



Financial Fitness Spotlight with Jeannine B.



Why did you decide to become debt free?

"I decided to become debt free because I wanted to become worry free. I want to be able to afford a comfortable lifestyle without having the daily stress of finances. In my opinion, being debt free allows me to have more freedom to enjoy my life!"

How has living debt free impacted your life (e.g., professional, personal, social)?

"I think being debt-free has impacted my life in several areas. Professionally, I know that employers like to see that I have a good credit score, which shows that I am a responsible person and therefore a good employee. In today's competitive job market, I think that every little positive thing you can do will set you apart from other candidates! Also, the money that I earn from working can go to retirement savings or a rainy day fund instead of towards digging myself out of a financial hole, which alleviates a lot of stress. Socially, being debt-free and having savings allows me to enjoy dinners, sporting events, and vacations with friends and family, although I still do things in moderation. I give myself an "entertainment budget" each month so I can enjoy these things and I stick to it. On a personal level, I have a sense of pride that I am still relatively young and am financially sound. It's my plan to continue saving so that I can be secure in my old age. With social security and other benefits running out, I feel that it's up to me to make sure that I can take care of myself in my retirement someday."

What is the most challenging and exciting part of living debt free?

"Being debt-free wasn't easy at first. I was jealous of other people who had money or who seemed to have life easier than I did. I knew the only way to be one of "those people" was to EARN it for myself. I wasn't paid much at my first job out of college (I made about \$16k) and had to live with my parents for 3 years. I used this opportunity to slowly pay off student loans from undergrad, buy a car, and just survive. I remember that I packed my lunch every day for work, and only treated myself to dinner only on Fridays (and it was just fast food, nothing fancy). I saved like crazy over a few years, got two promotions at work, and I was finally able to pay off those loans and start making headway. By the time I was 25 or so, I was able to start enjoying my money, and went on my first real adult vacation. The sacrifices were worth it! I was hooked!"

Can you name one or two big ticket items you were able to pay for in cash?



"I always wanted to drive a convertible but never dreamed that one day I would actually own one. With my savings, I was able to purchase a used 2003 white Toyota Solara with leather interior for \$12k a few years ago. It's funny because I grew up thinking that only "rich" people could afford the luxury of leather interiors, and now I'm one of those people. It's still my car today and I love it! The other big ticket item that I paid for in cash was my second Masters degree in the healthcare field. I had always wanted a clinical degree, and was able to pay for it in full with my savings. I just graduated in June 2012! (My first Masters was an MBA which was paid for by my former employer while I worked full-time.)"

What financial behaviors do you think some women engage in that have negative outcomes?

"I think the worst financial behavior that women engage in is getting into credit card debt. There are so many things that women buy to make them feel better about themselves, like clothes, shoes, makeup, salon appointments, etc. These are made to seem like they are things we need rather than things we just want. The interest rates on the credit cards used for these purchases are so high that it can make them difficult to pay off, and a vicious cycle of debt begins. Really think about what you are buying and determine whether there are ways to cut corners, such as buying a grocery store brand of makeup rather than the expensive department store stuff! That's what I do! I would say the other bad habit that women engage in is the thinking that "I will find a man and he will take care of me, so I don't have to worry about my finances now." While this may be true for some women, the fact is that men struggle financially also. In the end, we all just have to be responsible for ourselves and not wait for someone to bail us out"

When do you think is the right time in a relationship to inquire about your mates financial habits?

"It's probably bad etiquette to bring up finances on a first date. I personally like to bring up finances within the first month or two of dating someone. At first I may make subtle comments to feel out the other person's situation and will also let them know that I am financially stable (and therefore a great catch!). But I will eventually ask direct questions as to whether they have debt, what kind, and how much. If they have debt, I have to know that there is a solid plan in place to get it paid off. If someone doesn't even know how much debt they have, it's a red flag that it's not under control and I would walk the other way!"