

## Romance outside the Box: 5 Alternatives to Generic Gift-Giving

by Sherry Amatenstein

The holidays are just around the corner. While we all love giving and getting (fess up -- especially getting) gifts, a gal can only own so many silk scarves and diamond rings. (Just threw in the last part to make sure you were paying attention.) And how many shirts and golf clubs can you lay on your guy?

Maybe the spirit of the season shouldn't be about spending hours and hours in crowded, noisy stores, competing with hoards of increasingly desperate shoppers ready to mow down anyone reaching for the same Movado. After all, no one wants her relationship bogged down by the twin perils of obligation and lack of imagination.

Regina Evans, a 28-year-old accountant in Florida recalls, "It was so freeing last year when my fiancé and I decided not to exchange Christmas presents. We're the type who give little presents throughout the year, so being pressured into buying some elaborate gift neither of us needed wasn't appealing. We put the money toward a romantic weekend in the Caribbean."

It's much more meaningful to truly give of yourself, rather than feeling forced into it. Unconventional holiday gifting can actually bring you closer (and that's the whole idea anyway, isn't it?).

### *Memories in the Making*

**Chicagoan Christine Walker is looking forward to her sixth Christmas as a married woman. The 37-year-old author of *The Smart Mom's Guide to Staying Home* explains, "My husband and I love celebrating holidays out of the mainstream. Our goal in gifting each other is to focus on our relationship, not material goods. Our holiday tradition is to write each other a letter with the goals and dreams that we hope and plan to accomplish together."**

Newlyweds Kate and Dick Roberts have a more conventional, but just as individual, approach to gift-giving. As soon as the first snow hits, they're out on the slopes, so it's natural that this year their holiday gift to each other will be new ski jackets and snowshoes. "We just paid for the wedding and a condo," says Kate, a 29-year-old dental hygienist in Boston, "so we wanted to get something useful and fun. There's a hiking-biking-cross-country trail right near our house. When we can't go skiing, we can go for long walks."

The gift Kerry Oates and her boyfriend are buying together involves another type of joint endeavor. The 35-year-old computer programmer from New Jersey giggles and explains, "We're getting a puppy."

This kind of mutual gift not only makes the holiday special, but it gives you a memento to remember as a couple. It's setting the groundwork for more happy years ahead.