

Valentine's Day

By Erin Wold

the Budget Friendly Way

"It's the thought that counts." should be the mantra of Valentine's Day. My mom always had a special way of making Valentine's Day memorable. It was never about lavish plans or grandiose displays of affection. A simple card and a hug in the morning when we woke up was all it took to make the day special. Of course, the budget friendly dollar store decorations strung from the sliding glass door and bright red balloons helped a bit too. Mom always prepared a simple yet special dinner, capped off by a cherry upside down cake. It was about the family, and that was enough.

Valentine's Day is a holiday that invites people to go overboard with displays of love and affection. It's one of those holidays destined to be compared between friends and coworkers. So, like with Christmas, the bank account tends to take a little hit. But, here are some ways to avoid the financial crunch and still create a memorable Valentine's Day.

Get Carded

Cards are the simplest way to say "I love you". They come in all shapes, sizes and sentiments from funny to romantic. Electronic or paper, cards are a great way to celebrate the day. Don't forget the boxes of valentines you buy for the kids. They can be a funny and budget friendly option for the day. It's hard not to smile when you see a google-eyed puppy valentine on your desk...right?

Finding Free-dom

I know Valentine's Day can be difficult if you have children. It's hard to find sitters so you can have that much needed together time with your spouse or significant other. You can try arranging for the kids to spend time with Grandma and Grandpa. Or you may have a single friend who'll help you out...for free.

Home is Where the ♥ Is

A Family Valentine's Day can be a fun way to celebrate. After all, who loves you more? Spending some quality time with them can be a nice break. Create a craft, make cookies, or leave each other a little note. Dollar store decorations and a cherry upside down cake always worked for my family and the bank account.

When a Love is Away

When a loved one is away on Valentine's Day, you can still celebrate. A special card or letter goes a long way. Sending favorite sweets and candy is another suggestion. You just have to think ahead. Most mail takes 7-14 days to reach an overseas location. It may be a little more if you send a package.

Get the kids involved too! Get some extra Valentines and have the kids fill them in. They guarantee a good laugh and an opportunity to spread the Valentine spirit to Soldiers who may not have someone.

Enchanting Evening

If you're looking to save a little by staying in with your sweetie, it doesn't take a fortune to create a romantic mood. Candles and flowers are inexpensive ways to set a romantic mood. You can also create a special playlist on your music player and settle down for some time together. As far as your menu goes, sharing a favorite meal together with some choice beverages goes a long way. Be creative...but budget conscious.

Out and About

Do you want to "get away"? A romantic evening walk is a good way to celebrate Valentine's Day if you're on a budget. Make plans with your sweetie to swing out to Smith Lake for the Sweetheart Get-a-way on

February 13-14. More information will be available on the website fortbraggmwr.com.

Still looking for that special someone? The Fort Bragg Better Opportunities for Single Soldiers (BOSS) Team is hosting their first annual Speed Dating event on February 5. With Valentine's Day right around the corner, this event is a perfect opportunity to meet your special someone. The event begins at 7 p.m. at Sports USA. There is a \$5 cover charge that includes food, fun and the chance to win great prizes. Pre-registration is required. Register online at fortbraggmwr.com or by calling 396-7751.

Being thoughtful can really count on Valentine's Day. Memorable doesn't have to mean expensive. So, whether you choose to make it a homemade holiday or something a little more extravagant, it doesn't need to break your bank account.

Activity

Family Photo Frame

You will need:

- 1 plain white or black photo frame or cardstock to cut out a frame
- One special family photo and special quotes
- Fun markers or gel pens (to write on frame)

Help from the kids!

Instructions:

Make a frame for your photo out of the cardstock and cut it out (if necessary). Using your selected quotes, decorate the frame. Let the kids add their special touches too!
Place your photo in the completed frame and mail it to your loved one.

