

MOVIE

on the

STORY BY
MIKE LATONA

PHOTO ILLUSTRATION
BY JAMES STEIN



Katie Leidecker and Nick Trotta, shown at Johnny Rockets in Eastview Mall, Perinton, usually split their dating expenses.

Who assumes the cost of dating?

Valentine's Day brings visions of flowers and fancy restaurants — provided your bank account allows for such romantic gestures.

But what about the many teens who have to pay for such luxuries with part-time jobs yielding, at best, slightly more than minimum wage? Reality plays a big part in the budgetary side of dating.

More often than not in previous generations, the male would sweat out the expenses. Yet these days the playing field appears much more level, according to teens interviewed for this story.

Nick Trotta and Katie Leidecker, parishioners at Fairport's Church of the Assumption, have been going steady for nine months and agree to split the cost of their dates.

"I work, so I can take care of myself," said Katie, 17. "It would make me feel dumb if he paid all the time. Sometimes I'll pay for it all, and sometimes he will."

But this arrangement required an adjustment on the part of Nick, 18, who said he was brought up believing the guy pays for everything.

"Then it started getting expensive, and she kept offering. So I said 'Yeah, go for it!'" Nick said with a laugh.

John Niziurski, 19, hasn't been converted to this way of thinking yet. "I was raised old-fashioned. I usually don't let her pay — whenever I have a 'her,'" remarked John, a member of St. Jude's Parish in Gates.

Cait Erhard has been on the receiving end of this sort of generosity, even though she doesn't invite it. "I always offer to pay, but guys refuse it. I ask my guy friends out

all the time, but then they offer to pay. It feels weird," said Cait, 17, from St. Joseph/St. William Parish in Livonia and Conesus.

Caroline Whelan, 17, said she thinks the tradition stems from an earlier era when it wasn't common for women to have jobs. Katie Zuk said she's caught between this tradition, and what's practical and fair.

"I think the guy should pay, but I also think that whoever has the money should pay," said Katie, 15, a member of St. Joseph/St. William.

That's a viewpoint that Katie Leidecker shares. She said "girls consider it gentlemanly" when a guy pays, but added that "some girls really expect it. They're really disappointed when the guy doesn't pay all the time. I think that's taking advantage of them."

On that point, Katie Zuk remarked, "If you know he'll pay, you shouldn't suggest going to expensive restaurants."

As far as first dates go, Cait said "the guy should initiate the date — male or female — should assume the financial responsibility." "If it's the girl that asks, she should be the paying," she said.

"I'd pay for their ticket," added Anna Beck, 18, from St. Joseph/St. William.

That sounds like a good arrangement to John, who said his stance on paying for the girl is altered

if he doesn't initiate the date. "One girl asked me out, but expected me to pay," he said, adding that there was no second date with her.

Caroline observed that whoever foots the bill, especially on that first date, is sending a symbolic message: "If you pay for someone else, you think it's going to be more than friends," said Caroline, from St. Joseph's Parish in Pittsford.

"It changes dynamics if you don't split it," said Steve Bale, 18, from St. Margaret Mary in Apalachin.

As time goes on, however, Caroline said "it gets more serious and the boy was always reaching in his pocket, then you should kind of share the responsibility."

The teens suggest that dating need not be costly, saying that you can go for ice cream rather than dinner, and rent a video instead of going to the movies. For instance, Katie said she and Nick occasionally do dinner and a movie, but are also content just going for walks or even to the playground.

With prom season looming not far in the distance, it might be tough to keep dating expenses down. But even then, Anna said, you don't need to go overboard with a limo and a pricey restaurant.

"What's wrong with making your prom date a nice romantic dinner?" she asked.

