



Time

Dating Your Husband

Joan Indiana Rigdon, 06.11.09, 5:10 PM ET

Date night doesn't come cheap--or easy.

Ask White House Social Secretary Desiree Rogers. Well, you could ask, but neither Rogers nor the Obamas are telling how much it cost the couple to fly to New York City earlier this month for a one-star Michelin dinner and a Broadway show.

Let's just say that even if the Secret Service had allowed them to fly commercial (which they didn't), and even if you factor out the cost of the security detail (which you can't), the date part of their date, which the Obamas personally paid for, cost way more than average. For the record, they probably paid somewhere north of \$300 for their night out--about \$120 for dinner (without wine) plus \$193 for orchestra tickets to *Joe Turner's Come and Gone*.

I have no problem with that. Hardworking people deserve a nice date once in awhile.

Now, if only the rest of us hardworking parents could afford to go out with our spouses too.

I tried to find the average cost of a date but couldn't find anything that made sense, because dating means many different things to many different people. Walk in the park and coffee? \$20 to \$30 max. Three-star dinner with wine? So long, Bens.

But as parents know, that's just the start. It's the cost of babysitting that kills us. In the early days, to steal away in the evenings my husband and I paid our sitter \$8 an hour. Now we're up to \$15, which makes dating really, really expensive.

Consider one of our first official "date nights" as parents of two, back in 2004. My husband and I hired a sitter and ventured forth across our 'burbs for dinner. Nothing fancy in mind. We just wanted to eat, enjoy each other's company and not fight for parking in some posh place like the skinny lanes of Georgetown. So we pulled into a place whose name sounded familiar. An extremely bumpy parking lot behind a strip mall gave no clue that we had hit on one of the most expensive fondue restaurants on the Eastern seaboard.

Yes, it was fun to eat cheese dunked in beer and beer dunked in cheese, and all that meat sloshed around in all those other sauces. But no, I didn't think it would set us back \$160. And that was just for dinner. By the time we returned, we owed our babysitter 60 bucks.

We moved to Plan B for our next several dates: an online service where I could score same-day weeknight theater tickets for half-price. That actually worked out well because our babysitter, by then our nanny, was doing a lot more dating than we were and would often groan if we suggested taking over one of her Saturday nights.

The half-price shows were great. Better yet, we had to race to make curtain, so there was never time for an expensive dinner beforehand. And we were too tired to eat after. Instead, we ended up wolfing down dinner with the kids and drinking wine at intermission or eating dessert after the show. Total cost: about \$135, including babysitting and gas.

Last year, as we began our own personal recession, I inadvertently killed our date nights by raising our nanny's nighttime rate to \$15 an hour.

For a five-hour date, that meant an additional \$75 surcharge. Suddenly, I could not think about my husband and me walking out our front door, just the two of us, without seeing **\$75!** in large, bold numbers above our nanny's head. And I could not stop thinking that although our nanny is undeniably excellent, for most of her date-night shift our kids would be asleep anyway.

That is when we turned to our current strategy: Netflix. Pathetic? Yes. But the economic allure is undeniable: For \$4.95 a month, we can watch almost any four movies we want without paying for a sitter, gas, parking or overpriced, over-buttered popcorn. Instead, we pop our own (who wouldn't want to, after reading Tomie dePaola's *The Popcorn Book?*) and retire to our bedroom after the kids have passed out.

And yes, we still date. Sometimes we sneak away for lunch, which somehow feels racier than dinner. This weekend, we'll be celebrating our 13th anniversary with a nice dinner out. Unlike the Obamas, though, we don't have an in-law like Michelle's mother Marian to watch the kids, so we'll have to book our nanny. We can afford it--*this time*. We've been Netflix dating for months now.

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