

Anna: Hallmark who? Making your Valentine's Day unique. This is Stay Happily Married episode #235.

Announcer: Welcome to Stay Happily Married, your source for weekly updates on the latest tips and advice to build a happy and healthy marriage.

Anna: I'm Anna Riley and I'm your host today. Welcome to the show. Trying to avoid the same old Valentine's Day of flowers, cards, and chocolate? Look no further. Today, we'll share some fun and unique ideas. As Valentine's Day rolls around, many people begin to feel pressure to make the day special for their significant other. With life being so busy, however, a lot of couples wind up defaulting to something nice, yes, but predictable, like a nice romantic card, dinner out, maybe some flowers and, of course, chocolate.

While a night out like that is perfectly acceptable, it tends to be a bit 'been there, done that.' The good news is you can have a really fun and fulfilling Valentine's Day that's unique and fresh without breaking the bank or going crazy trying to plan something. If you're feeling frustrated or anxious about creating the perfect Valentine's Day, take some time to join us today. Our guest is Dr. Tina Lepage from Lepage Associates and she's here to share some new, exciting ideas for making the day perfect and stress-free.

Tina says there are many options that will change the pace of it and give couples a reason to look forward to Valentine's Day rather than dread it. Welcome to the show, Tina! I'm so glad you could be with us today.

Tina: Thanks, Anna.

Anna: So, why do you think that people get so stressed about Valentine's Day in the first place?

Tina: Well, there's so much pressure around it and emphasis put on it. It's like a lot of our holidays, I guess. They're kind of everywhere you look around and there's also the added piece to it of there's somebody you care about and somebody you love and that's a certain pressure you might put on yourself to want to make everything perfect and make it really special for them.

Anna: Yeah, definitely. So, let's break it down a little bit, maybe. What could be the first change in someone's Valentine's Day plans?

Tina: Well, what I like to have people think about doing is, first of all, decide between three different broad areas and that way they don't have to drive themselves crazy looking at too many options because that's definitely something people do. They look at tons of options and get really stressed out, so I say think about whether you want to do something together, whether you want to maybe make something for the person which can be really special, or whether you're going to buy them a

gift and so once you choose one of those three, you narrow it down and get rid of some stress right off the top.

Anna: Okay, all right. That makes sense. So what are some fun activities that couples can do together instead of, say, the typical dinner and a movie?

Tina: Yeah, I think there are different things. Some of them are similar to the dinner piece in that you can make it sort of a nicer dinner. There are some places where you can do sort of a dinner at a chef's table somewhere which is a little extra special. Some people think maybe hiring a limo to take them to different restaurants for maybe a dessert tour, something like that can be fun. Certainly, going to a hotel for the evening and having a sitter so that you can stay overnight somewhere else.

And have the whole night to be romantic or intimate without children and such around and for people who have kids, it's often nice to have a whole night away rather than just a couple of hours away and sometimes you can jazz that up with a sexy board game. There are actually some board games made for couples and intimacy so stuff like that that you can kind of do together is always nice.

Anna: Right, definitely. Just thinking of something a little outside the box, I guess.

Tina: Yeah. It could even be a day hiking or a day doing something that you know your partner really, really enjoys doing. Sometimes it's nice to do something for them that they love that you don't necessarily love, like if they love to go to the symphony and you don't love it, that's an extra special gift if you do that for them.

Anna: Right. So, what is it that you think makes these things really special and unique for couples?

Tina: I think often times people are looking for things they don't do that often and so that makes it kind of special and unique. So if you think about the idea of, let's say, a board game for couples around intimacy, most people are not doing that in their everyday life and it's not even expensive but it can be kind of fun so I think that's what makes it nice. It's fun, it's a little bit of a new surprise or adventure for people to share.

Anna: Okay, yeah, for sure. If we're going to talk about doing things together like you said pick one of those kind of three areas to go with, so what if they were going to do something together? Are there things like specific events in our area that maybe they could do?

Tina: Yeah, definitely. There are specific events around this holiday which can be a lot of fun for people and I'll kind of go through a few of them and then I think people who are listening, they can always go back to the website to sort of get a full list of these things so people don't have to feel like they have to write them down, but

there are some things. The Capital Area Transit actually has what they call a Love Bus event on Valentine's Day and they take people on kind of a date around downtown, they give you free gifts, candy, flowers, coupons to local restaurants, that kind of thing. There are actually singing groups that serenade them along the way, so that's kind of a fun. Isn't that interesting?

Anna: Yeah, that is interesting.

Tina: Yeah, it's kind of fun that people can do. The North Carolina Comedy Arts Festival runs from February 2nd to the 20th, so certainly taking in a comedy show together can be tons of fun. There is a special showing of *Gone with the Wind* which is the typical romantic movie that's done at the Varsity Theater. The [Care Eclairs 00:06:25] do a bit called *Love, Bits, and Bites* and you kind of go to see that and they call it delicious entertainment. So there are sweets and treats and stuff that are served during the event. So there's definitely that.

I think we live in a day and age where you can kind of Google and find so many things that are going on and, as you can see, some of these you could get specifically for February 14th but even if you don't get something specific to that date, obviously a gift of tickets to an event or something like that is also a great Valentine's Day present.

Anna: Right, yeah. I feel it doesn't exactly have to be on Valentine's Day. If you have a plan to do it the next week or something like that, it's always acceptable.

Tina: Yeah, absolutely. You can give the gift on Valentine's Day and that's still a lot of fun.

Anna: Yeah, definitely. So let's talk about gifts. Instead of the typical maybe jewelry or flowers or things like that, what are some things that people can make for each other that would be cool and unique?

Tina: Sure. Well, for people out there who are good at making things, certainly people love it when they get something made, that can be really special, and some of these I will point out as I'm going through, too. There are some things now where if you're not crafty and you can't make this type of thing, you can go online and find some place that you can have it done, so you can still kind of have things made that way.

So one fun thing to do is create a clue hunt for your loved one that leads them to a gift eventually and that can be a lot of fun. You can remove the printed paper from under the plastic of a Scrabble game and you replace it with tiny photos of you and your loved ones, family members, kids, pets, whatever you adore and want to have there--

Anna: Aw, that's a great idea!

Tina: Yeah, that's a nice gift. So, this one I have never done but I really love it so I think I'm going to try it. I hope it works. I hope it works as well as it says here but, apparently, if you wrap a fortune cookie in a damp paper towel and heat it for about 15 to 40 seconds, you can unfold the fortune cookie and you can take out the paper that's in there and you can slip in your own fortune sentiment. You could even put diamond earrings in there if you wanted to but the point is you can kind of pick out whatever you want and put your own thing inside the fortune, which I think is kind of cool.

Anna: That is cool. I guess you would then fold it back up and it'll kind of harden back up, I guess?

Tina: Right, it'll just get hard again and you would give it to the person and they'll open it thinking it'll just be a typical fortune cookie.

Anna: That's awesome.

Tina: Yeah, I think that sounds kind of fun. A lot of people are familiar with things you can do through Shutterfly nowadays or other online places nowadays for calendars. For books, you can create books with personal photographs. You can create calendars, that kind of thing for one another which I think are really nice. I'm looking at my calendar in my office as we're talking thinking "Wow, it's just a general calendar and I'd love to have one of my husband and my daughter. That would be great. It'd be nicer to look at."

This next one a friend actually did for me once as a birthday gift but I thought this is just good for any people who care about each other but, in any case, the idea is to fill a jar with tiny slips of paper that you write whatever types of things you want on them. You can write what you like about the person. You can write special jokes on there that are shared sort of things you'd both understand a reference to, kind of fun things you've done together.

But the idea is it's just sort of this nice little gift and they open these scraps of paper and it's kind of very personal little sentiments that you've given to the person.

Anna: Okay, that's cool. I like that idea.

Tina: Yeah. What else we can do - I think those are some good things. People who bake will do nice things with baking for one another which can be nice, too, and then making a mix CD for somebody. I've got to say, my daughter got one in the mail the other day from an old babysitter of hers and I thought, "There's just nothing better in the world than a mix CD."

Anna: Oh, yeah. True. With all your favorite songs? Right.

Tina: Right, absolutely. It's a personal gift and then every time you listen to it you'll also think about the person who made it for you which is just wonderful.

Anna: Right, definitely. So I guess a lot of people kind of, well, maybe not, but the homemade gifts can often be overlooked but sometimes I feel they are some of the best and most thoughtful gifts, really.

Tina: Absolutely. I think people really, really love those kinds of gifts. You can forget about them but, like I said, if I think about some of the gifts that I've liked the best, they certainly have been things like little notes or the mix CD or just leaving a little note on the mirror that says "I love you," before I go to work in the morning. Those are the things that are really special.

Anna: Right, definitely. So what about the card that you give? How important is the card and what it says or how much you spend on it, I guess?

Tina: Right. Well, it's probably not the card itself that's the most important but it's more sort of what you write inside of the card and so, again, you can make your own card, you can write something in the card, but I think people are looking for that little extra instead of just getting the card and putting "love, whoever," do you put like two or three sentences about what you really appreciate about this person. Those are the kind of things that give the person that warm, fuzzy feeling.

Anna: Yeah, definitely. Definitely write in the card. I actually got a blank card one time. I'm not kidding. I got a blank card! And I was just like, "Really? Hmm. This is interesting."

Tina: Yes, writing in the card is good and gift-giving is good, too. That was sort of the third thing: the fact you do something, make something, or give a gift. Giving a gift can certainly be terrific, especially if you've really figured out what the person might like. Sometimes, spouses or people in relationships have a hard time figuring that out for one another but often times if you ask that person's best friend, they will know. So, oddly enough, sometimes the spouse or the lover of the other person in life doesn't quite know what that person would really like but if you ask their best friend, that person will say, "Oh, she would love this," or "he would like that."

Anna: Yeah, definitely. So, Tina, is there anything else that you'd like to share about Valentine's Day?

Tina: Another final thought would just be kind of saying not to have it be quite so typical and predictable with flowers and chocolate and you even mentioned jewelry and then I was thinking we should probably say out loud that women do like those things, too.

Anna: Oh, right. Of course, of course.

Tina: Talking about the female side, we probably have some listeners out there going, "No, don't tell him no flowers and no jewelry!"

Anna: Right. That is true.

Tina: All of those things are lovely. The point is just spending some special time together, saying some nice things to each other, having a little bit of fun together and it is always neat if you can come up with maybe not every year you're looking to do all of these things that are sort of off the beaten path but every few years if you do something that mixes it up a little bit, I think that can be a lot of fun in a relationship.

Anna: Oh, absolutely. Well, I'm so glad that you were talking with us today about all these different options and I want all the listeners to know we're going to have all those up on the show notes so they can access all that information and see all those things we were talking about today so that will be good.

Tina: Great! Yeah.

Anna: Well, Tina, thank you so much for talking with us and being on the show today.

Tina: Sure. Thanks for having me.

Anna: To find out more about Tina and her practice, Lepage Associates, you can visit their website at www.lepageassociates.com. That's L-E-P-A-G-E Associates.com or you can call 919-572-0000 for an appointment. Thank you so much for joining us today and I hope you'll join us again next week. For more information about this show and future episodes, visit us at stayhappilymarried.com. I'm Anna Riley. Until next time, stay happily married and happy Valentine's Day!

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