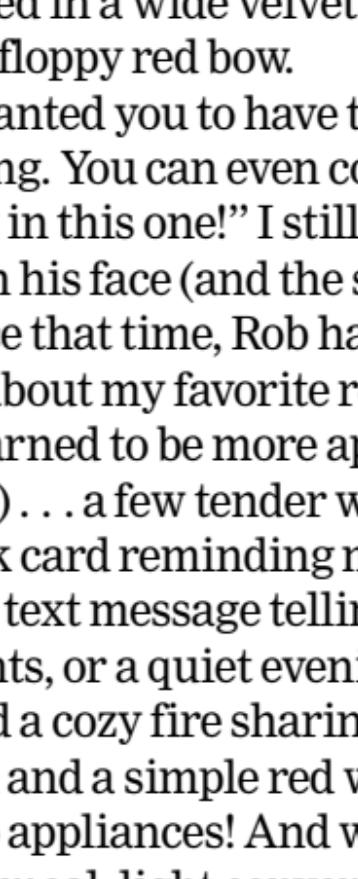


INTIMACY, SEX & RELATIONSHIP

For Your Valentine, Skip The Nightie Or Microwave



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On our first Valentine's Day (over two decades ago) my husband, Rob, bought me a "very special" gift. "You're going to love this," he assured me, barely able to contain his enthusiasm as he led me down the staircase blindfolded.

I didn't know what to expect. As he walked me into the kitchen, I became curious. "Voilà!" he exclaimed, as he uncovered my eyes with a flourish. There, before me on the kitchen counter, was the biggest darn microwave I'd ever seen — wrapped in a wide velvet ribbon topped with a floppy red bow.

"I wanted you to have the best," he said beaming. You can even cook a full-sized turkey in this one!" I still remember the look on his face (and the shock on mine).

Since that time, Rob has learned much more about my favorite romantic gifts (and I've learned to be more appreciative of his efforts) . . . a few tender words scribbled on a blank card reminding me of his love, a caring text message telling me I'm in his thoughts, or a quiet evening together around a cozy fire sharing some take-out Italian and a simple red wine. No fanfare, and no appliances! And what pleases him? A nice meal, light conversation and a neck massage.

In these tight times of economizing, you don't have to splurge on something showy to impress the one you love on Valentine's Day. Just pay attention to what makes them happy. Instead of buying an enormous box of chocolates or two dozen long-stemmed roses, consider one yummy strawberry dipped in dark chocolate or a perfect red rose.

Whatever you do, don't buy your partner a stripper pole with an instructional DVD or a flimsy negligee (unless it's specifically on their wish list). You might like the thought of seeing her in it, but it will probably wind up in the back of the bureau with all the other "great ideas."

Lingerie is a risky gift. It's hard to get it right. Size is the first challenge. If it's too small, you'll never see it on her, and if it's too large, you're going to be in even bigger trouble (You think she's what size??) If you insist on buying her a nightie, I suggest you go shopping together. You might not like her final selection, but you'll have a better chance she'll actually enjoy wearing it — and isn't that the idea (or one of them)?

And what about a gift for him? Ask him to give you a list of six wishes (make sure half of them aren't R- or X-rated), and grant at least one of them. Don't be surprised if he simply wants a quiet evening alone with you NOT talking about kids, money or problems.

Isn't it wonderful that we have at least one special day in the year devoted to love and romance? This year, maybe we can take a lesson from our newly elected president and first lady. "At Last" was not only their song selection for their first dance but also what many of us felt as we witnessed their warmth, love and spontaneity. As they gazed into one another's eyes and embraced tenderly, they graciously permitted millions of us to share in their intimacy with pride and admiration.

Happy Valentine's Day to each of you!

"What I realize as I get older is that Michelle is less concerned about me giving her flowers than she is that I'm doing things that are hard for me . . . carving out time. That to her is proof, evidence that I'm thinking about her. She appreciates the flowers, but to her, romance is that I'm actually paying attention to things that she cares about, and time is always an important factor."

— Barack Obama, 2007

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