

Savings Savvy

A short story based on the quote, "If you know how to spend less than you get, you have the philosopher's stone," by Benjamin Franklin.

The blinds were drawn and a musty odor hung in the crowded Florida home's living room. Surrounded by adults all dressed in black, a girl in her late-teens sat on one of the folding chairs and adjusted her navy stockings. Sighing, she thought how funerals are never any fun, but this one was especially drab. Kirsten's grandpa had passed away recently, and the youngest person other than herself was his fifty-three year old lawyer. *buse*

Later in the day, her mother approached her as she was debating whether or not to try the green tinted cheddar cheese on the buffet table. "Mr. Reddy just informed me that Grandpa Blitz left you some money too. He even set up an account for you with the \$4,000 in it. Now I know this is a lot, but it won't last forever. I really think you should keep babysitting on the weekends and keep your job at the pool. Just leave this alone until college," she said.

Kirsten didn't hear a word after \$4,000. She had money! No more spending days life guarding at the indoor YMCA pool, and it was only July! She could quit and spend her time with friends! No more staying in on Friday nights to save gas. She had money!

"Kirsten? Did you hear me? I don't think you should spend this until you get to college."

"Drat," thought Kirsten, "Of course mom would say that, of course she would ruin the one good thing to come out of this funeral."

"Okay mom. I won't go crazy, but I'm not committing to not spending any of it. I'll probably use it to fill up the car or something."

A week went by, and Kirsten stopped by the Shell station to put fifty dollars

worth of fuel into the family Honda. She also went into the little grocery store next to the station and bought herself a Milky Way, to reward herself for not spending any of her paycheck yet. She used a debit card, connected to her money from life guarding to make both purchases.

Kirsten had never bought gas with a plastic card before; she had always used cash for everything. Her mother thought it was a good way to learn how much things really cost. Counting out bills makes one think a lot harder about buying things. Now the numbers showing up on the computer as she slid her card through the register did not mean a thing to Kirsten. Purchases were only the swipe of a card away.

The next week she turned down a family who asked her to watch their children, and instead went to the movies. Again using her debit card to buy the tickets. Now that she had money in the bank, she decided she did not have to save her income anymore. She could spend it things for herself.

Every other Friday, when her paycheck was sent to her, she went out to the mall with her friends to buy the latest gadget or a new top. She no longer even bothered to send the money to her savings account.

Soon November and her eighteenth birthday arrived. She decided to go visit her brother, Collin, at Columbia University, and spend a few days with him to celebrate. While Collin was in class in the afternoons, Kirsten explored the city. She made her way up to Fifth Avenue and stopped by Prada, Gucci, and Fendi. Christmas shopping was done, and she had picked up a birthday present for herself at Tiffany's.

On December 25, her family opened up the gifts and jaws dropped. Afterwards, Kirsten's mother took her aside again. "How could you afford this? These are too

extravagant. I thought you were putting half of your paycheck into savings!”

Kirsten just looked away. “Sorry. I couldn’t help it. It’s my money anyways.”

“You can’t just spend what you make. You need a cushion! You need to save this for college. Living week to week doesn’t work! What if something happens and you can’t work for a few days? Then where will you get money to fill up the car?” her mom replied. “From now on, three fourths of whatever you make is going into your saving account. You can use the other quarter for fun. If you keep spending whatever you make, you will never be financially sound, and it set up poor habits for you in the future. ”

Kirsten’s shopping habits cut back drastically, and she even turned down an offer for the new iPhone 3G, sticking with her \$49.99 Verizon flip phone while all her friends upgraded theirs. Every other Friday, when she cashed her paychecks, she sent most of it to her saving account for college. The money she made babysitting she kept for gas. Kirsten’s friends went out on paydays to celebrate the end of the workweek and did not put any money away.

At the end of her senior year, Kirsten had enough money saved up to be able to only work part time while she interned at the local newspaper three days a week. Her friends continued to fold clothes in their retail jobs all day.

When she went off to college the next fall, she realized her mother was right. Textbooks cost much more than she thought, and if her savings account was not as deep as it was, she would have had to work a part time job during her first semester too. Kirsten decided then that she would never spend more than half of what she made; she wanted her retirement fund to be as large as possible.