfold on. I then made up things about the restaurant we were going to. Like it was outdoors and stuff. I pulled into the campsite and up to our site. I then took off her blindfold and had a table with a

cooler of food, candles and some libation (cocktails). We had a quiet dinner, a romantic fire and a quiet night to ourselves. We spent Saturday together and my parents dropped the kids off on Saturday night. What made this fun was that it was unexpected and something that I didn't normally enjoy doing, but knew my wife did. She really enjoyed it. It was cheap, fun for both of us and we even included the kids later.

Bringing a Little Bit of Home With You

By Sara Carr

I'm taking a trip this August with my boyfriend to Ocho Rios Jamaica and we have both never been out of the US but we are going because we wanted our wedding to be something we would remember. As you might have guessed we are going to get married on the island while we are there but I'm going to make sure he doesn't miss anything from the US while we are in Jamaica. So I'm going to pack his favorite snack food that he ALWAYS eats in the evening and then pack a couple of his Star Trek episode video tapes, I really doubt we watch them...hehee.

I know he sounds kind of nerdy but he definitely isn't and he is my white knight and the man of my dreams so I wanted to make this vacation even more special because we would have new things from the island, but he wouldn't miss any of his old favorite things from the States.

Doing Mardi Grad in Texas?

By Lana Calvery

My husband and I were very tight on money but really needed to get away from the kids. I called and made reservations at a hotel an hour away from our home. I got the room with a Jacuzzi. My husband really wanted to go to New Orleans for Mardi Gras, but we couldn't afford it. Well, I brought Mardi Gras to our hotel room.

I kept everything a complete surprise. We went to eat at a Cajun restaurant and then returned to our hotel room. I sent him out to pick up some snacks at a local grocery store. While he was gone I decorated the room with Mardi Gras cut outs I purchased at a party supply store. I draped Mardi Gras beads all over the room and the tub. I lit purple, green, and yellow candles and set them all around the bathtub, and I drew up a big bubble bath. I had packed a small CD player and put in a jazz CD. I put a sign up that he would see when he walked into the room. It said to go into the bathroom (not where the tub was) and put on his costume. All that was there for him was a mask and beads. He then joined me in the tub for a very romantic night. This was just what we needed. Total cost of the entire night was about \$150.00 including the hotel, dinner and the decorations.

Behind Her Back

By Gary Hileman

In February 2000, my sweetie and I celebrated our 15th wedding anniversary. I wanted to do something really special, so I planned a weekend get-away... a sort of vacation, if you will.

The first problem was to get the money. Since my wife had the checkbook she would see every dime that left. So, whenever I would take out money for our family to do something, I'd "hide" some of it and tell her we were out of money when we really had maybe \$20 extra. I did this for a year and saved several hundred dollars.

Then, I made plans to surprise her at work and take her away unannounced. About two or three months before the big day, I incorporated her secretary's assistance to run interference with her staff so they couldn't schedule any meetings on the day I planned to get her. I emailed her with the plans so she didn't have to talk and risk being overheard in the office. Then, I emailed her supervisor to gain her permission so that if a meeting was called she wouldn't get in trouble for not attending and that any information she missed would be gotten for and reviewed with her.

I made arrangements for my parents to drive almost five hours across the state to stay with our youngest child. A backup family was ready to get him if they had trouble and had to cancel

Finally, I made reservations at a Gatlinburg, TN hotel we had stayed in our first year together. We had loved it so much because the room overlooked the river; it had a wood-burning fireplace and a cozy little seating area. It was our little piece of Heaven. The clerk at the hotel was nice enough to hold off requiring a confirmation payment until 30 days before our arrival - he held the room for two months on my name only. That gave me time for the credit card bill to arrive and not be noticed - I had to mark through the business and amount of charges so my wife didn't see it because it still came in before we left.

On the big day, I went about my day as usual. My wife went to work and I went to the gym and took clothes with me as though I was going to work from the gym. After we all left, our daughter packed my wife's clothes, makeup, etc. to be sure she had everything she might need. When I got back from the gym, I packed our car, picked up two roses (one as a Thank You to my wife's secretary for her help and one for my wife) and drove to her office. She is a school principal and was in the teacher's lounge having lunch when I got there. With several teachers and her secretary in tow, I walked into the lounge (surprising and embarrassing her big time), gave her the rose and a kiss and told her to get ready to leave - we were heading somewhere special. Two of my co-workers mailed a bottle of non-alcoholic juice and nuts to snack on to the hotel to be there when we arrived and we also purchased a bottle of wine while we were there to enjoy by the fireplace.

We spent the weekend going and doing everything she wanted to do. Her favorite restaurants, stores, etc., nothing was spared. On Sunday morning when we had to pack

to return home, she cried because she didn't want to return to the "normal" life we had to live. It was one of the best weekends we have ever had. She told me she would plan the surprise for our 20th. I can't wait to see what she comes up with then.

Little Things With Little Ones

By Mark Hughes

Having a one year old and a three and a half year old, romantic vacations are hard to come by. But, that is no reason not to try.

When my wife and I go on vacations, I try to pack some surprises for the week: little notes to leave on the mirror in the hotel, in her bags, in her make-up kit, etc. I also try and set out her clothes, give her extra time for a nap or a long bath while I take the kids to the pool or shopping, returning with a rose or small gift to let her know she was thought of even while we were away.

I make a point to open her car door first and hold the door for her whenever possible. I also make sure that we have our hands free to hold hands on a walk, especially along the boardwalk on the beach. And even though the children are with us, we try and schedule one evening at a special restaurant rather than the typical vacation feeding trough buffets geared toward families. It can't hurt for my son and daughter to see what romance really is. And if we need alone time, there is always family that we can use one night of our vacation to "get away," even if it means a quiet dinner at home, prepared by yours truly of course. Romance on vacations with children may be more difficult, but it certainly isn't impossible with the use of a little imagination.

Hidden Messages

By Chris Linke

A few years ago, when my wife and I had only 3 of our 4 children, I decided I was going to fly and see my parents in Oregon around our anniversary. I wanted to take my wife, Monica, with me, but in order for her to go I had to make sure the kids would be taken care of. Without her knowing about it, I arranged for relatives and friends to care for our children while we were gone. This wasn't an easy task because Monica is very particular about who she will let care for any of our kids.

When I was satisfied that those that "volunteered" to help out would be "approved" by Monica, I needed to find a perfect way to let her know she was going with me. It just so happened that her father had lost a bet with me about who would win the NBA championship, and as the loser, he had to baby sit for me. I took Monica to a very nice restaurant and had a perfect evening alone with her.

Now comes the creative part. I kind of consider myself a hack poet, so prior to our night out I wrote Monica a poem about how much I love her and how much I know that I can be a real pain to be married to. I ended the poem with lines that implied to her that she

would be going to Oregon with me. A friend of ours worked in a printing shop and took the poem I had written, gave it a very nice font and printed it on parchment. I put the poem in an envelope that matched the parchment and in a separate envelope I put her plane tickets and a schedule of who would have our kids and when.

After dinner was over, and while waiting for dessert, I gave Monica the envelope with the poem. I had given her poems before, but none with a hidden meaning like this one had, so I'm sure she didn't expect much more than my usual bad attempt at poetry. She read the poem and as she got towards the end, I pulled the other envelope out of my pocket to give to her at just the right moment. She got to the part about going to Oregon and she looked like she was going to cry, and like she was a bit confused also. I then handed her the tickets and the kid's schedule.

As any parent of three small children would attest, she was thrilled to be able to get away, even if it was for just a little while. She still had the poem years later. To this day it stands out as my greatest work, which I am sure is due to the amount of love I had in my heart for her.

Oh What a Difference a Night Makes

By Pat Barker Rhoads

I once took my husband to a hotel on a Sunday night (cheaper rates) that had a Jacuzzi tub in the room. With floating candles and a sense of humor for when you put too much Mr. Bubble in the Jacuzzi - you can have a great time, its inexpensive and relaxing.

We went to breakfast before we went to work and felt like we'd had several days off when it was actually only one night.

We did this one other time and brought our own crackers, cheese and fruit. Wine was included in the room rate.

Hey Mon! Make a Vacation

By Kelly Legge

This winter I wanted to do something special with my partner. We didn't have the money (or the time) for a "real" vacation, so I decided to "make" one.

About a week before our planned "vacation", I gave him a letter telling him that he won a special draw, and that the grand prize was a Caribbean Getaway. Along with the letter I sent him a "ticket" for the evening.

The day of our date, he left the apartment so I could prepare. I had purchased a big cardboard and crepe paper palm tree, which I hung from the ceiling. I made a tent with mosquito netting (over the bed) and strung up white Christmas lights so they would look

like stars. I prepared a special meal - Jamaican Jerk Chicken and Caribbean Rice and Beans, with fresh tropical fruit, like kiwi and pineapple for dessert.

When he arrived home, there was Caribbean island music playing. After we ate (feeding each other the fruit), we got into the tent, and I gave him a massage with Coconut Suntan Lotion. That night we slept under stars on our very own Caribbean island.

Becoming Royalty for \$15

By Bill Fleet

Ruth and I went to Washington, NC to check on a boat motor and to New Bern and Beaufort the next day to investigate some marinas and to inspect a boat for possible purchase.

This was not really a vacation but it was a pleasure trip for me because I enjoy boating and because Ruth could join me. We had planned to stay a night in a motel but as we were driving around Washington we came across a cozy looking Bed & Breakfast. We stopped and were given a tour by the proprietress. We both fell in love with the Queen room. I suggested we stay there because Ruth is my queen. And this room had a hot tub.

That evening we chatted with the owners for an hour or so and had beer and wine and crackers. The next morning at the time of our choosing we also had the best breakfast we have ever enjoyed.

Thus a trip for my favorite avocation turned into an event we both could enjoy. The additional cost of the B&B was about \$15 more than a motel but well worth the extra expense for the new friends we met, the amenities, the breakfast, and mostly for the pleasure we shared and the memory we will share for years.

Changing the Rules

By Janelle Krause

Both my sweetheart and I are college students, so neither of us have lots of money to spend to go on vacation; so, normally we go tent camping. It is a great way to get away from the city and be able to enjoy nature, and most importantly each other. And what is a camping trip without playing cards?

We have created our own version of poker (he loves poker where as I am not much of a fan of the game). We play with chips, except the chips in our game do not represent money, but they represent minutes. At the end of each hand, the winner tallies up the total number of minutes won. The loser must then do whatever the winner wants he/she to do for that amount of minutes (whether it be a back scratch, foot rub, or something a little more intimate and romantic).

It makes the evening and the trip more delightful and romantic because we must be creative with our wants and it gives us lots of special time to share with each other. I guess with this version of poker, there really is never a loser...both winners.

Sentimental Fool

By Lynne Olcomendy

I am extremely sentimental, and save ticket stubs, programs, etc. I even have the straw from the soda of our first date in 1984. Well, last October was our 10th wedding anniversary. We went to a resort in the Caribbean. What my husband didn't know is that I had brought along some of our wedding napkins (the kind with our names and wedding date on them). We sat down in the bar to have a cocktail, and, of course, they put plain white napkins under our drinks.

I told my husband to go tell the hostess it was our anniversary (so he would leave the bar for a minute) and then I replaced the plain white napkins with "our" napkins. The look on his face was priceless when he returned to the bar and noticed what I had done! (p.s. - the hostess took care of us too - brought a beautiful cake, and had the whole restaurant serenade us.)

A Lay in the Hay

By Diane Milner

My boyfriend and I live a few hours apart and we usually only get to see each other on the weekends. I took 2 days of vacation during the week and drove down to spend some time with him. He surprised me by taking a day off work himself and we spent the whole day together at his place in the country.

I had mentioned wanting to take a walk in the woods while I was there. Before I got there, he had bought a bale of hay and found a nice shady place under some trees and made a "straw" mattress for us to lie down on. We stretched out and enjoyed a "nature nap" together. I was very surprised by his thoughtfulness - and look forward to doing it again soon!

Without Stopping for Directions

By Brian Danhouser

My wife had said that I don't surprise her when it comes to planning outings. So a few weeks after I had gone on a father/daughter outing with a large group of friends to Sausalito, California, I started my plans.

I got directions from friends so that I could drive there (without having to stop and ask directions). Because of the route I was taking, she just figured that I was taking a back route into San Francisco. But when I pulled into the parking area in Sausalito, she was

very surprised. We walked hand in hand around the town, looked at the boats, walked by the water, checked out the galleries, and looked across the bay at San Francisco. It still is one of the best trips we ever took.

PICNIC DATES

So you want to take your date out for a picnic (that's romantic). If you want to be romantic **and** creative, here are just a few ideas:

- In a tent in your backyard
- In the back of a pickup truck
- In a moving van
- On a boat (parked at your friends house)
- In a barn
- On an inner tube, floating down the river
- In a tree house
- In a large appliance box you have decorated (maybe even cut out a window and put up curtains)
- On the bottom of an empty swimming pool
- Dressed in all white vintage clothing – followed by a game of croquet

Take Me To the Hospital

By Valerie Fernandes

I had lived in Goa, India, one of the beautiful touristy places and my husband, John, lived all his life in Delhi. We met in Kuwait during our studies. We were married in Delhi too. John had never been to Goa.

One fine morning during the month of November last year, it was John's birthday and I had a very bad stomach ache. I kept screaming so bad that John almost went in tears. He didn't know what to do because we lived alone and he didn't know anybody over there. So then I told him to take me to the hospital though he didn't know the way. I sat with him in the front seat in order to guide him.

So we were set on our way still shouting in pain as if was in labor and guess where I took him. It was the beach of Vagator. I told him that the guesthouse down by the beach is the doctor's place and when he CARRIED me in there, there were flowers all around the place just waiting for him. He was so surprised and amazed. He kissed me and I wished him Happy Birthday. After that we had our little kissy kisses and then went off to the beach.

We ordered snacks and lunch right on the beach. We had the best picnic of our lives. And now John is willing to never go to Delhi again. Whenever it is a holiday he mentions no other place other than GOA.

A Fun Food Rule

By Marisa Caverhill

My suggestion to make a picnic ultra-romantic is to have a "rule" that you must only feed the other person, and are not allowed to feed yourself. Eating is a super sensuous activity, so feeding your partner makes it even more romantic. Another suggestion to add on to this "rule" is that you must close your eyes when your partner feeds you. It makes the experience of tasting the food, feeling the texture in your mouth and enjoying the touch of their fingers on your lips that much more enjoyable. As far as the type of food goes I wouldn't recommend soup or anything that needs utensils but cut up fruit, cheese are great starters.

That's Amore!

By Pete Kendall

We had both had a week to "not" remember. Both my wife-to-be and myself had worked long hours at our perspective employers. That Friday afternoon, I was able to get some reprieve from my hectic schedule and leave the office early. My wife was still destined for another grueling 4 hours, working at the beauty salon.

We had always liked the idea of sidewalk cafes and had actually eaten at one once while on vacation in Kansas City, MO.

Anyway, I had made an appointment with my wife for one hour under a "bogus" name in order to block out some time for a romantic dinner for two within 20 feet of her hairdresser's chair. Around 4:45pm I loaded up our van with a card table, red/white checkered tablecloth, CD player (w/fresh batteries) and our finest dishes and tableware for two. I made three stops.

- 1) Our local record store to purchase an authentic Italian romance music CD
- 2) Our local Olive Garden to purchase our favorite dish (to go)
- 3) Our local florist to purchase a little vase of fresh flowers.

After purchasing the above I arrived at her salon shortly after 5:20pm and secretly set-up our little "side-walk" cafe just outside the salon doors. Needless to say, some of the customers entering and leaving all smelled the wonderful Italian food and heard the sounds of "That's Amore" and suddenly had the inclination to have Italian for dinner that night.

All was ready to go around 5:30pm as I entered the salon looking for my beauty in wait. She was there finishing up a hair-cut and ready for her next "appointment". Knowing her pretty well, I could see that she was pretty tired and ready for the weekend, but was hiding it quite well under her professional smile.

She looked over at me oddly. I then explained that I was the next appointment and needed her to come with me outside.

As we walked outside the salon and on-to the sidewalk, Italian music filled the air along with the sweet aroma of the Italian cuisine. The other beauticians laughed in envy.

She was bedazzled and to this day states that that dinner on the "sidewalk cafe" was one of the most romantic and pleasurable occasions of our 12 years of marriage.

What He Packed...

By Tracy Guringo

After not having contact with my ex-boyfriend/ex-fiancé in over eight months, we suddenly decided to meet "half way" (he lives in Virginia, I live in Pennsylvania) get some coffee and just talk.

Well, as soon as I pulled up at our selected halfway point, he reached in his car and handed me three red roses (one for the past, one for the present, and one for the future) and gave me a big hug. Then, he proceeded to explain that he had packed a nice picnic for us, so we just needed to find a nice place to spread out, rather than going to a stuffy restaurant. We drove just a short way down the road until we found the ideal spot. A covered church pavilion, quiet and secluded.

The most romantic thing was not just that he had taken it upon himself to do this, but WHAT he had packed. He had truly put a lot of thought into the contents of the picnic basket, including all of my favorite things- things I never dreamed he'd remember, or even ever knew about! He explained that he had to go to five different stores in three different states on his ride to meet me, just to locate the one item he knew I'd love the most! He also brought me a cowgirl hat because I am about to take a "Ranch Vacation" and a southwestern style blanket "Just for fun."

We had a wonderful time reminiscing and catching up and I had never felt so special.

Two days later, a beautiful arrangement of flowers was delivered to my office with the card reading simply "I miss you!"

Majestic Memories

By Kare Morken

My girlfriend had in passing told me that one of the things she would like to do was at some point watch the sunup from the steps of the Cathedral in St. Paul, Minnesota. The Cathedral is very majestic and sits on the top of a hill, a big stairway leading up to the doors on the eastern side.

We had just started going out three weeks earlier and October had just set in with chilly and hazy mornings. In just one week I was supposed to go back to my home in Europe so I thought this would make for a good memory until I could return. I asked her if she

wanted to go see the sunup with me before class (she is a college student) and she heartily agreed.

Early Tuesday morning I ran over to a bagel shop and bought a couple of bagel sandwiches when they opened at 6am. Then I went over to my girlfriend's house and picked her up and we went to the Cathedral where we posed ourselves with our backs toward the church on the top of the stairs. I had brought a picnic basket for the sandwiches, pillows to sit on and a blanket to cover us with. It was still cold but the warm tea and the good company more than made up for that. We talked, ate and held hands under the blanket as we waited for the sun to rise. When the sun rose in the haze we talked some more until I had to bring her back for classes.

Now almost a year later it is one of the many great memories we have to sustain us with as we are forced to be apart from each other for months at a time.

On the Greens

By Kristen Frechette

My boyfriend wanted to have a picnic on a golf course, but after getting permission, it rained for about a week straight. Not giving up he went to my house and borrowed anything green he could from my roommates. This included sheets, blankets and even comforter covers.

While I was in his room watching a movie, not having a clue what he was doing, he laid out all the sheets over the ground and couches. He also tacked a blue sheet to the ceiling that he had taped stars and a moon onto. He set plants around to make it look more "authentic" and we ate take out in the "grass". It was so romantic and a very creative idea for those rainy days.

The Stuff of Dreams

By Linda J Vigil

My significant other and I often dream about all the places we will go once we settle down together. We always talked about backpacking through the mountains for a few weeks. We both had been working and haven't spent much time with each other in the last couple weeks and I thought about bringing one of our dreams to his place.

I took the afternoon off and got his place ready. I brought over all my plants, took his plants out and put them everywhere in his living room, took out his furniture, placed a tent in the middle of the room along with all our camping equipment and fishing stuff, and put a CD on of mountain noises. I turned the cooler up on high to help out the atmosphere and had another stereo on in the other room with waterfall noises. I made fish for dinner and had it all set up when he came home. We had a picnic in our tent and pretended we were living our one of our dreams. We ended up camping there all night long! It was the best picnic I ever went on!

As You Like It

By Claire R. Morris

I decided to throw a surprise picnic for the guy I was dating. However, having done picnics before, I wanted to somehow make this one different. So, I decided to use the romance of, Mr. William Shakespeare. I grabbed one of his great works, As You Like It (although any great romance or romantic comedy will do). I then told my significant other to meet me in this park at a certain time.

I arrived early and set up all the picnic things. The best part, however, was that I dressed the part. I came in a long white gown from the era and was daintily reclined on the blanket when he arrived. In the car, I also had an outfit for him to change into when he got there. We spent an afternoon dining on fine food and reading romantic scenes from Shakespeare in "authentic" garb.

Snow Stopping My Picnic

By Randy Tipps

One of the things my wife has told me was that the most romantic thing I have ever done involved a picnic. We were not even married yet, just dating. I had met my wife in January and this was February. I told her not to eat that I was coming over and we would get something when I got there. It was snowing really badly that night.

When I got there, I had her close her eyes. Then I brought the stuff in from the car. I had a blanket, picnic basket full of food, some wine and some flowers for her. I put in a tape of some outdoor music and led her to the blanket on the floor. She was shocked when she saw what I had done. We had a picnic in the middle of winter. We fed each other strawberries. We drank some wine, and spent hours on the floor in this intimate setting. All in the comforts of the living room. NO ants either. All we needed was a skylight to shine in the light from the stars and our evening would have been perfect.

Christmas Eve Surprise

By Mary Holzman

My husband and I were married on December 24th. Needless to say, that doesn't always leave time for romantic anniversary plans to become a reality. Especially since I am the self-proclaimed Queen of Last Minute Details!

A few years ago, however, my husband made a wonderful gesture on our anniversary. After I had completed all my last minute Christmas morning details. I got ready for bed and slipped under the covers. My husband waited for me to doze off and then got up himself.

I was gently awakened a little while later to soft music and a blanket on the floor covered with all the things needed for a romantic picnic! Candlelight, champagne, a professionally

prepared picnic basket (complete with caviar and other gourmet treats) and an anniversary card awaited me! He had hidden the basket outside in the yard since the cold kept everything fresh and the champagne chilled and I was none the wiser! It was a wonderful memory that I will always cherish.

Wedding Cake at the Lake

By Linda Botkin

When my husband and I went on our honeymoon, my mother had packed a basket of some of the wedding food (we were too busy greeting guests to get to eat much). We went to a park with a lake where we could rent paddleboats. We took our basket and a bottle of champagne and paddled all around the lake. It was the most wonderful picnic we have ever been on.

I Love Picnics – Not Bugs

By Rita Sims

I am not a lover of the outdoors activities. However, I do love picnics. For me there is nothing more sensual as eating food with your finger while lying on a blanket. But since I don't enjoy being out doors fighting off the bugs, the hot sun, and the possibility of bad weather, I was forced to use my imagination. So I came up with the idea of having a "picnic in the bedroom"...

I brought a small picnic basket that contained service for two, two plates, two wine glasses, eating utensil for two, all of which were plastic. I cooked only food that would require fingers, chicken fingers, various cheeses, dips, crackers, and Jell-O Jigglers (for dessert) and a nice chilled bottle of wine. Next I set about creating the bedroom as our picnic area.

I suggest that you do this during the late evening or night; the effect is much better during these time periods. I first spread a large comforter on the floor for our "picnic area" and placed candles at various points around the room, to give the best romantic lighting for mood effect. When my husband came home from his bowling league that evening he was pleasantly surprised and very excited. That night was one of our most romantic nights as husband and wife.

SEASONAL DATES

That Video Is Hot!

By Stephanie Lynn

During the general getting to know you banter, my sweetie revealed his idea of the perfect date. He thought going to a mountain cabin and cuddling on the couch in front of a fire with hot cocoa and cookies was the perfect evening. I wanted to be the one he spent this perfect evening with, but since I'm a starving college student paying for a mountain cabin was out of the question. I don't have a fireplace either.

So I bought one of those tapes that make your TV look like a fireplace, sprayed the edges of my windows with snow, since it hasn't snowed yet, and made homemade cocoa and cookies. He absolutely loved it! Now whenever we want quality cuddle time, no matter what time of year, we just pop in the instant fireplace video!

Modern Day Sleigh

Jingle Bells, Jingle Bells! Riding in a decorated sleigh is a fantastic winter dating experience that most people never get to experience. Up until now.

The automobile is a modern day sleigh although it doesn't have the same charm. If you want to take your sweetheart on an old-fashioned sleigh ride, here are some ways to improvise.

- * Put some pine needles or a pine scented air freshener in the car
- * Have a great mix of holiday music on hand to play
- * Get some battery-powered twinkle lights and decorate the vehicle with them
- * Bring along a thermos of hot chocolate
- * If you can manage, find a "Santa" to chauffeur you two around to see the Christmas lights
- * Bring a warm blanket and roll down the windows
- * Hang some sleigh bells from the rearview mirror

A Puzzling Game

By Sabrina

My sweetheart and I started a great winter "date". We went online and ordered a bunch of 3d puzzles (the cute ones of village houses, Thomas Kinkade homes, castles, etc.) really cheap from eBay and bought an espresso machine (and yummy syrup flavorings for our specialty coffee drinks).

Now, we spend the weekend nights making up coffee drinks for each other and doing 3d puzzles while we sample our drinks. The collection of finished puzzles in our library is growing, and we're getting faster at puzzles and better at making espresso drinks!

I just love knowing that in the evening we will have a few hours for just us, working together on a project, making special drinks for each other.

Artificial Winter

By Lori

The best winter romance I had was actually in the spring. Winter is my favorite season, because I love the snow. But this particular year we hadn't gotten much, just a light dusting. I had in passing mentioned to my husband that I really missed seeing the snow that year.

After I got home from work, I walked into a freezing cold house. As soon as I came in the door my husband handed me my coat, gloves, and hat, and instructed me to put them on and close my eyes. He took me into our den and told me to open my eyes. When I did I saw a beautiful winter wonderland. He had purchased the fake snow from one of the Christmas shops about an hour from our house, and had my brother paint a mural of a winter landscape. He had even put the Christmas tree up so that I could have the snow on Christmas effect.

We made paper wads and had a snowball fight and I made homemade potato soup and fresh chocolate chip cookies and we enjoyed the winter together.

This is something I will never forget because I know that he had to really be listening to me to pick up on the fact that this would make me so happy.

Putting Your Names In Candlelight

By Leanne Capozzi

With the fall creeping in and Halloween just around the corner, my boyfriend and I invited my niece to go pumpkin picking with us. It was fun to have a family day and she felt so special. Having to contend with her and manage my four year old together was definitely a bonding experience. It is also enlightening to see how the man you want to spend the rest of your life with treats the little ones.

We all worked together carving the pumpkins. My boyfriend did the entire actual cutting. My niece got to scoop out all the guts and I was in charge of drawing the faces under strict supervision of my niece. It was a fabulous way to spend day together and if that wasn't good enough here is the pinnacle romantic moment. My boyfriend carved our two names in the biggest pumpkin. It looks great all lit up and makes me feel special when he can't be with me at night.

Riding Through the Leaves

By Heather Clifford

The fall is our favorite time of the year! We have three kids from 3-6 years of age so we don't get a lot of nights out! But we like to get a baby-sitter one evening every fall. We pack a dinner with candles and wine. Then get out our bikes and ride up to the park, which is 7 miles away!

Along the way we get to enjoy the colors of the leaves changing and fresh air! We can talk to each other with out interruptions. Then when we get to the park we enjoy a candle light dinner, each other and the sound of the great outdoors. We end the night with the ride back and then the sound of children sleeping!

Under the Stars

By Vickie Waldron

My husband and I like to lie out under the stars in the cool fall evenings. We take out a couple of quilts and snuggle under them. It helps us to reconnect after crazy days full of work and kids and other obligations.

Im-Press the Memories

By Kathryn Taylor

As an incurable romantic, I firmly believe that autumn is that magical time when dreams are realized and hopes renewed and the turning of the leaves brings to fruition all the promise of spring and summer.

My love and I like to collect a leaf to mark the turning of each autumn, which we faithfully press in a beautiful hand painted heirloom flower press given to me by my mother-in-law. Our leaf collection started the year of our marriage in 1979 and has grown over 21 years, each added leaf marking the passage of time and becoming in a strange, mysterious way the embodiment of our hopes and dreams.

The flower press has traveled with us around the world, and includes unnamed exotic leafy specimens pressed alongside those from an ancient Pohutukawa that clung to a cliff in the Bay of Island, New Zealand, a frond from a dainty English Willow overgrowing the River Avon and pert Canadian Dogwood we carefully nurture in our own garden, to name but a few.

God willing, we plan to gather many more, each carrying part of our past into our future.

GAME DATES

No Bored Games

The next time you are at home with your partner and you ask each other “what should we do?” look in your closet. Take out a few of your board games and together with your sweetheart, create your own game using pieces from the various games you have found.

If you have a lot of fun with it, you might want to write down what you did so you can play again.

Better Than Check Mate

Athena and I like to play all sorts of games - cards, Backgammon, Chinese Checkers and even Chess. Staying home and playing games is a relaxing and inexpensive date night for us.

Chess particularly can be a "serious" sort of game. There is a whole lot more strategy and thought with that game. Sometimes chess should be more fun.

To combat the all too serious attitude about chess I came up with a great way to bring a bit of levity to the game. I created little tags to put on the bottom of chess pieces. The tags were basically "rewards" for capturing that piece.

So when Athena captured my Rook, she turned it over and found out that she was awarded a five-minute back rub. When I took her Queen, I got one night off of making dinner (yes, I usually prepare most of the dinners).

The tags are randomly placed under the pieces so capturing a Pawn might gain you a better prize than a Bishop. I even created a couple of tags for each side that allowed the conqueror to take back one of their pieces.

Bobby Fischer probably wouldn't like my game of chess, but Athena and I sure do.

I Can Name That Tune...

Ask your date to bring over some of their old albums or CDs. Play the game of “Name That Tune” by taking turns trying to guess artists and songs on your CDs when your date plays just the first few seconds. Work out a point system and the loser has to do something for the winner. Perhaps a 15-minute back rub.

Old Games - New Tricks

One of my favorite games to play is Pictionary. For those who have never played it, you play in teams. One person on each team knows what the word is. On a piece of paper, they have to draw the word and the other member(s) on their team have to try to guess what they are drawing. You can buy the game in the store. A similar game is Win, Lose or Draw.

I like to play a variation on the game. One of my favorite ways to play it is with modeling clay. You can buy some or make your own. A recipe is included. It's a blast trying to create your word by shaping the clay.

Have you ever tried finger paint Pictionary? I haven't either but I'm willing to try. Buy some finger-paints, put on some old t-shirt and you are ready for a fun and messy evening.

What would be even more fun is playing with pudding. Make up a big batch of different flavors and use it like finger-paints. Messy, yet edible!

Homemade play dough

1-cup water

1-cup flour

½ cup salt

1-tablespoon oil

1-teaspoon cream of tartar

Food coloring

Combine all ingredients and cook in a non-stick pan over medium heat until mixture begins to dry out. Knead until cool.

I'm Game If You're Game

By Jennifer Perkins

My sweetie and I love to play games together. We spent a good many summer evenings out on the balcony trying to sink each other's battleship. Now that it is getting cooler it's Scattagories and Trivial Pursuit in front of the fire.

Our anniversary was approaching and I wanted to do something unique and special for him that we could both enjoy. What better than a game? We had been talking about purchasing a game of Jenga, and so this is where my gift idea came from.

Jenga is a tower of small pieces of wood that you take turns pulling out until someone makes the tower collapse. I went to various thrift stores around town shopping through their game sections. Until, wah-la, there it was, a game of Jenga.

Now I had no intention of just giving the love of my life a used game, I was going to personalize it.

I went to the craft store and bought some pink paint and a red fine tipped paint marker, and sat down to work. After I had painted all the pieces, I took out the list of sweet, sexy, and silly items I had been jotting down since I thought of the idea.

On each piece I wrote a different thing. "Kiss other person's left ear for 1 minute," "Get an ice cube run it down the other person's back until it melts," "Play this little piggy went to the market with the other person's toes."

So on and so forth, until every piece had something silly written on it.

The night of our anniversary we played his new game. The first piece I pulled read "Sing 'My Endless Love' to the other person", after we laughed so hard at my Diana Ross impression that we both had tears in our eyes, I could tell he loved his gift.

CRAFT DATES

It's a Good Thing

Anyone who watches Martha Stewart's television show or reads her magazine, will know that she often demonstrates craft projects that she calls "Good Things". What I like most about Martha is that she focuses on quality; she doesn't make Popsicle stick baskets or soup can wind chimes.

Go to the library and flip through several back issues of Martha Stewart Living (by yourself or with your date) and pick out a fun project. There are literally a hundred from which to choose. Make a photocopy of all the instructions and then head to the store to purchase any supplies you might need.

You and your date can make individual pieces (a little bit of competition) or work on one item together (some teamwork). You might want to have some snacks on hand and maybe some good music playing in the background.

Your date will get to see your artistic side and depending on the craft, he or she might even have a wonderful memento of your time spend together.

Tie It Up

I was born in the 60s but don't remember any of it. I think it would be fun to experience some of it (but certainly not all of it).

A "groovy" date would be to invite your sweetheart over to listen to some 60s tunes (the Beatles is a good option) while making tie-dye t-shirts.

Have two white t-shirts and a few bowls of different colored bright dyes. Tie off sections of the t-shirts using rubber bands and then dip sections of the t-shirts in the dyes. Let the t-shirts dry and then plan a future "60s date" where you can wear your tie-dye shirts.

The Butcher, the Baker, the Cookie Decorator

I'm not a huge cake person. I usually prefer moist, chewy cookies. I would rather have one of those giant cookies instead of a birthday cake anytime.

Instead of buying each other Valentine's cards next time, make the cards out of cookies. Spend an evening with your sweetheart baking giant cookies and then each of you can secretly decorate them to be revealed later on.

If you don't have a cake decorating kit, you can buy plastic tips and disposable bags really inexpensively at craft stores and at some grocery stores.

While you are at it, you might as well make some Valentine cookies to give to friends and family.

Paper Bending Exercises

Athena and I have had the privilege of hosting several Japanese exchange students. While they come to the U.S. to learn more about our country and culture, they in turn teach us much about the Japanese way of life.

One of the things I loved to do with our Japanese students was practice Origami - the art of paper folding. It is mind boggling how a simple square piece of paper can be manipulated into hundreds of different animals, flowers and structures.

Origami is a fun craft you and your date can try out together or you can make a few items as a gift for your loved one. You might want to create a dozen flowers, fit them with pipe cleaners and present your love with a bouquet that will never drop its petals.

Books and instructions on creating Origami art can be found at most libraries. One of the best locations on the web for information is at www.origami.vancouver.bc.ca/

Happy folding.

Make It and Bake It

If you are dating around the Christmas holidays you might consider a date where you make Christmas cookies and ornaments together. If this happens to be your first Christmas together, the ornaments you make will become very special years down the road.

Here is one recipe you might want to try:

1-cup flour
1-cup salt
1 ½ cup water
optional food coloring added to water before mixing

Mix all the ingredients together and squish the dough with your hands until it is completely blended. The dough should be firm and moist, not sticky or crumbly. Roll out to about ¼ inch thickness cut with various shapes of cookie cutters. Use a small straw to make a hole for hanging on the tree. Bake at 325 degrees for two hours or until completely hardened.

Decorate the baked ornaments with paints, glue and glitter or whatever interests you.

Amazing Glaze

About twenty years ago, when I was a young schoolboy, I would spend a month each summer with my grandparents out in the county. One of the highlights of each visit was going to the ceramic shop and picking out my item to paint. One year I painted a black and white piggy bank. Another year I painted a coffee mug to give to my mom. But when my grandfather sneezed I was startled and dropped it.

Do-it-yourself ceramic shops are once again in vogue and are sprouting up all over the place. There are at least six within a 45 minute driving distance from our house.

About a year ago Athena and I had a date night at Amazing Glaze. We purchased a teapot and a creamer. They sat us down at a table, gave us some brief instructions and showed us where the paints were and then let us go wild with our brushes. We painted the teapot and creamer for a couple of hours and when finished we left them there to be fired (that's what creates the shiny, porcelain-like finish).

The date was slightly more expensive than going to the movies, but we could talk with each other while we worked on our projects and we have a meaningful and practical keepsake from our date. Now we have to go back to paint a sugar bowl to finish our set.

Who Is That Masked Man?

I was in fourth grade, lying down in the hallway outside of my classroom. Another kid was putting strips of wet newspaper across my face and I was letting him.

It was a class project to make papier-mâché masks. First we cut up newspaper into one inch by ten inch strips. Then we gently coated the paper in a mixture of flour and water. Piece by piece, we layered the strips over our partner's face until it was covered except where their mouth and eyes were.

Taking a hair dryer, on low, we gently dried the mask until it was hard enough to remove from the face without damaging it. The mask was left to dry overnight and the next day we painted them. Craft stores have other products you can use to create masks that are a little more professional than newspaper.

I think it would be fun to create and paint a mask of my beautiful wife or even create a half mask that we could use at masquerade parties. People put carnival and tribal masks on their walls, why not lover's masks?

Why do couples always think they have to go out and spend lots of money in order to have a "date?" Can't you stay at home and do some silly project like this, spending time together but spending very little money?

Building a Home

How would you like to build a house for a date? How about eat a house? With this date both are possible in the same evening.

Athena and I have an annual Thanksgiving tradition of building gingerbread homes. We actually build more than homes. We have designed and constructed castles, mansions, villages, barns and even a train.

A gingerbread date does take a lot of planning and preparation so it is not something you can do on the spur of the moment. First, you have to design on what you will actually build. A simple four-wall cottage is recommended for beginners. Then you need to figure out how much dough and icing you need to make your creation.

Once you have your shopping list, you will want to go purchase all your ingredients and candies with which to decorate. If you are planning on an all-day date, your sweetheart could help you out here. With a simple cottage structure, you will probably figure 2-3 hours for the baking and 1-2 hours for the assembling and decorating, depending on the size.

I always like to make some gingerbread men or cookies with the leftover dough so we have something to nibble on while we are working. We will often donate our creation to our church's youth group or a deserving family when we are done.

Here are some recipes that have worked well for me.

Gingerbread Building Recipe:

I've used this recipe a few times and find it works well, particularly because you DO NOT chill it. In fact if it gets cold you must get it warm again to use it.

1-cup vegetable shortening

1-cup sugar

1 cup dark molasses or corn syrup (dark gives dark, chocolate colored dough; corn syrup gives light dough...or use half molasses and half corn syrup for a medium colored dough)

Melt these three items in a pot over low heat.

Remove from heat and stir in

1-teaspoon baking soda

1/2-teaspoon salt

1-teaspoon ginger

1 teaspoon nutmeg

1-teaspoon cinnamon

Then stir in 4-4 1/2 cups of flour, 1 cup at a time. (You may have to enlist the help of an electric mixer on the last cup, as the dough gets quite thick and hard to stir. Split the

dough into manageable balls, wrapping excess in plastic wrap. Roll out, cut pieces, and bake at 375 for 6-12 minutes.

Note: If you feel like the dough isn't working well, heat it in the microwave about 10 seconds to warm it, knead again and then roll it.

MERINGUE POWDER ROYAL ICING

3 Tablespoons Meringue Powder (available where cake decorating supplies are sold)

1 one pound box (3 3/4 cups) confectioner's sugar

4-6 Tablespoons cold water

Put dry ingredients together, add half the water, then add more water as needed. The consistency of the icing should be thick; where a knife can be drawn through it leaving a clean path...but not so thick it won't go through an icing tip. Takes about 2-3 minutes with this method.

SPORTS/OUTDOORS DATES

“Sink” the Putt

Athena and I took some children from church to play miniature golf one year and it poured buckets of water on us. We decided to play anyway. Many of the holes were covered in a few inches of water and it definitely made the game interesting.

You certainly can't predict when a miniature golf course will be under water but you can create your own under water course in a swimming pool. Get a couple of putters that you don't mind getting wet and get some golf balls too.

To create the “holes” on the bottom of the swimming pool place coffee mugs on their sides (shallow end of course unless you have scuba gear or can hold your breath for a while).

Tennis Anyone?

If there is one downside to playing tennis, it is spending most of your time chasing down wayward balls.

Tennis is a great date because it is usually a free date as long as you already have the equipment. Take some of your savings and hire one or two kids to be your ball boys for the day. You and your date will have more time to spend hitting the balls and you will make your date feel like a “pro”.

In addition to fetching the stray balls, have the youth serve you and your date some beverages and fan you while you are taking a break.

Catch of the Day

By Gala Bohannon

The most memorable date my husband and I have ever had cost practically nothing. My husband packed the car with "secret" items and then carted me off on an adventure. We ended up at Turner Falls in Oklahoma. It was one week after they had just stocked the ponds with fish so it was really easy to catch them. The wonderful thing about the date was that he only packed one fishing pole. He allowed me to catch the fish all morning while he took them off the hook and strung them for me. It was really wonderful because I hate to unhook them. At the end of the morning, he cleaned the fish and he cooked them up over an open fire. He remembered everything that day and I truly felt special.

In Shape & In Touch

When my wife was pregnant with our son, we decided to learn a bit of Yoga. We heard that it, and other forms of mild stretching would be helpful throughout the pregnancy.

We rented a few basic Yoga videos at the local video rental place and tried them out to see which ones we liked the best. We did some Yoga most days until my wife was too big and started falling over during most of the moves.

Rent some Yoga, Tai Bo, Tai Chi or other exercise/dance videos to try out with your sweetheart. If you like them it might become a regular date routine. You'll stay in shape and in touch.

Toss It

If you don't know what Frisbee Golf is, it is basically throwing a Frisbee at a certain target and seeing who can hit it in the least amount of throws. The best thing about Frisbee Golf is that you can play it practically anywhere – no green fees to worry about.

Take your date to a local park or other fairly open space and bring along two Frisbees and a pad of paper with a pencil. With your date mark 10 or so trees, lampposts, trashcans or other objects to be your "holes".

Now each takes turn throwing the Frisbee. The person closer to the hole goes first. When you are all finished the game serve up a picnic lunch you have stashed in your trunk.

A Walk In The Woods

It was on Thursday that Athena told me "I have something special planned for us this Saturday." My mind started racing. What could it be? I was excited for the rest of the week to find out what she had in store.

After breakfast on Saturday we hopped into the car and she drove Ashton (our 1 year old) and me across town. She wasn't going to any of the places I thought out in my mind. We ended up in one of the many parks that our region is famous for.

When we got out of the car she opened the trunk and I could see that she had packed a backpack when I wasn't looking. Then she handed me a "clue." It was a compass. I quickly figured out that we were going orienteering. I had mentioned a long time ago that I heard they had orienteering competitions in the area and I thought it would be fun.

The county park puts on a short orienteering (where you find your way from one point to another using maps and/or compasses) class once a month followed by a course you actually take. In the course we selected, there were 7 labeled posts scattered throughout

the woods and a map that guided us to each one. The goal was the find each marker and return back before all the other teams. The cost was only \$4 for all three of us to participate.

Athena had packed bottled water, snack bars, trail mix and other goodies in our bag. We had a really great time working together as a team reading the map and searching for the not-so-easy-to-find markers. Even with Ashton strapped to my back (he loved it) we came in first place. Next time we'll try the more advanced course.

Find out what programs your country and state parks offer. You might be surprised.

A Smooth One

If you are dating someone who is athletic and you have a tennis, racquetball or other sports date, come home afterwards and make a couple of smoothies to help you cool down.

There are literally hundreds of kinds of smoothies but here are two sample recipes to get you started.

Berry Smoothie

1 cup low fat strawberry yogurt
1 cup mixed berries (fresh or frozen) (strawberries, blueberries, etc)
2 teaspoons frozen orange juice concentrate

Combine in a blender and mix until smooth. Thin with more orange juice if desired.

Strawberry Banana Smoothie

8 ounces crushed ice
1 ounce strawberry juice
4 strawberries
1/2 banana
11 ounces plain nonfat frozen yogurt
Fusion Boosters (ginseng, bee pollen, multivitimin, ginko biloba, lecithin, and/or soy protein)

Blend 15 to 20 seconds, use a spatula to remove the thick and creamy smoothie from the blender

The 5 A.M. Shower

By Mel

Since my husband and I married while still working through college, we spent a lot of time on cheap dates. We have done everything from the standard stay-at-home dinner and a rented movie to taking a road trip to "wherever that road over there leads".

One of my favorite "dates" was in the early morning, before work. There was supposed to be a meteor shower at 5am, in January. I don't know how he convinced me, but we got up, bundled up, and walked to the nearest park with a wide view of the sky. We held hands, glove in glove, reminiscing about our engagement era, which also took place in the winter. The view wasn't really the most romantic aspect of it-- it was the time spent huddling and cuddling and remembering the beauty that is all around us. Sometimes it just takes an icy reminder to get us to see how vibrant our lives can be, with a little effort!

LONG DISTANCE DATES

Check Your Mate-To-Be

By Glenn K. Roberts

When my sweetheart and I lived a great distance apart (she going to college in Ontario, and I working in Nova Scotia), we only got to see each other on vacations and special occasions. Needless to say, our long distance phone bills were high, as we talked on the phone almost every night. We both were very much committed to keeping our relationship going, and to maintaining the deep level of romance we shared with each other. This necessitated some creative thinking.

My girlfriend and I both enjoy the game of chess, and decided to incorporate our love of this game into our long distance love affair by playing chess over the telephone. We each set up a chessboard at our respective apartments, and when we spoke on the phone, each of us would inform the other of a move (one move each per call) to be made on the other's board (anyone familiar with correspondence chess knows how such games are played). It takes a bit of time - it would often take us a few weeks to complete a game.

The only difference (and here's our romantic twist) was that she would switch her king and queen pieces with each other (their moving capabilities would also switch). I then had to capture (check mate) her "Queen of Hearts"; she, of course, would have to capture my "King of Hearts". The person who won would be entitled to a special treat (candlelit dinner, night out on the town, etc.) when next we were together. You can imagine that a lot of thought and effort went into trying to win the game. Now that we're together, we still play chess, and although the games aren't as lengthy, the winner still gets treated.... thus the romance continues.

Keeping An E-Journal

By Niki

My boyfriend and I have been together for a little over 4 years and have had a long distance relationship for almost 3 years now. He attends college on the east coast while I attend college on the west, but we're both from Hawaii and see each other for winter and summer breaks. Throughout the semester things can get kind of hectic and it's kind of costly to talk on the phone.

So this past summer we decided to write an e-journal every night before going to bed. We both realize that we miss a lot of each other's college lives because we're far apart, but the e-journal will keep us in tune, not only on how many things made us think of each other, but also with what we did during the day, how classes went, the kinds of people we ran into and the types of events that happened.

It is a great and inexpensive way (since both our colleges offer free internet access and you can get a web e-mail address almost anywhere) to keep the spark in our long

distance relationship throughout the semester and to tide us over until we can be in each other's arms again.

Sharing a Little Soul

By Michelle Facciollio

One of the things I do with my boyfriend who lives in Connecticut (I live in New Jersey) is read part of Chicken Soup for Couple's Soul to him every once in awhile when we are on the phone together. The stories are all about couple's and it helps keep us connected as well as start a discussion on the topic of the story.

Wooing From Afar

By Sheryl Renshaw

At the beginning of our Senior year in high school, my husband and I started writing letters under the guise of being just friends. This progressed into a long distance relationship until the following fall when we started college together. We were living 235 miles apart and the creative ways Christopher wooed me were what made me fall in love with him.

- One-ringers. Every now and then he would call my house on the hour, let the phone ring once and hang up. Just to let me know he was thinking of me.
- Movie Date. He checked the local listings for a movie channel he knew my parents subscribed to and looked for a romantic movie. (Say Anything). He rented it the same night and told me to watch it, knowing he was watching it at the same time and to imagine him sitting beside me. He called me afterwards so he could say goodbye for our "date".
- Video. He videotaped himself doing various things to show me parts of his life that I had not been exposed to before, like his high school.
- Surprise visits. He showed up a few different weekends, unannounced, just because he missed me.
- Very creative letter writing. Christopher took the time to make sure every word in his letters would make me smile. They were always filled with so much life, witty verse, and poetry, that I have several of them memorized from top to bottom. There was never any "Hi, how are you? I'm fine."

We also did more standard things like scheduled visits, phone calls, and flowers, but the special things listed above were what showed me that he was "the One".

A Puzzling Way To Stay Close

By Joelle Cardoso

My fiancé was just starting his career as a pilot when we began dating. Two months into our relationship, he had to move to Las Vegas for 5 months.

I was missing him so much and I decided instead of moping around the house, I would do something to get both of our minds off of being apart.

I sent our 1st picture together to a puzzle company and they made it into an 8x10 puzzle with about 65 pieces. I planned it so that he would receive 5 pieces every week or so. He loves surprises and this kept him entertained trying to figure out what the puzzle was. This little game helped the both of us survive our five months apart.

Virtual Date

By Patreece Page

My fiancé and I live about 3000 miles apart, since neither of us have a lot of extra cash (we are saving our money for him to move to the states so we can be married) most of our time is spent on the phone. Thank GOD for cheap calling cards.

One thing I do is send him date letters. In these letters I go through a date with him from start to finish...where we will go, what we will wear, what we will be doing, everything...after he gets these letters he reads it over the phone and we add little intimate touches like what we would say and things like that.

It is not as good as being together but it is romantic and we still have our "dates". In these letters I send him one of those perfume cards with the scent of my perfume on it so he can remember what I smell like. We also put the same CD on and listen to the same music, sometimes we each light candles so it is almost like we are together.

Snail Mail Devotion In an Email World

By Kristy Hendricks

Due to unfortunate circumstances, my sweetie and I will be away from each other for the next 5+ years. We are two months into our separation from one another. It is very difficult. We're 3 hours away from one another. In two months time we will be several times zones apart.

We know our love is strong and though person-to-person time can't be beat...there's always the occasional long distant phone call, but most of all...there's the US Postal Service. For the past two months we have written NUMEROUS letters to one another with a person-to-person visit every other weekend. Writing normal letters quickly became rather dull, so I began to be as creative as possible in my writings.

Some of my letters I wrote in code. I wrote one letter and then cut it in to hearts and other shapes to make a puzzle. It took him awhile to get it taped together to read, but the effort was well appreciated. Once together, the puzzle read, "I go to pieces without you" on one side. And once, we weren't going to be able to make our weekend visit with one another, so I wrote an especially sweet and longer letter than usual, sent a photograph of us from a high school dance and sent a photocopy of my hand (sort of a virtual visit in an envelope). I told him, we would be together soon and if he needed me just hold my hand and I would be there in thought.

In his letters to me, he draws pictures of our names and they're wonderful to look at. We miss each other very much and we also try to not focus on our sadness in our letters to one another. We try to find the high points of our days or even make up really funny stories starring us as the main characters. We have a long road ahead of us and we know it's going to be tough, but our words and love are always there.

Once we are back together for good, I hope the letters never stop because they are a wonderful, open and honest part of our steady growing relationship. Never underestimate the power of handwritten snail-mail devotion in an email world! Love Letters are simply the best, next to the real thing.

A Call and a Clue

By Carl Witten

When I have to go out of town on a business trip, or anytime I'm going to be gone from the house for several days, I try to let my sweetheart know that I'm thinking of her all the time.

Before I leave, I write messages on little sticky notes - such as: "I sure am missing you", "I'm thinking of you right now", "You're always on my mind", "Can't wait to get back home so I can hold you in my arms", etc.

Then I place those little notes all through the house in places that I know she'll find them, but at different times - on the coffee pot for morning, in the shower, inside her shoes, inside her purse, stuck to the rear view mirror in the car - anywhere I know she'll find them throughout the day. Then, since I always call her every day, I often place one in a difficult spot (sometimes with a little gift), and with each call I will give her a hint or a clue as to it's whereabouts.

She loves finding the notes and loves the scavenger hunt. They both speak my love to her while we're apart.

Long Distance Television

By Ken A Harris

When I first started my long distance romance it was very important to keep that constant "in touch" conversations going and to let that person know that she was always in my thoughts. Long distance calls were piling up and e-mail can sometimes get impersonal after weeks of it.

So, I got my video camera out and taped a personal message for my sweetheart. In it I told her how much I had been thinking of her, what I thought of our relationship thus far and what I hoped for the future as well as.

Playing "our" song or some songs that you both like could help make that tape "extra" special.

It worked. She called as soon as they got the tape and had immediately watched it. Everything I had tried to make sure came across did. She felt intimacy with me, which you can't get on the computer or the telephone. It meant more for her to hear what I was saying about "us" but seeing the facial reactions as well.

Next up for me. A tape to be sent a few months after the first one (don't send too many or it won't be a special treat) will include a hello from some friends on my end and what they think this long distance romance has done to affect me. I think it'll be a hit and show just how much I'm in love with her.

More Creative Dates

- Decorate cakes blindfolded.
- Plant a tree in your yard or in the countryside to honor one of your special anniversaries or occasions.
- Go to church (bet you don't get asked on this date much) followed by a nice Sunday brunch or lunch.
- Instead of a lunch or dinner date, try a breakfast date.
- Play darts.
- Go for a night swim with candles floating in the pool.
- If you two are a regular item, join a bowling league for a regular night out together.
- Play on the monkey bars or go swinging at the local park.
- Find a cheap piece of furniture for one of your places and resurrect it together with a bright coat of paint.
- Try making a gourmet meal together.
- A canned whipped cream fight.
- Rent a convertible for the day while the weather is still warm and take a ride to the beach, mountains or countryside.
- Play along with a television game show. Keep score and the loser takes the winner out for ice cream.
- Go to the golf driving range. If you don't play, it is all the more fun.
- Wake up early and searching for treasures together at a flea market or garage sale.
- Rent and watch the first movie you saw together.
- Warm up the house in winter by baking several batches of cookies with your sweetheart to share with friends, family and coworkers.
- Dress up in hats and boots and find a country and western bar.
- Draw portraits of each other (even better if neither of you are artistic).
- Hunt for four leaf clovers.
- Spend the day looking at each other's photo albums/ scrapbooks. If you don't have many photographs borrow your parents albums.
- Find a school play to attend.
- Get a bucket of sidewalk chalk at the kids store and make some masterpieces.
- Attend a Renaissance fair dressed in period costume.
- Play bingo at a local bingo parlor – great place to people watch too.
- Go panning for gold.
- Go through a gourmet grocery store sampling the items and buying something you have never tried before.
- Spend a quiet day fasting (going without food or something else) as a spiritual journey with your beloved.
- Locate the movie that won the Academy Award for Best Picture the year of your sweetheart's birth and watch it together.
- Spend an afternoon or evening in an art gallery and pretending you are professional art reviewers. Give each other a critique of several of the pieces.
- Build a house of cards together.
- Find a nearby river or stream and go "tubing" down it together.

- Take your sweetheart on a tour of your old high school or college - pointing out all the special places.
- Host a wig party where everyone comes wearing a wig.
- Write and make a short movie with video camera.
- Visit your state capitol and watch a legislative session in action.
- Purchase coloring books and spend the evening coloring and talking about your childhoods.
- Look up at the night sky and pick out a star for each other. Make official certificates officially naming the star after your sweetheart.
- Swim in a swimming hole with a rope swing.
- Stay up all night and visit places that are open very late like Waffle House, Wal-Mart and dance clubs.
- Take an art class together.
- Adopt a street or small area that the two of you clean up together.
- Try to get to the highest/lowest elevation point in your state.
- Watch an awards show together and during commercials present your own awards.
- Make s'mores in your fireplace.
- Search out some covered bridges in the fall.
- Go to a laser show or special showing at a planetarium.
- Make a stain glass window together to put in your house.
- Enjoy a bottle of wine from your year of birth.
- Attend a high tea.
- Make an old fashioned root beer float and drink it with two straws.
- Play marbles.
- Attend a dog show and try to pick out the winners.
- Go midnight bowling where they turn off the lights and the pins glow.
- Build a birdhouse or feeder together.
- Try to make balloon characters out of a variety of balloon shapes.
- Share your home with someone who doesn't have a sweetheart. Invite a single person over for a nice dinner.
- Get a book on bird watching and see how many different birds you and your sweetheart can spot (they are easier to see in the winter).
- Help your date rearrange or redecorate a room in his or her house
- Wash, blow dry and brush your lover's hair.
- Celebrate your sweetheart's "half" birthday (six months after his or her real birthday).
- Buy some water colors or finger paints and paint just for fun.
- Go to a nearby park with hiking trails.
- Plant an indoor winter herb garden together.
- Get in the mood for winter by visiting an indoor ice skating rink.
- Do a blindfolded smell test of your various perfumes/colognes. Give a prize for each correct guess.
- Give blood together and then go out for an ice cream or coffee and cookies.
- Pretend you are without power and light up your place with candles and just talk for a change.

- Have a snowflake making competition. Just takes paper and scissors.
- Go grocery shopping together and point out the food you loved (or hated) as a kid.
- Take a nature walk in the winter, scattering birdseed along the way for our feathered friends.

ASKING SOMEONE OUT

Sounds Fishy

By Wendy Tilley

When I was in college, someone asked me on a date in an unusual way. First he left an anonymous card in my mailbox saying there was a gift waiting for me in the dorm's lobby. I went to the lobby and found a small fishbowl with a goldfish swimming away inside and my name taped to the outside. Later that night during class we had a ten-minute break (it was a long class). During the break one of my friends came up to me and handed me a package of fish food and asked if I wanted to go out.

Secret Computer Admirer

By Nicole

Lets face it, we're firmly entrenched in the information age and should use all the tools available to us. One great feature AOL and probably many other email accounts have is the ability to create more than one email address for an account.

Several years ago I was dating a man rather casually, we kept in touch on a day-to-day basis via email. I really wanted to secure a date with him on Valentine's Day but was too shy to ask directly. So I created a new email name for myself itsasecret@aol.com or something equally mysterious. I posed as a secret admirer and in that guise was more comfortable sharing some of my feelings and desires, such as my desire for a date on Valentine's Day. The highlight of both our days would be opening those "secret" emails to see what the other had written the night before.

He figured out it was me long before our date, but the anticipation leading up to the date was more than worth it.

Asking Out While Working Out

By T.R. Cardozo

My future husband had a very creative way he went about asking me out. We used to work for the same company and although we would exchange pleasantries while passing in the hallway, it was never any more than that. After a year of this, we started running into each other at the same health spa, always as he was leaving, I was coming in. I choose the time I did to work out because there was nobody about, I HATE working out in front of people. One day he asked me why I came in so late and I told him the truth.

The next time I bumped into him at the health spa, we said hello, how was your work out etc., etc. I changed my clothes, went to the treadmill and started to jog. He walked over to me and started to talk about nothing really important, I was a bit perturbed and subtly tried to get him to go away, by only giving yes or no answers or not responding at all, but he just wouldn't shut up and go away. Finally, quite annoyed I said, "You are interrupting

my concentration, can we pursue this conversation tomorrow?" He said, "Not unless you agree to go out on a date with me," and he had this devilish smile on his face, which of course made me realize that he had sabotaged me to assure that I would most likely say yes, just to get him to go away. I asked him if that was true, and he laughed and said he was beginning to wonder if I was ever going to tell him to bug off. With an approach like that of course I had to say yes, and even though our first date turned out to be a date from hell, I was hooked and we have been together for 8 years and married for 4 of them.

A Different Paper Invitation

By Tilly

I think the most romantic way to ask someone out is to take his favorite magazine or book he (or she) is reading and add a paper the size of the magazines or book paper. The paper you add has a written invitation for the date and is sprayed slightly with perfume (or cologne).

Bring In the "Experts"

By Jackie Hostetler

In high school I asked my date to prom by interviewing my teachers and friends - asking them why they thought I would be a good date and why he should be sure to say yes. I then put the tape in an envelope with a poster board size puzzle asking if he would go to prom with me. Fortunately after all that hard work, he said yes!

He then invited me to his prom (he went to a different school) by inviting me to see him perform in a play. He had a mime deliver a single red rose to me during intermission with a note asking me to go to his prom!

Date By Appointment

By Tim Levert

My wife is a therapist, and sees 6-8 clients each day. She's a hard worker, and rarely schedules herself any free time during the day, so . . . I made an 1:00PM appointment under a fake name, then showed up at her office with Chinese take-out (her favorite). She loved it!

Have You Flossed Today?

By George Robichaux

I proposed to my wife with a dental floss letter. What's that? you say?

Take an empty dental floss cartridge apart and refill it with a letter. Write or type a letter in thin lines, then cut the lines and tape them together. Roll the letter onto the spool so that when you are finished, only the beginning is hanging out of the cartridge. Your chosen will end up with a pile of paper at his or her feet by the time they are finished. My wife of ten years still has this "letter" tucked away in a drawer. This idea also works for asking someone out on the date.

The Challenge

By Charles Stastny

I had met this very sweet girl via the Internet. I could tell that she was a great lady and she played hard to get for over 1 month. The challenge was the best. I wanted to call this young lady on the telephone, but I found it very difficult for her to give me her home phone number (and I understood her safety concerns).

Finally, I had THE PLAN! I knew where she worked, so I sent her the Top 41 (not Top 40 on purpose) reasons to make just a little time for a date with me. And at the end, I included a bit about getting her phone number. I had printed out 34 sheets of paper listing 41 reasons starting with #41 all the way to #1. I had fun with the list and then I did the ultimate by connecting all 34 sheets together with tape and rolled up the list.

It worked -- she loved it and it has been a great romance so far.

DATING DISASTERS

Your Glass Is Completely Empty

By Jenny

His name was Craig and I met him the night before at a party. We exchanged numbers and decided to go out to dinner the next night. He picked me up at my apartment and said he liked my outfit, not because it looked good, but because it matched his outfit. We drove to the restaurant and the whole time he told me how good he is to women, how lucky I was to be going out with him and how much he would like to go to the gym with me so we could "sweat" together.

We got to the restaurant and he was amazed that I ordered his favorite drink, we must be connected in some way and he started planning camping trips, visits to amusement parks and overnight excursions. He had planned out the next 6 months of our lives and this was our first date. At the end of dinner he asked me the age old question, is the glass half full or half empty? Being a little pessimistic, I said half empty. He became extremely angry and said he refused to believe that, that his prior girlfriend had been a pessimist and he hated it. He refused to talk to me for a half an hour and drove me home. When we got to my place, he actually said that he forgave me and acted like I should be very grateful.

Needless to say I never went out with him again and it was the weirdest date I've ever been on.

Three Strikes You're Out!

By Sherry

My worst date was really a worst series of dates. I started dating this guy and the first date went fine. Typical first date where you're really too nervous to have a great time but things went well and we got along really great.

It went down hill from there however. Our second date, he was supposed to pick me up at 7. The phone rings at 6:45 and he tells me that he was up all night the night before with his buddies and then he went hunting all day so he's really too tired to do anything. In his favor, he did offer to make it up to me the next day. I gave him the benefit of the doubt.

That next day he picked me up, then picked up one of his friends (who I had never met) and we went to visit another of his friends (who I had also never met). He left me to talk to the friend's wife while the guys went to another room to play guitar. We stayed there until midnight, and then he took me home.

The third date wasn't officially a date. I was going to a party at a mutual friend's house and he asked if I'd be there and told me that he'd meet me there. He never showed up.

Why I let it go to three, I don't know. Sucker for punishment I guess.

Doesn't Check Out

By Sally

We arranged to meet (blind date - we had seen each other's pictures) at a pub in a yuppie popular part of town. At least I thought it was that part of town. Turns out it was on the EDGE of that section. When I drove by the front (parking was in the rear) - I almost kept going - it looked like a dump. The place came highly recommended, so I forged on. It was called the "Lucky Labrador" - apparently people are allowed to bring their dogs along - there were several dogs sitting next to people on the covered porch area. Okaaaaay.

He pulled in right behind me - I knew it was him, because he drove a yuppie SUV - just fit. He got out and I instantly recognized him as the father or at least waaaaay older brother of the man I had seen in the picture. Of course I smiled and offered my hand, we exchanged pleasantries and went inside.

Actually, the place was pretty neat. An old warehouse, with nice decor and an awesome bar. We chose a table toward the middle of the room, there were only a few tables occupied so we pretty much had our choice.

The first words out of his mouth as we sat down were, "I'm not sure how to tell you this, and I feel a little stupid, but I forgot my wallet" (Ok Bud, you can forget this date). So I said, "that's ok, I'll just give the bartender my debit card for the tab." We got drinks (soda for me, beer for him) and ordered a light dinner.

We sat there and talked, had fairly pleasant conversation for about two and a half hours - even though I'm sure we both knew it was not a "Love Connection". However, he got up to use the bathroom THREE times. I thought that was a little strange. Before the last time he got up to go, he had been squirming, and acting really uncomfortable. I asked him if he was ok, he told me he had a bad back. Jeez. Ok, third shot at the toilet, squirming with a bad back, this was going nowhere, so I put my coat on while he was gone.

He got back and took the hint, asking me if I was ready to leave. I said, "YES - I'll go take care of our tab." He says, "Ok, but let me write you a check." (Is there no end to this guy's lack of class?) I told him no, not necessary, and stepped up to settle the tab. When I got back, he shoved a folded in half check at me. I told him no again, but he said he insisted.

I stuck it in my pocket.

We left the building, our cars were parked apart. I assumed he would walk me to my car, but was wrong. Instead, he said it was nice meeting me (yeah, right) and headed toward his own car! What a schmuck. I got in my car and headed down the freeway, replaying the events of the night thinking blind dates might not be the ticket (this was my first). All of a sudden I remembered the check in my pocket. I pulled it out, unfolded it and read it.

First of all, he made it out to "Sally" - which is pretty funny in itself. Of course, he didn't know my last name. But then, the amount!! He made the check for TWELVE DOLLARS!! Where in the heck did he come up with TWELVE DOLLARS????????? That wasn't even half the tab. Am I a TWELVE DOLLAR DATE? Or WHAT?!! I started laughing, it was so funny!

The worst part was I had told everyone at work that I was going on a blind date, so of course, they all asked me how it went. All I had to say was, "Well, the first words out of his mouth were "...I forgot my wallet."" By the way, I DID cash the check.

Putting Your Best Feet Forward

By Rebecca

I really DO NOT normally do things like this but I have to tell the story about one of my dates, the worst date of my life!

I met the guy at the laundry mat. I saw him more than one time there and we would always talk while doing the laundry. This was a town of about maybe 1000 people. He finally asked me out for a date so we made the arrangements.

I was all dressed up and ready to go and then he finally showed up 2 hours late! No big deal I thought, it happens. He comes inside and we chat for a bit, I am sitting there waiting for us to leave to go to dinner. Then he blurts out that he was going to run and go pick up something to eat that he would be back! What? He did not just say what I thought he said! Yea he did! He leaves, without asking me what I want; the least he could do was ask I thought!

He then comes back from going to a fast food restaurant and goes and sits at my dining room table and proceeds to eat his dinner. I am watching him in shock when all of the sudden he drops his tomato on the floor, picks it up and eats it! I thought I was going to die! I was in total disbelief!

Then after he ate we watched some movies, I was just being kind, I knew it was the last time I would EVER have anything to do with him again! But wait it gets better, or should I say worse!

He starts telling me that he has this thing for feet. He won't go out with someone if they don't have beautiful feet. What the heck? So I show him my feet for the heck of it, unfortunately I have been told that I have pretty feet. Then of course he goes on and on about how pretty my feet are.

But wait there is more! He tells me that he can't see me again because he isn't physically attracted to me! You know what -- that at that time was the most wonderful words I could ever hear! I swear this date really did happen and to this day I share that story when I hear people talking about worst dates. Does it really get any worse? If it does, I feel very sorry for them.

Paging Mr. Dud

by Karen

The worst date I ever went on was actually the first real date I ever had. I met a really nice guy at a restaurant, he was our waiter. We talked for a little while and we really seemed to click. He had a great personality and sense of humor. He asked for my number so I gave it to him. He called me a few days later and asked me out to dinner. He picked me up and we proceeded to drive to the Cheesecake Factory, a great restaurant.

The conversation in the car was a little awkward but I thought it was just first date jitters. We got to the restaurant and had to wait to be seated. The entire time he never said a word. It was like he was a different person than who I had met at the restaurant where he worked. Being a very outgoing person I thought this was strange but I tried to ask him questions because I thought that he was nervous. He had only one-word answers for every question I asked.

We finally got to sit down and we looked over the menus and ordered. The restaurant is sort of a family place so it gets pretty noisy. He was leaning so far back in his chair that I had to lean over the table in order to even hear him. Then he said that his pager went off and that he had to make a call. So he got up and went to the payphones.

My date returned. His pager went off again, or so he said, I never actually heard it go off. He left the table. He returned and then proceeded to leave again. I wasn't sure if he was bored or if he had stomach issues. When he returned I tried to resume conversation but he again leaned so far back in his chair that I had to shout at him and then I couldn't really hear what his responses were. By this time I was getting really frustrated. I think he even left one more time.

We finished our dinner and were walking out to his car when he realized that he couldn't find it. The restaurant was located in a mall and we ended up walking around the entire area just to find his car. You could cut the tension with a knife! After what seemed like eternity but was actually about 45 minutes we located his car.

Now I know the date was not going well but I thought we might go to a movie or something but no he got on the freeway and took me home. He dropped me off at about 9pm right at the time when my girlfriends were leaving to go out. They were shocked to see me home so early. I ended up just going out with them and having a good time. But to this day it was the weirdest date I ever went on. I never heard from him again.

BAD DATES X's 3

By Cyndi

- 1) One of the worst dates I ever had was a blind date: we went out for dinner (he used a coupon, something I think is FINE after you are married, but seems cheap as a first impression!), then tells me that "I am not actually STILL a dental

hygienist, I WAS, I am now unemployed." Then, we walk through a mall that has beautiful hardwood floors. I said that I liked them. His reply? "Yeah, it's pretty, but, with my luck, I would put something like that in my house and I would spill milk and it would seep down into the cracks and then smell really bad!" Weird.

- 2) Another one was with a computer programmer who had bought a nice condo, but was too cheap to pay for trash pick-up. He bragged that he "just recycles and what can't be recycled, he takes to work to throw away at his office." Alrighty, then.
- 3) On yet another blind date he and I commiserated about our dead parents. He had lost his mother. I had lost my father. We were both near tears several times. He was a wonderfully nice guy. I think we were both just too depressing for each other.

Nice Isn't Enough

By Kim

I was asked out on a date by who I thought was a really nice guy. I was ready and waiting by the door at the time he told me. And I waited and I waited. For an hour. When he did finally pick me up he didn't apologize for being late. He didn't even mention it. I decided to try to enjoy the date anyway.

We got to the movie and as we were standing in line he said to me "Can you just put this on your credit card. I don't really want to spend my cash." So I paid for my ticket and stood by as he paid for his. After the movie he asked if I wanted to go to dinner. Being a glutton for punishment I said yes. We went to a Coney Island. I should have known. When the check came he said, "I'll leave the tip. How much should I leave?" We figured it out; he set it on the table and walked out the door.

I paid for our meals, and ran to the payphone to call a friend to pick me up. I didn't have enough money left to pay for my ride home with him.

Up In Smoke

By Angela

My worst date began when this very cute man asked me out at a wedding reception we were attending. He was a good friend of my childhood friend who was getting married, so I assumed it was safe. We had made plans to go to dinner and a movie the following weekend.

Upon arrival to my house he came to the front door with a tall boy (16oz can of beer) in his hands! OK, I thought to myself, bad first impression. So, we pull out of the driveway after he downs the beer. I offered to drive, but he refused. Needless to say, I had to ask how many he had drunk so that he was OK to drive. So on our way to the restaurant he

lights up a cigarette, and doesn't crack the window. I'm not a smoker, so you can imagine how happy I was. The truck was filling up with smoke so I had to crack my window so I could get a little oxygen.

So while we were at dinner, things started getting a little better, to my surprise. He started asking me questions about myself. I started talking about my family, my 4 sisters, what I like to do in my spare time, etc. etc. Then I had to go and open my mouth. I said, "So, tell me a little bit about yourself." So he did... "Well, my parents have been divorced for quite some time. My mother remarried and I really like my step dad. My step dad, Bernie, is really into racing. So that has gotten me into racing as well. I really enjoy it. See, Bernie is really cool. I live in my parent's pool house and he comes out to the garage and hangs out with my buddy and me all the time. He'll always come out there and smoke weed with us. He's a blast!" HOLD UP!!! Weed???? ACK! I'm sitting across the table thinking to myself..."this stuff ONLY happens to me!"

So dinner is finished. We are a little early for the movie so he says he would like to go across the street to the bookstore to get some racing magazines. "They carry the cool ones with the curse words in it!" Oh yippee, can we, can we? On the way there and to the movie he proceeds to smoke 3 more cigarettes, in a 15-minute period. I'm not a smoker, but that doesn't sound too good.

So, after the movie he takes me home. He pulls in the driveway and proceeds to tell me that he had such a good time and would like to get together again. He says, "Maybe next time we can do something funner." Funner, nice? What would be more fun, going to the pool house and smokin' up a few? Ugh. Suddenly, he has 'the look'. The 'I want to stick my tongue down your throat and taste your insides' look. I say, "Yea, maybe bowling or something like that. Thanks so much for the date! Have a safe drive back!" And I hop out of the car and run for the door. He sits there for a minute and then finally leaves. This would only happen to me.

I Am Not Amused

By Lori

The worst date I have ever been on occurred when I was 17 years old. I was dating a fellow whose parents I had never met. He lived with his grandmother and his parents came to visit about once a month.

I walked into my house one Friday night and I see a 270 lb man covered in tattoos and a stringy-hair, rough looking woman standing in the dining room. Since I come from a conservative Christian home, this is not something I saw everyday. I soon realized these were his parents. They asked my Mom and Dad if I could ride with them to a town about 3 hours away and stay the night so that we could go to the amusement park the next morning. They agreed as long as my boyfriend and I were in separate beds. They agreed to the condition and on our merry way we went.

Once in the car and down the road, his father lights up a joint and his mom pulls out a Ziploc bag full of pills. They began to fight over who would get what and started punching each other. I was freaking out.

Finally, we arrived at the roach infested hotel. As soon as we walk in the room, his father strips down to his underwear. Not a pretty sight!!! His mom then tells us to get ready for bed and she goes and changes into a black teddy (a trashy black teddy). They lay down in the bed together and my boyfriend and I look at each other; both of us remembering what my father's instructions were. We climb into bed - me on one seam under the covers, him on the other seam above the covers. At about 4 o'clock my boyfriend wakes me up and asks if my father is going to kill him. I told him that it was a possibility.

We got up the next morning and went to the amusement park. His dad was in leather, his mom in a halter-top, and to make matters worse, it was raining. We went our separate ways from his parents but said we would meet up with them at lunch. At the gate, we had to get our hand stamped to be able to reenter the park. While in line, his mother started screaming at some 14-year-old girl. She said that the girl had pushed her and caused her to spill her beer. The girl was nowhere near her. I was so humiliated.

We went out to the car at lunch and his mother started stripping in the parking lot. I literally mean stripping down to nothing. She finally got changed and we went back in the park. It was finally time to go home. We got in the car and again they started fighting. Finally my boyfriend tells them to pull the car over and he drives us the rest of the way home. He drops his parents off and tells them to get out and he will deal with them later and takes me home. My parents asked how it went when I got home and I replied, "It was magical, like right out of a movie...a horror movie. Good night."

Failing the Date

By A. Bridges

I had recently divorced and some well-meaning friends planned a blind date for me. My girlfriend, who was about 6 years younger than I, said that the man I'd be meeting was her husband's older brother who had also been recently divorced. I never asked his name and truly wasn't worried about the date because my friends are great people and they were planning to come along.

The plan was to meet him at a restaurant. When we arrived at the restaurant, my date had not arrived, so I used the extra time to head to the ladies room and touch up my hair and makeup to provide an extra good first impression.

On my way to the ladies room, I saw my high school English teacher coming through the entrance. He was my high school crush, as he was only 2 years out of college when he started teaching at our school. I stopped him and chatted, coming to find out he was there to meet someone for dinner. After telling him how great it was to see him, I excused myself and finished my trip to the ladies room.

Certainly, you can guess what's coming next. I returned to the table to be introduced to my date...whom you know by now was my high school English teacher. The rest of the evening was comical and somewhat uncomfortable. I mean, who could get intimate with a person who never gave you better than a C on any test!

On Cue

By Hanna

The worst date I ever had was when the guy I was going on a first date with was so nervous (I am guessing) that he wrote cue cards for himself so that he would remember subjects to talk about while we were eating. He kept "discreetly" looking down at his lap and would ask me a question. This might have been cute except for the fact that he would ask the question and wouldn't wait for me to finish my answer before sneaking a peek at the next question and asking me that one.

Eventually the dinner was over and we went to leave but he had forgotten to put the cards away safely and they spilled all over the floor when he got up. I suppose it was a good idea gone bad.

Out of Gas

By Philip

I had been going out with my girlfriend for a little less than a year. One year for her birthday I had planned to take her to an early movie before taking her home to a surprise birthday party. My car had been in the shop so I borrowed my Dad's Jeep, which to set the stage had very little gas. Needless to say we didn't make it to the movie.

We ended up walking about two miles to a gas station where we called my parents to come pick us up and get some gas for the jeep. After about a 45-minute hike through the summer heat in Houston Texas we made it to the gas station. Then once we made it to the gas station and called my parents they said they would be on their way...

An hour later my dad showed up and picked us up. We got the gas and the jeep and made it to the party on time, bad date but ended up as a great story. We did make the best of it and laughed about it for the rest of our relationship. That was one bad date I'll always be embarrassed about but she really did not mind.

Running Late, Then Away

By Kelly

I have a worst date story that happened to me about 10 months ago. I had just gotten out of a bad relationship and was starting fresh. A friend of my best friend's boyfriend heard that I was single and asked me out on a Saturday night. He called me in the afternoon on

Saturday and asked if he could cook me dinner and have a nice evening at his house. Sounded good to me. I was supposed to bring the drinks.

As always, I am running a half hour late. I get to his house at 7pm and I can already smell the food from outside. As I walk across the front yard, he quickly walks out of the house, says hi, and says he has to get something out of the garage so go in and sit down. It was a very cold hello that he had given me. I thought he was pissed that I was late. After sitting on the couch for about 10 minutes, a girl walks in and introduces herself as "his" girlfriend. She had pulled in front of the house right behind me and I didn't know it. There I was, sitting in the living room waiting for my nice romantic date by myself, wine poured, and the smell of dinner coming from the oven. Of course the ex-girlfriend is there and my date is outside somewhere.

After being there about half an hour, I just left. I could hear screaming coming from the garage. I ended up at the movies alone that night too embarrassed at the time to go home.

Dating Myself

By Linda

I met a man through a friend of mine. The first time we talked, time flew and I thought to myself how amazing is this to have so much in common. After that we decided to exchange numbers and go out on a date. Normal as every first date goes, I spent a little more time than usual making sure I looked just right.

When he came to pick me up he was a complete gentleman. Within ten minutes into the date, his cell phone rings. I at first shrugged it off, thinking it might be something important. The call last about twenty minutes, him on the phone and me sitting next to him parked in front of the place where we had reservations.

Finally off the phone, we get out and notice the time; apparently the call that was so important was just his ex-girlfriend talking about a date she just came from and how horrible it went and this call made us miss our reservations. So we waited for an hour and chatted outside the building and in that time his phone rang four more times.

As nice as this guy was, no one ever told him how to not answer a phone. Once we sat down, it rang two more times through out dinner. One more 20 twenty minute call now with his brother from his fraternity. Throughout this time, I realize I'm on a first date with myself, and my dating is having a love affair with his phone.

Once dinner was finished we left and got in the car and told me we needed to run an errand. Being the polite one and not chewing him out for his behavior, I went along with it and we ended up two blocks from my place, in front a liquor store. He ran inside while I twiddled my thumbs in the car and watched him walk out with a case of beer. A little confused I asked what that was for. His reply: "My little bro wanted to drink tonight and since I was out I told him I'd pick up a case." I nodded and told him to turn down the street. He did and we ended up at my place. He asked if something was wrong and while

I was getting out of the car, I told him I had to go. He told me he had a great time and how he wanted to go out again, my reply: "Don't call me, I'll call you."

DATE COUPONS

Print out the coupons on the following pages and present one or all of them to your sweetheart to let him or her pick a future creative date. Find some nice stationary or cardstock on which you can print the coupons.

To: _____

Redeem this coupon for a picnic with your sweetheart, followed by a game of badminton or croquet.

Signed _____ Date: _____

To: _____

Redeem this coupon for dinner in bed with your beloved

Signed: _____ Date: _____

To: _____

Redeem this coupon for a 30-minute back and/or foot massage

Signed: _____ Date: _____

To: _____

Redeem this coupon for an evening of soda pop, popcorn and the movie rental of your choice

Signed: _____ Date: _____

To: _____

Redeem this coupon for an afternoon of washing your car with me

Signed: _____ Date: _____

To: _____

Redeem this coupon for a game of miniature golf

Signed: _____ Date: _____

To: _____

Redeem this coupon for a weekend at the beach or mountains

Signed: _____ Date: _____

To: _____

Redeem this coupon for a day trip to a nearby town

Signed: _____ Date: _____

To: _____

Redeem this coupon for a picnic in the living room – you choose the menu

Signed: _____ Date: _____

To: _____

Redeem this coupon for a take out dinner eaten over candlelight

Signed: _____ Date: _____

To: _____

Redeem this coupon for a fruit picking date at a nearby orchard or berry patch

Signed: _____ Date: _____

To: _____

Redeem this coupon for some homemade ice cream

Signed: _____ Date: _____

To: _____

Redeem this coupon for a 1-hour call from me when I am out of town

Signed: _____ Date: _____

To: _____

Redeem this coupon for your favorite dessert at home or in a restaurant of your choice

Signed: _____ Date: _____

To: _____

Redeem this coupon for 20 minutes of slow dancing in our living room

Signed: _____ Date: _____

To: _____

Redeem this coupon for a tour of a nearby historic home or property

Signed: _____ Date: _____

To: _____

Redeem this coupon for an afternoon of feeding ducks at the park

Signed: _____ Date: _____

To: _____

Redeem this coupon for a 1-hour bike ride

Signed: _____ Date: _____

To: _____

Redeem this coupon for a 30-minute reading of love poetry to you, in bed, on the phone or elsewhere

Signed: _____ Date: _____

To: _____

Redeem this coupon for an evening at a nearby drive-in theatre

Signed: _____ Date: _____

To: _____

Redeem this coupon for _____

Signed: _____ Date: _____

To: _____

Redeem this coupon for _____

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