

WHAT'S
YOURS
IS MINE

When a REALIST Marries an *Idealist*

STACY WILLOUGHBY

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To Rick, who is making all my dreams come true.
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INTRODUCTION

Being a romantic at heart and an eternal optimist, I believe that everything is possible. When you and your spouse bring the best of yourselves to your marriage, the victories you can achieve are powerful. Knowing that you have this person in your life that you trust completely and receive unfailing support from, and who knows the secret dreams of your heart, is a potent feeling.

Still, in today's world, maintaining a strong relationship in which money doesn't get in the way can be hard. The decade began with the tech bubble burst in 2001 and ended with the Great Recession. With the results of this last decade and changes in our personal economies, we are more aware of our finances than we were in the past. We now publicly talk about this subject, which once was taboo. But for couples these discussions can be thorny, especially if the family's breadwinner loses a job, if one or both earners in a two-income household find themselves underemployed, or if a formerly passive partner starts to take a more active role in financial decision making. Inequities in earnings or spending can contribute to fights, resentment, and conflict.

Traditionally, financial roles were well defined for men and women. Today, both men and women fill a variety of financial roles, so it can be hard to know the standards for maintaining a strong relationship in which money doesn't get in the way of

happiness. Reverting to traditional roles isn't the answer. Keeping an open mind, compromising, and communicating will help.

Other factors can make talking about money feel like walking into a minefield. I believe that because we are not taught about money and personal finance at school, we acquire our financial habits and beliefs from our experiences. Those experiences forge our emotional attachments to money, making financial conversations with a partner difficult. You may feel inadequate, immature, or inexperienced when handling money or, alternatively, use it to exert control or power. You may fall into old patterns established by your parents or previous loves. These behaviors can sabotage the best intentions for your relationship.

The goal of this book is to help you and your spouse understand that you are not alone in your issues with money. Throughout the book, I delve into the experiences and conversations I shared with Rick, my husband, so you can see how natural it is to get tripped up by financial issues. When we ran into a new problem, we knew many of the right things to do, but understanding how to do them together as a married couple was a hurdle. We have learned from what we have done right and, more important, from what we got completely wrong. Our secret is to try to be tender and, out of love and respect for each other and our relationship, not to hurt one another.

Overall, in our relationship, Rick is the realist and I am the idealist. I dream up the big idea, and he slows me down to figure out if the time is right for that big idea. However, neither of us fits those labels all the time. On occasion, he has decided to take a risk that I had to think about twice or three times. As a general rule, I don't like labels. If one of you in the relationship bears the label of "spender" or "saver," that becomes the default explanation for behavior. I prefer understanding the reasons for

each decision to spend or save. Both of you could learn by having conversations and by delving deeper.

I don't have all the answers to the financial problems you might face, but by reading these real-life stories, you might find the tools and courage to have candid conversations with your partner. In this book, I encourage you both to engage in periodic conversations to explore your experiences and emotions. Having these conversations during a time when the outcome isn't immediately relevant is helpful. You could have these talks without pressure during a long drive or a walk around the neighborhood, for example. To support talking on a regular, scheduled basis, try a Sunday brunch. On a Sunday morning, assemble your brunch, get cozy in your breakfast nook, and enjoy a mimosa with your eggs and bacon. During your meal, you can say, "I was just reading about this couple, and they had an issue with talking about money, just like us." Then open up this book to the Sunday brunch conversation that you want to engage in and see what unfolds. I have also included tips on getting organized. Look for these when you are trying to tackle the nuts and bolts of a particular issue, like paying off debt or buying a home.

Through my work, I hear of various experiences similar to those I shared with Rick. So in this book, I hope to inspire you to reach for your dreams as well as those of your spouse. I want you to feel empowered to have those difficult financial conversations with your partner.

As you approach each challenge, remember that having more money isn't the simple solution that it may seem to be. You have probably heard stories of lottery winners whose marriages and family relationships were damaged after a large win. I believe that love is a stronger base for building the foundation of your financial plan.

In fact, love is the reason that I write this book. Love gives me the courage to share this story. Love is the reason to go all out and let go of fear. Living on love can help a family transcend its daily struggles. No names have been changed in this book. The stories are real, sometimes funny, and sometimes painful. I invite you to share your story too.

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FULL DISCLOSURE

On yet another rainy, lazy Sunday morning in Seattle, I was snuggling in bed with my husband. I said to him that I didn't think anyone in the world could possibly be as in love as we were at that moment. He responded, "I hope not." This perplexed me, and I asked, "What does that mean?" He explained, "I sure hope that millions more get to feel as in love as we are right now." Insight like that makes me fall in love with him all over again.

Rick and I first met at work. We were both involved in setting up a new retail store when I noticed him. Rick, a finish carpenter, was building the interior. I was a department manager excited to help establish a flagship store. In the weeks before the store opening, we got to know each other a little. He liked to joke around, and I liked the way his eyes smiled. Once, he fixed my hard hat, explaining that it should stay put, perched above my head, and not fall down into my eyes.

A week after the store's grand opening, Rick stopped by my department to see how things were going. He wore a sport coat