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Frugal Ways To Show Your Love

By Brandie Valenzuela

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At one time, I would have never wanted to share my frugal ideas for showing love to those around you. My reason for keeping it to myself? At one time I thought that no one would be interested. After all, we were the only couple not buying each other expensive gifts, jewelry, roses, and more, right? Reality check! I have grown up a lot over these last 10 years and I have learned that I am not the only one clipping coupons and cutting my children's hair myself. There are lots of other families out there just like my husband and I, who have to watch our spending.

Without the necessary money to buy costly gifts for anniversaries, birthdays, holidays, or other special occasions, we have been very committed to doing things that were wonderful, yet inexpensive. Over the years, I have learned that these creative ideas are what truly matters and they have made our years together, lots of fun.

Here I have compiled my ideas here to share them with you:

PILL BOTTLE: This is a cute idea for your spouse or other adult. Take an empty pain reliever or prescription bottle and soak it in hot water to remove the label. After you remove the label, design your own label on paper, with something like the following: "Love Pills" – take one as needed. Then take strips of paper and write down the things you are willing to do for your loved one. Some ideas are: foot massage, back massage, your favorite pie, your favorite cookies, you choose the movie we see, etc... Take each strip and wad it into a little ball and place them in the bottle.

LOVE SONGS: This next idea I did before we had internet access, so today it would be even easier to do this. Frame the lyrics to your wedding song or other love song. The internet has several sites that list song lyrics, so just type "song lyrics" into a search engine. Print up the lyrics in a nice font, and frame.

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CANDLELIGHT DINNER: When you are not able to go out to an expensive restaurant for dinner, have it at home. Wait to eat until after the children are in bed, set your dining room table nicely with a tablecloth, candles and play soft music. Enjoy a nice dinner...preferably one that you don't usually have, and one that you and your spouse consider to be special.

SWAP CHILD CARE: If you do want prefer to go out for your special day, but find yourself having a hard time paying for dinner *and* childcare, ask a friend to swap child care with you.

CREATE A LOVE TREE: Find a branch outside that has several smaller branches coming off of it and place the branch standing up in a pot of soil, or even a coffee can filled with dirt would work. Cut out an assortment of hearts from different colored cardstock or construction paper and string each one with ribbon. Then have each member of your family write the things that they love on the hearts (one "love" per heart) and hang them on the tree. You can name just about anything you love: a beloved pet, grandma, sunsets, or even ice cream! If you want to create this tree as a gift for someone, write things on the hearts that you love about that person or couple.

RUN THROUGH A MAZE: If you have a gift for someone in your home, make them go through a maze of clues to get to their surprise. At the first "stop" (which should be a place in your home that this person is likely to go to), you should have a little poem of sorts which will tell them to go to the next spot in your home, and so on. At each point in your home have something telling your loved one where to go next until the end which of course will end up being their gift. I had a friend who did this for her husbands birthday. She placed his first note on the toilet since that was the first place he went to when he got home from work, and each note she cleverly told him where to go next in his home. After going from room to room, he came to the end which was a CD that he had wanted.

HEART SHAPED CAKE: If you don't have a heart shaped cake pans, don't despair. Create your own heart-shaped cake by baking one layer in an 8-in round pan, and one layer in an 8-in square pan. Cut the circle in half and place the cut side of the halves against two adjoining side of the square to form a heart. Frost and decorate at desired.

HEART SHAPED COOKIE POPS: Bake up some heart shaped sugar cookies, but insert a popsicle stick near the point of the stick and bake as usual. Decorate.

FLOWERPOTS: Take flat bottomed ice cream cups and place them on a cookie sheet or in a muffin tin (you can wrap bottoms of cones with crumbled up foil to make them more sturdy). Fill cones with 1/3 cup brownie batter and bake 35-40 minutes or until tops are puffed up and cracked. After brownie cones are cooled insert a fake rose in the center. You can also create a flower out of construction paper and secured it on a popsicle stick, and then insert this into the center of the puffed up brownie.

HEART SHAPED CUPCAKES: Prepare you favorite cake mix according to the directions on the box. Line your muffin pans with paper baking cups and fill each cup 1/2 full of batter. Place a marble in each muffin cup....between the paper liner and the pan, which will create the heart shape. Add additional batter as needed so that cups are about 2/3 full. Bake as directed.

GIFT COUPONS: We have all heard of the idea of creating coupons which give of ourselves, but have

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you ever given your kids some? Why not create a coupon book for your child that has coupons such as: your choice of dessert, kids video rental, lunch out with mom (or dad), etc.

PLANT A TREE: Give a gift that will grow! Without your loved one knowing, plant a tree in your yard. You may also want to make a small yard sign that will sit near the tree and that says who the tree was planted for, and the date.

PROGRESSIVE DINNER: Call up two other couples and arrange a progressive dinner. Everyone will go to the first couple's home and enjoy some appetizers, at the next home you will go for the dinner, and at the last home, you will enjoy dessert. After your progressive dinner, you may want to go out together to a movie or some dancing.

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Brandie Valenzuela is married and a mother of three children. If you like this article, be sure to check out her other website, Family First at:

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be sure to sign up for her FREE weekly newsletter devoted to your and your family and her FREE

weekly ezine called Daily Holiday Recipe!

Book Review: "Frugal Living for Dummies"

By Deborah Shelton

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Book Review: "Frugal Living for Dummies"

Reviewed by Deborah Shelton

"Frugal Living for Dummies"

by Deborah Taylor-Hough

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Whatever your reason for wanting to save money (job loss, suddenly single-income, another child on the way, rising college tuition costs), arm yourself with Frugal Living for Dummies for super saving success.

This book details so much more than coupon-clipping. Some of the chapter topics include ideas for frugal family fun, thrifty cooking tips, ways to cut utility bills, setting a budget and lots of inexpensive gift ideas. And that's just the beginning! Frugal Living also provides icons in the margins that alert readers to important reminders, tips, super savers, special warnings, great ideas and handy checklists.

Each section is jam-packed with cost-cutting ideas for baby showers, back-to-school needs, dinner parties, gift giving, auto maintenance, home cleaning, dining out, laundry, family trips.... Basically, Deborah Taylor-Hough offers money-saving solutions for every aspect of your life.

Frugal Living for Dummies is an essential reference for your family collection. This book will make a practical and thoughtful gift for young couples just starting their lives together, college students on their own for the first time, single-income families, new parents, and anyone who needs

proven ways for cutting costs while keeping their sanity.

A must-have guidebook for the novice penny pincher as well as the seasoned dollar stretcher.

About the Reviewer: Deborah Shelton is a mother, freelance writer, and author of the brand new book, "The Five Minute Parent: Fun & Fast Activities for You and Your Little Ones." Visit Deborah's website for more family-friendly ideas: <http://www.fiveminuteparent.com>

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