

# Sorting It All Out

by Todd Maupin

To understand how and when things have gone wrong, it works best to proceed from the beginning and put them in order. Everything all started out so well for them, and seemed to develop rather quickly, probably happening something like this...

It was January 3, a Friday. Both of them had spent the holidays without a plus one, and were eager to meet someone and were hoping that tonight would be the start of something meaningful.

He had orchestrated his departure in order to arrive at their meeting place punctually on time, but had forgotten that he had intended to refuel his Audi along the way, and he had wanted to procure more cash from the ATM. He cut it close but he made it, first visiting the Wachovia on Merchant Street to withdraw \$120, then to Amberson's Shell on Fleet Street. To save time, he did not use his fuel points and just paid the total \$2.40 per gallon, for a total of \$38.23. As it so happened, he arrived at the Stained Glass Chimney, on Waterson, a minute or two late, but exactly at the same time as she did. She found his behavior gallant as he opened the door for her and the night started out on the right tone. He insisted on paying, telling her that he was traditional and that it was his pleasure, and left a healthy tip for the server. \$115.04 well spent, marking the beginning of this new chapter in their lives.

And on Sunday, just two days later, they met again, at the Maplewood Gardens Arboretum. They arrived in mid-morning, and he paid for the tickets, \$15 for the pair, at winter rates. A few hours later they returned to the café and spent \$8.67 on a snack, just two bottles of water and a small bag of artisan pretzels. They barely touched the pretzels but these must have primed them for dinner at the nearby Mirkwood Arms. She offered to pay this time, and he thanked her, but wanted to cover this bill too. He did allow her to

leave an amount of cash as a tip for the \$86.39 dinner, and spared his card from adding a gratuity. It was another memorable day. Something was building between them.

On Wednesday, they met up again, for a play in which one of her friends was performing. Either the tickets had been given to her or she had paid for them; she remained aloof about this detail. She did allow him to pay for their glasses of wine at intermission. \$14 on his card, but she slyly pushed some cash of her own into the bartender's tip jar.

The weekend witnessed another date for them. Fortunately, he was able to retrieve his Audi from Gramercy Automotive on Friday. Although the repairs were an unplanned expense, the \$481.22, when itemized, seemed reasonable and necessary. They opted for a traditional dinner and movie, but in reverse order. Not that they were ever lacking in conversation, but a discussion of film that they had just watched provided yet another topic. She again took responsibility for the tickets, and they were probably not given to her this time, unless she was better connected than he thought. Dinner fell upon his shoulders but it was another quality experience in exchange for the \$112.56 he paid. The extra drinks for each of them were indicative of not wanting the night to end, or perhaps there was much to be said for and about the movie. She again won the battle to leave the tip.

In the weeks that followed, sometimes they ate out, or ordered in. One night, they had dinner at Santo Gallo Winery and Vineyards. The \$206.12 bill seemed steep at first glance, but, considering that it included a case of red and a case of white, it was revealed to be more an investment than a bill. Their carryout meals varied, and were not often fancy. Papa Juan's and Domingo's were their choices for pizza, and negligible in their pricing, with either a \$21.17 or \$21.45 total assigned to each order. Always carryout, never delivery. Other times, she would cook or he would cook. He bought the

ingredients at Whale Foods, or Wegmania, spending \$56.11, \$46.44, \$34.18, \$43.67, or \$44.23, which was still cheaper and more satisfying than eating out.

February, of course, meant Valentine's Day. Red roses from Floral Reef cost him \$78.23 to be delivered to her work, and then dinner later became a \$100.24 outing. He covered the tip this time, with another \$20, and muted her attempts at contributing as a moot point in the spirit of the "holiday."

The remainder of February and March found them in more of a pattern, with him more often than not acquiring the ingredients at the Whale or Wegmania for nights in, to cook together. He never spent more than \$86.32, and sometimes as low as \$24.56, but, in all fairness, his own grocery purchases were included within those expenditures. They made a return trip to Gallo for dinner, and for \$212.57, replenished the wine supply at the end of March.

In April, they took a trip together. They agreed that she would pay for her own airfare and the rental car, while he would cover the accommodations, in addition to his ticket, which was a steal at \$82.14. Before their flight, they each had a mocha at the Starbox in the terminal. The \$11.94 for both beverages was steep, but not outrageous, and without the steeping annoyance of tea. In Boston, they stayed at the Hyatt on Bennington Street, and AAA coupled with the still off-season rate meant only \$169.99 per night. \$600.22, with all taxes and fees. City taxes have become a global scam. They fulfilled a bucket list opportunity for both by dining at the former Bull & Finch Pub. The \$156.92 tab was likely elevated by the name alone but in the place where everybody knows your name, saying "Cheers!" never felt more unique.

The year continued on, and they continued to progress as a couple. She convinced him to replace some of his old furniture with older furniture from Aunt Tia's Antiques. Did he need a chaise

longue for decadent lounging and plush Edwardian armchairs to demonstrate the uncomfortable seating option for someone who earned a comfortable living? The question remained a subjective one, but the total (including delivery) of \$1373.21 became objective as a charge on his statement. Otherwise, they alternated \$209.22 dinner and wine splurges at Gallo, the \$21.17 or \$21.45 convenience of Papa Juan's or Domingo's, and the \$32.73 - \$79.27 range of Wegmania or Whale Foods purchases for more quality time at home.

In September, he visited Chamber's Jewelers and placed \$4000.00 as a down payment on a ring. The additional installment payments of \$1250.00 began to appear on his October statement. At the end of September, they traveled to her hometown of Waukesha, just outside of Milwaukee. They decided on a similar arrangement as the trip to Boston, although he covered the rental car this time, because the accommodations and the requisite cheese curds were being provided by her parents. \$111.43 for airfare, and \$94.21 for the Chevy Spark or similar from Avis were sensible charges for what was to be a priceless experience. In front of her witting parents, as he surprised her on one knee, she said "yes." The \$34.11 bottle of champagne he had ninja'd from Morty's Fine Spirits certainly added to the celebration.

In November, however, something happened. There were no more dinners nor were there restocks at Gallo. Papa Juan's and Domingo's only charged half the amount. The purchases at Wegmania and the Whale never topped \$24.02. Many nights were subjected to \$9.43 or \$7.22 totals from fast food options. Even that month's \$1250.00 of Chamber's was credited back to his account. The original \$4000 could not be fully refunded, but \$3000 of it was.

As the holiday season settled in, the doldrums continued, with purchases at a minimum. Until December 18, when he used his card to hire a barbershop quartet for \$125 to serenade her from outside her window. And then, on the 22nd, the \$32.75 for two tickets to a

stage performance of *It's a Wonderful Life* at the same theatre where her friend had performed in January, was another sign of a turnaround. Finally, on New Year's Eve, a \$216.62 dinner and restocking at Gallo looked to be a possible precursor to him returning to Chamber's...

"Grace."

"Grace!"

"GRACE!" Mr. Bailey finally succeeded in drawing Grace's attention with a combination of stomping his foot and raising his voice. Intensity level 6 for a CPA.

"Grace, why don't you have those receipts in order yet?! Mr. Sanderson's audit is not the only file I am working on today, you know. There is a whole pile of folders for you to do next," Mr. Bailey said, grimacing, as he placed another stack of folders on the corner of Grace's already cluttered desk.

"Yes, sir, actually, I just finished the last of Mr. Sanderson's receipts. They are finished, all in chronological order for you, ending with December of last year," Grace replied, closing the last Sanderson folder and placing it in the Sanderson binder.

"Okay, thank you. Why don't you work on the Jansen file next? I want to start on preparing for her audit next, after I am done with Sanderson's paperwork. And try to be quicker this time. I swear, you are a good worker, but you space out when you are sorting receipts," Mr. Bailey ordered and was still talking as he was already out of the room.

"Yes, sir, I am on it!" Grace called after him, and found the Jansen file. As she started sorting the receipts, the first expense that caught her eye was \$2400.23 for a backyard playset. The Jansen children

were lucky to have such a doting mother, a kind woman who had also paid \$10.75 for ice cream cones at Dairy Queen on that same day, just 20 minutes later, probably on the way home from Home Depot with the playset still in the back of the truck...

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