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Spend the Holiday Outdoors With Your Partner

A VALENTINE'S ADVENTURE

A **romantic adventure** is one of the best ways to celebrate Valentine's Day. Why spend the day cooped up inside when you can share the joys of the great outdoors with that special someone in your life? Create a date that is out of the ordinary to leave a lasting impression on your soulmate.

A **Valentine's picnic** is the perfect way to express affection for your significant other. Anyone can book a reservation at the trendiest restaurant in town, but preparing a picnic full of your date's favorite foods shows how much you cherish them. Search out a quiet place with a majestic view to set up your feast and spend the evening in each other's arms.

If you and your Valentine happen to be ardent explorers of the outdoors, a **romantic hike** will let you spend some intimate time together. Trekking through the woods, desert, or plains while holding hands will provide you ample time to enjoy some serenity and closeness. Try to plan the hike so that it concludes with a beautiful view — a great place for a photo or a Valentine's kiss.

Maybe you want to go all out by **renting a secluded cabin or bungalow**. Sometimes the best way to celebrate

Valentine's Day is to escape the monotony of everyday life with the person most important to you. Airbnb is a great resource for finding a private rental to make the evening extra special.

Make Valentine's Day surprising and exciting by traveling off the beaten path this year. Getting away from the distractions to focus solely on each other is bound to engender passion and warmth between you and the one you love. It certainly beats a box of chocolates and a card!



HAPPY VALENTINE'S DAY!



16 Years With My Husband

My husband, Josh, and I have been together for 16 years — 17 this July. Valentine's Day is this month, and I've been thinking back about our wonderful relationship lately. We've been through good and bad times together, staying supportive and caring through illness, law school, professional careers, and the start of a family. He's been an amazing, supportive partner, and I feel so grateful to have him in my life.

"Pulling off that wedding was like orchestrating a military operation."

We first met on the Fourth of July in 2000. I was living in the DC area and went out with a large group of friends to watch the fireworks from the airport. We knew that we'd get a better, less crowded view than if we'd gone to the Mall instead. Josh and I were in the front, walking together and talking.

I thought he was cute, but I didn't think we'd date for religious reasons. You see, at the time, I was still a Christian and he was Jewish (I converted later). Belonging to different religions had been an issue in past relationships. For his part, Josh didn't realize Puerto Rico was part of the United States and wanted to know if I needed a green card.

It turned out we were both wrong — Josh didn't care that I hadn't been born a Jew, and I explained to him that Puerto Rico was an American territory. Despite the confusion, we *did* hit it off, and two days later, we went out. Within a few weeks, I knew that we were

going to be married — it was just a feeling I had. Misunderstandings about my home aside, Josh was warm and intelligent and fun to spend time with.

We still danced around each other, like all young couples do. The first time we said that we loved each other was in a coffee shop in DC, after half an hour of pretending to study and trying to figure out who was going to say it first. But we knew what really mattered, and when my mom's health started to deteriorate in late 2002, we realized it was time to get married so she could be involved in the planning and in the wedding ceremony.

Pulling off that wedding was like orchestrating a military operation. Between mom's health, my graduation from law school, studying for the bar, and the various holidays, we narrowed down the possible wedding date to one weekend in April. In fact, we booked the venue before we were technically engaged — there was not room for error!

We celebrate that date every April and look back with fondness each Independence Day. I've loved all the years with Josh, and this Valentine's Day, I look forward to many more years to come.

Wishing you the best,

- Melina Pérez Halpern



EVERYONE'S A POET

HOSTING A READING ON A WINTER'S NIGHT

By February, it's easy to tell winter is wearing out its welcome. The holidays have come and gone, and most of us are ready for spring. If you have run out of fun cold-weather activities to enjoy with your family, it may be time to get the mind racing with a more nontraditional activity. One fun and educational way to spend an evening is to host a family poetry reading.

A family poetry night transforms reading from a solitary pursuit into a communal spectacle. Don't hesitate to go all out and craft a stage, set up lights, and maybe even record the event. Creating an immersive atmosphere will go a long way in making the activity special and memorable.

Writing poems before the reading can be a rewarding pursuit on its own. Lots of poetic forms — like limericks, acrostics, and haikus — are easy for children to

comprehend, and they're fun to craft. Writing and reading poems allows children the opportunity to express their creativity.

Parents should participate in the readings as well. Along with writing poems alongside your children, a great idea is to sprinkle famous children's poems throughout the event. Some amazing children's poets include Shel Silverstein, A.A. Milne, and Edward Lear.

Poetry readings provide excellent educational opportunities, too. Jim Trelease, author of "The Read-Aloud Handbook," notes that reading aloud "conditions the child to associate reading with pleasure, creates background knowledge, and builds 'book' vocabulary." A poetry event also affords children the opportunity to practice public speaking in a safe space, which builds confidence.

That late winter malaise is no excuse for spending another night in front of the

TV. Instead, bring your family together through the magic of poetry. Who knows? You might discover that you have some talented writers living under your roof.



HOW A CHANCE CONVERSATION TURNED INTO LIFE AND LOVE



Two years ago, Christopher Dempsey of Frankfort, Illinois, overheard the most important conversation of his life. It also happened to be the most important conversation in another individual's life — Heather Krueger.

Christopher was relaxing in the break room at work when he caught part of the conversation. A co-worker mentioned a relative was in need of a liver transplant. The co-worker's cousin, Heather, had stage 4 liver disease. Her doctors said she had a 50 percent chance of making it through the following two months. Time was of the essence.

Wanting to make a difference, Christopher decided to get tested and find out if he was a match for Heather. "I just thought to myself," Christopher said, "I would want someone to help me or my family in that situation." The test came back. He was a match.

Shortly after the confirmation came in, Christopher called Heather to break the news. It wasn't long until the two met, went out for lunch, and started to get to know

one another. As the surgery drew near, they spent more and more time together.

The pair even did some fundraising work together. "We were going out looking for donations for a benefit, and I just started thinking," Christopher said, "She's a really nice girl. She is somebody I would like to get to know."

Then, about a month after they had first met, they were in the operating room. The transplant was a success.

After the transplant, it turned out the spark was mutual. Christopher and Heather were in love — and it all began with a chance conversation, which turned out to be an incredible journey. In November 2015, Christopher proposed to Heather, and in October 2016, they were married.

BUILDING A BETTER BRAIN

How Exercise Stimulates Your Mind

When you exercise, you're working more than just a specific muscle. Going for a run not only stretches your legs, but it pushes your cardiovascular output and expands your lung capacity. Exercising has a full-body effect. But did you know that exercising works more than just that? Working out also stimulates your brain.



Your Happiness According to John Ratey, M.D., an associate clinical professor of psychiatry at Harvard Medical School, when you exercise, your body produces endorphins and happiness-inducing chemicals, which boost your mood. On top of that, new research from the New England Journal of Medicine suggests that working out sparks production of myokines — a protein that helps protect your brain from stress-induced depression.

Your Intelligence According to Dr. Ratey, when you work out, your body strengthens all parts of your brain tissue, including gray matter. This tissue is key to processing information, and the more of it you have, the easier it is for you to learn. It also makes your brain more resistant to stress and aging.

Your Memory Exercising also boosts your memory. By working out, you increase the blood flow to your brain. This is crucial because, according to Alfonso Alfini Ph.D., research has linked less blood flow to mild cognitive impairment and Alzheimer's disease. When you exercise, you also produce more cathepsin B, a protein linked to improving your memory.

Your brain is not like the other muscles in your body — in fact, your brain isn't a muscle at all — and there isn't a machine in the gym specifically designed for your brain. In order to maintain a proper, homeostatic environment in your body, from your head to your toes, utilize a consistent workout regimen and a proper diet. Help your brain maintain your happiness.

BUTTER COOKIES



Ingredients

- 2/3 cup sugar
- 1 egg yoke
- 1 1/2 sticks butter
- 1 cup flour
- 7 tablespoons strawberry jam

Directions

1. Cut the butter with the flour until the mixture resembles large bread crumbs.
2. Add the sugar and egg yolk.
3. Knead to form a large ball, wrap in plastic wrap, and cool for 30 minutes.
4. Preheat the oven to 350 F.
5. Use a roller to achieve a thickness of 1/8 inch. Cut 40 biscuits with a cookie cutter in the shape of a heart, and cut the center of each heart with a smaller cookie cutter.
6. Cover 2 cookie trays with waxed paper and place the cookies on it. Bake for 12 minutes or until they are slightly golden.
7. Remove cookies from the oven, spread jam on half of the biscuits, and cover with the other part to form a sandwich.

PUZZLE YOUR BRAIN BREAK CORNER

Sudoku Rules:

- Use numbers 1-9 only.
- The full grid is 9x9 cells.
- The full grid is broken into 9 regions, 3x3 cells each.
- Each region can contain only one of each number 1-9.
- Each cell can contain only one number.
- Each row and column should contain only one of each number, 1-9.

4	5		3	8		9	6	
8				4		2		
9	1	2			8			
1	7				6	2		
						5		
2	6			7		1	8	
1	4	5		3	9			
				5		3	9	
9								6

