

**THE
WEALTH
FORMULA**

**BUILD WEALTH
EVEN IF YOU ARE
DOWN TO YOUR
LAST DIME**

K E N D E K K E R

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DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to all the people in world that have bought into the lie that having stuff bought on credit will bring joy and fun into their lives. The shininess of our toys seems to wear out long before the payments do. We are taking our financial advice from banks whose business it is to loan out money and make large profits for share holders. Millions of dollars are spent on advertising to make us desire things and to use credit to acquire those things.

The inspiration for *The Wealth Formula* came when my father passed away at age 72. He had worked hard all his life and still had consumer debt, a large mortgage on his house and insufficient life insurance to protect those that he loved. His wife had to sell the house because she could not afford it and I bought his burial plot as he had no emergency fund. I decided right there and then that I would not leave those I love with a financial mess when I leave this world. I became passionate about understanding how to build wealth and passing that knowledge on to my children and my grandchildren. *The Wealth Formula* is especially dedicated to Candice, Sacha, Ryan, Amber, Jill and all their children who already number eight.

DISCLAIMER:

The characters in this book are fictions of my imagination and any resemblance to you or people you know is purely coincidence. The situations and life lessons are drawn from years of personal financial experience, coaching others, and reading lots of financial books and relationship books. I was once told by my business coach, Joe Stumpf, that our deepest darkest secrets about our financial and relational issues, that we believe are unique to us, are generally almost universal to the rest of the population.

The Wealth Formula is a general summary of the beliefs of the author that have helped him go from indebtedness to being a multimillionaire. This book is not to be construed as individual financial advice for you. Every person's individual situation is different and so you must seek wise legal, tax, financial, investment, insurance, and real estate advice from a professional in the industry before making major decisions. Of course eliminating consumer debt from your life is simple, may not need the service of a professional, and yet I have seen miraculous results when a debt elimination coach is utilized to help in accountability and next steps. The highest paid athletes, performers and singers usually have a couple things in common...they practice and have a great coach to encourage, correct and hold them accountable.

My prayer is that this book will be a catalyst to you to decide to make the changes that will allow you to become truly wealthy and pass that knowledge on to the next generations.

FOREWORD

With debt loads at historic highs and interest rates at extreme lows, there has never been a better time for you to understand the power of *The Wealth Formula* to change your perspective on bad debt and good debt, to change your financial world and to ultimately change your life for the better. Learn the power of compounding and leverage that can work for you or against you. The decision is yours. You can build wealth for the good money can do.

I have heard many times that money changes people. I totally disagree... money does not change people, it amplifies them. If they were stingy or greedy with a little money, they will be stingier with lots of money and if they were generous with the little they had, they will be more generous with their wealth.

Go on the journey with Sarah and David as they discover the truths about building wealth from a mysterious mentor. Use the exercises at the end of each chapter and the tools on the website to implement the strategies into your life and in a few short months you will notice a big difference in your behaviors and your life. Many have used these simple strategies to go from trying to make ends meet to being completely consumer debt free and having financial peace in a matter of a few years.

These new financial habits are simple to understand and easy to do and also easy not to do. The choice is yours. You can read this book, enjoy the story, and leave it at that, or you can do the work and change your life forever. My prayer is that after reading *The Wealth Formula* your life will never be the same. Enjoy the journey.

MEET SARAH AND DAVID

Sarah sat on David's couch with a sad look on her face, wondering what had happened to her dream of having the perfect marriage. She had expected to find peace and protection with the man she was engaged to marry; instead, she found herself sitting on a couch that he still owed money on, sullen with worry over the sea of bills spread across the coffee table. A table also not yet paid for. What were they going to do? Paying for a wedding was one thing; how could they ever dig themselves out from the weight of all this mess? Her thoughts broke as she heard her fiance arriving home from work.

"Look at what I bought today," David called from the hallway. He bounded into the a room with a huge grin on his face, a package in hand.

Wide-eyed, Sarah just stared at him in disbelief. "You don't get it!" she exploded. "We have no money to be buying anything! We are facing financial ruin...and you don't get it! What is wrong with you? What is wrong with us? Don't you love me at all?"

David's smile dropped. His eyes narrowed bitterly. "You're right," David yelled back. "I don't get it...and I don't get you! All I did was buy lunch and spend a hundred bucks on blue lights for the floor of my car. They were regularly \$200, so they're a great deal. I thought you would be happy I saved a hundred bucks today, but all you do is get angry every time I spend a cent. It's like since we decided to get married, you don't want me to have any fun anymore. Sometimes I think you just don't care about me in this relationship."

Through the tears that she could no longer hold back, Sarah spluttered for words, "You are wrong; I do want you to have fun...but ..." She let several bills drift from her hands to the floor.

David looked on helplessly. He gave in and put his arms around her and held her close. Words eluded her; she could only sob.

David's first marriage had fallen apart, and he was bound and determined that this marriage with Sarah was going to work. He loved Sarah more than he thought possible and couldn't imagine spending a week without her. Sarah was a soft spoken, lovely young lady. She weighed a hundred and twenty pounds soaking wet, had blonde hair, and a smile that could melt ice. It didn't take David more than one date with her to decide she was almost perfect. David, in contrast, was six feet tall, had dark skin, and a full head of thick black hair that he kept short.

David quietly said to Sarah, "I am sorry. I'm not trying to frustrate and hurt you. I just don't understand why you get so upset. It was just lunch and some lights."

Sarah's eyes were red and blurry as she tried to explain, "David, buying lunches is expensive, and I know you don't take time in the mornings to make them, so last night I packed one for you to take to work. When you buy a lunch and don't eat the one that I made, I feel like you don't appreciate what I'm trying to do."

"I do appreciate your efforts," David replied. "I'm just bad at remembering to take my lunch out of the car and put it into the truck for the day. I just get sidetracked and anxious to get started working. I don't know - maybe I can put a sticker on the car window or on my keys to remind me to put the lunch into my truck. But seriously, what is the big deal about the lights? It's only a \$100. I make that in only four hours. I'll just work some overtime."

Sarah started to calm down as she explained. "I'd much rather have you with me for the four hours than have fancy blue lights in your car. I feel like I don't see you enough as it is. And it isn't four hours because that's after tax dollars. It'll actually take you about seven hours to pay for the lights."

David raised one eyebrow, confused.

"And David, it's not just today. With all the money we spend, I'm concerned that we won't have enough money for the basics, like a mortgage and food. I worry about it a lot, and seeing you just going out

and spending money like that makes me panic. I had hoped when we get married we would be secure together, but it seems like we will always have bills looming over us.” The pent up anxiety took its toll on Sarah, and she started crying again.

David started kissing away the tears; he finally understood. “I’m really sorry for making you feel like this. I knew you were worried about our finances, but I had no idea it was bothering you this much. From now on, I’ll just ask you before spending any money.”

“That’s not what I mean,” Sarah blurted out, “That’s not even realistic. It’s not that you cannot spend any money, it’s that we need to set up some boundaries on what amount is okay to spend, and then seek consensus if we are going to spend more than that. Does that make sense?”

“Yeah,” David agreed relieved. “Honestly, I’m really sorry. I can take the lights back tomorrow. Do you forgive me?”

“Yes I do,” Sarah replied and squeezed him tightly. “I’m just so glad we got this out into the open. It feels so good to finally talk about this rather than worry on my own.”

Sarah came from a caring family with little to no debt, and therefore her propensity for debt was very low. When she and David became engaged, she had only a small car loan and enough savings to pay off the five year old Nissan Altima at anytime, while still having a little money left over.

David was in a different position altogether. On the rebound, he was recently divorced. When the court proceedings came through and his ex-wife got most of their possessions, he thought, ‘I’ll show her.’ David had a great paying job and worked lots of overtime, so getting credit was no problem. He ran out after the separation and bought a brand new Mitsubishi Lancer, rolled his old debt into the car payment that he felt he would have no problem paying, and then bought new furniture during the ‘Don’t Pay a Cent’ Event. And of course a new big screen TV was in order. When the smooth talking salesman pointed out how low the monthly payments would be, David also purchased a surround sound system with a powered subwoofer to go with the TV for only an extra \$25 a month. David started working a part time job on top of his full time job to make ends meet. Considering all the stuff he had, his friends thought he was doing great. After all, he who has the most toys wins.

Because David worked two jobs, neither one held back enough taxes off his pay cheques, and now he was behind in income tax. He also owed money to the lawyer for the work he had done on his divorce. The weight of all the debt was starting to be almost more than he could bear. It felt good to be able to forget about it and buy lunch and a few toys for his car. After all, he worked really hard and deserved it. The credit card was so high now anyways, another hundred dollars on it was not going to matter. That's what a credit card is for, right? David grew up in a family that felt debt was fine just as long as you could make the payments. The only thing was, it was getting really hard to keep up with the bills, and there always seemed to be more month than there was money. Working two jobs was helping, and yet at tax time each year, it seemed he was slipping further into debt. The tax bill was getting so large that he stopped filing tax returns so that he wouldn't owe more money. David's financial roller coaster was getting out of control.

Sarah sat on the couch in a daze. She had known David had some debt when they first started dating, but she never really realized how bad things had become until they began looking for a place to live. Currently, David was living with friends in their basement, and Sarah was still living with her parents. David assumed they would just rent somewhere cheap until they got themselves out of debt and onto their feet. Sarah hated the idea of renting because her parents were real estate investors and had taught her that when you rent, you pay off your landlord's mortgage and build wealth for him or her. She had expected that when she got married, she and her husband would buy a home and begin building equity. She wanted to pay her own family rent each month, not some landlord.

Sarah asked her parents' REALTOR ®, Yetta Dekker, to look around and see if they could find a particularly inexpensive home that needed renovations. David loved the idea because he was very handy and realized they could buy homes and flip them to help generate an income. Basically this would be like having a third job, except there wouldn't be any income tax since it would be their principal residence. Yetta worked for Keller Williams Solid Rock Realty in Ottawa, and when Sarah spoke to her about her plan, Yetta explained that they should come into the office and meet with her so that she could gain an understanding of what their goals were, explain how the real estate process would go, and explain the different levels of service that were available to them. Sarah

set an appointment for the buyer planning session with Yetta for the next Saturday morning, which was the only time that she and David both had off work.

During the planning session, it became clear that the first step was for them to get in contact with a mortgage broker to see what they could qualify for in a mortgage. Yetta called one of her favorite mortgage specialists, Lynn Fraser, who also ran a financial fitness company called More than Enough, and arranged for her to speak with Sarah and David in the next hour. The couple was hoping to buy a home for approximately two hundred and fifty thousand dollars. As Lynn filled out the application for Sarah and David, she winced a little when she saw all the debt. A credit check confirmed the worst - David's credit score was very poor and he had a lot of debt which caused him to not qualify for a mortgage at all. While Sarah made a small income, her credit score was great because she only had a car loan and she made her payments on time every month. Lynn explained to David how the back taxes, late payments and the bills he had co-signed for his ex-wife were hurting his credit score. "On top of all this," Lynn noted grimly as she swiveled in her chair, "the 'Don't Pay a Cent' credit is also harming your credit score."

"But it's not due yet!" David exclaimed.

Lynn explained that the credit at the furniture store was under a year old, so that affected the score, and then the credit limit was set at \$1400. He had spent all of that, plus there was a \$99 administration fee, which meant that he had a \$1499 balance on a \$1400 credit limit. "Anytime you are near or over your limit," she said, "you lose more points on your score." The late payments on his minimum payments on the credit cards were also dropping his score, even though they were only a few days or weeks late on average.

Seeing David's downcast expression, Lynn tried to encourage him. "Don't worry, David. All is not lost. By taking certain actions over the next few years, you'll be able to pay down your debts and improve your score." She laid out a plan for him to do just that and then explained that at this time, they had one of three options. First, they could wait until their finances and credit score improved; second, they could see if they could get someone to co-sign the mortgage; or third, they could buy a house

at a value of \$125,000 or lower. As that is what Sarah qualified for by herself.

David and Sarah really did not want to rent and they knew that they would never find a home for under \$125,000, so they decided to ask Sarah's parents to co-sign for the mortgage. Sarah's parents loved her dearly as their only child, but their views on debt just didn't allow them to be comfortable with this idea. They also felt Sarah and David weren't ready for the responsibility of taking on a mortgage of that size when their finances just weren't under control. Sarah was disappointed; however, she understood her parents' wisdom and didn't push the subject.

A few weeks later Yetta called Sarah and David and explained that an old home located in the country had come on the market at a very low price. The house needed just about everything updated: new electrical, a proper bathroom, insulation, windows, a septic system, drywall, flooring; the list went on and on. Since the home was a much more affordable \$50,000, they decided to go look at it with Sarah's parents to see if it was something they could fix up. However, after seeing how bad a shape it was in, David felt it might just be too much work for him to tackle alone and the cash needed to do the upgrades would be almost impossible to come up with. Sarah's father Michael offered to help him and suggested that they go ahead with an offer conditional on inspection by a professional. Yetta mentioned that a purchase plus improvement mortgage may also be available that would give them a final mortgage based on the renovated value so they had to finance the renovations until they were complete and then the remainder of the mortgage would be advanced. After the inspection confirmed the amount of work to do, and also confirmed that the foundation and structure were sound, they decided to go ahead and buy the house. After a quick closing, they began the work immediately as their wedding was now only eight months away.

Their new house had white vinyl siding on about sixty percent of the outside and a huge summer kitchen, garage, and workshop area that were just ship lap wood, with the paint peeling off. Many of the windows were broken; the roof leaked and sagged under the weight of a hundred years. The floors were extremely sloped, and the stair case had a significant lean to it so one had to hold onto the low railing to go up or down. The smell of years of mould and mildew hovered over the old carpets along with the smell of urine from the mice that had overtaken

the rooms. The smell was almost too much to handle, and yet this was Sarah's and David's new home.

SARAH'S JOURNAL

Friday

I feel so insecure about my financial safety. The fear of not having a place to live and this load of debt has given me a heaviness I have never felt before. I am already facing so many challenges with planning the wedding, and just getting used to the idea of being married, that the debt stress is putting me over the top. It is nerve wracking to think that I can't trust David in this aspect of our lives.

A few weeks ago I had a meltdown, and it was awful and embarrassing, but I think I had a breakthrough with David. I think he finally got a glimpse of how I am feeling, and how the bills aren't something we can just shrug off or leave stacked in a corner. I think this message really hit home too when we talked to our mortgage broker, Lynn. It became so clear how our debt is limiting our future.

I think David sees all this now and believe he truly wants to change our money situation. Not sure he has

the skills to do it. We have made a good start though, with buying this crazy ramshackle old house. It is going to need some serious TLC - we have to use a ladder to climb up into the second floor and I can't go into some of the bedrooms yet until the carpet is ripped out because it stinks so much like pee. Thankfully, David is great with a hammer and tools...as long as he gets his morning coffee first :)

I pray someone comes into our lives to help. I know David is a proud man and wants to support us. It would be great to go to Mom and Dad with our money problems and just borrow or do whatever they advise, and yet David needs to feel I trust and respect him. He will need to decide who and when he is ready to ask for help.

MY DECISIONS AND ACTION ITEMS

What is keeping me awake at night?

Who do I look up to as a mentor?

Who do I know that is an expert, or knows someone that is, in the areas of:

Investing:

Debt elimination:

Insurance:

Tax:

Real Estate:

Estate Planning:

Law:

Relationships:

THE NOT-SO-PERFECT BUY

Work on the new house began slowly. For starters, the house was a sixty minute drive from Ottawa, limiting work to days off, which were few and far between for David as he worked two jobs to help make ends meet. As he and Sarah began ripping out the carpet and removing ninety plus years of accumulated wall paper, it became apparent that a very big job lay ahead of them. Since it was already November, the first and most pressing need was to insulate the outside walls as they had nothing in them except three layers of wood. The next challenge was to rewire the electrical as the house had knob and tube wiring, which prevented the home from being permanently insured until it was completely removed. Soon David discovered that all the interior walls were constructed of a single layer of tongue and groove planks which were toe nailed into the floor and ceiling, meaning there were no cavities to pull electrical wires through. The solution was to tear out every interior wall. David decided he was okay with this since he wanted to change the floor plan and had to install a bathroom anyways. After a day of Saws All and black coffee, David stepped back and surveyed his work. Now that he had cleared all the interior walls, it was time to put new windows and doors in the outside walls. Mercifully, the heating bills began going down once the exterior was all fixed up.

One day while working on the house, Sarah and David decided to take a break and go exploring in the loft over the summer kitchen, garage, and workshop. They had so far ignored this huge area of the house because they were focused on the main floors. As David made his way up the steep staircase, wiping spider webs out of his face and hair as he went, Sarah followed closely behind. “Yick,” grimaced Sarah. “No one’s been up here in a long time!”

David was surprised at how easily the trap door opened. After they climbed up, he examined the door and discovered a unique weight and pulley system attached to a rafter. Someone had installed it so that it opened easily and stayed open at a very wide angle. A previous owner had spent some time putting that mechanism together.

“David! It’s huge up here,” exclaimed Sarah.

Pulled from his daydream, David surveyed the room and was taken aback by the size and height of the loft. He had no idea from looking at it from the outside that it would be this large. David stepped onto the floor wondering if the old structure and boards could hold his two hundred pound frame. As he gingerly walked along, Sarah at just over a hundred pounds ran all over the loft marveling with excited oohs and ahhs. The floor bounced up and down as she delightedly ran from treasure to treasure. The house was sold as an estate sale and apparently had come with a number of tools and items that were left in the workshop garage area.

The first thing Sarah found were some glass balls with pointy ends, almost like oversized Christmas balls. A pinky semi-clear liquid floated in them. “Hey, David? What are these?” she called out. Examining them further, she noticed that the metal wall bracket to hold these decorative balls had a label that read: Throw at the Base of Fire. “Oh neat!” Sarah murmured “Hey David? I think I found some kind of old fashioned fire extinguishers.”

David, however, caught up in his own excitement barely heard. “Look what I found!” he bellowed.

Sarah made her way over to where David stood admiring two overgrown lanterns. Like the ones you take camping, except these were thirty six inches tall. The pair was covered in dust, looking like they had been there for forty years. Next to them were ten foot boxes covered in bird droppings and more dust. Peeling back the lids, David found that they contained enough siding to finally finish the back area of the house. “This is wonderful!” exclaimed Sarah with a delighted laugh. “Who knew all this was up here all this time?”

As they went over to a raised section over the summer kitchen, they found an assortment of vintage metal Tonka trucks. Sarah surveyed the

length of the attic. “Wow,” she mused, “it’s big enough up here to build an indoor basketball gym.” She smiled wryly, “This’ll be great for when we have our three boys your mother is convinced we’ll have!”

David grinned and said, “Let’s worry about making the house livable first.”

As they rummaged through more boxes and various odd pieces of junk left from years gone by, David moved a large sheet of wood and was surprised to find behind it, leaning against a wall, a bicycle built for two. There was something different about this old bicycle. It was bright red and had virtually no dust on it compared to everything else they had found. David was mesmerized. “Sarah, mind giving me a hand to get this bike down the stairs, please?”

He went down the steep stairs first as Sarah slowly passed down the bicycle. Once outside in better light, they marveled at the condition of the old bike. There was not even a scratch in the paint or a speck of rust on the chrome handlebars and rims. Sarah ran to get some cleaning cloths anyway and David headed to the workshop looking for a tire pump and an oil can.

“This bike is beautiful,” marveled Sarah out loud as she rubbed minor traces of dust off the handlebars. “I wonder who it used to belong to?”

“Maybe to the couple who lived here before us,” suggested David as he put down the oil can and spun one of the wheels.

“Could be,” Sarah replied undeterred. “But why would they leave it here? Why not sell it or give it to their kids? It looks like something from an old black and white movie. I have a feeling it’s really old.”

Satisfied with their work, the couple stepped back and stared at the bike. David flicked the rag over his shoulder. “It really does look brand new, doesn’t it?” he asked.

Sarah nodded her head.

They put the bike away in the garage and went in to continue their work constructing new interior walls and leveling the floors. At the end of the day they kissed each other goodbye, drove back to their respective homes, and fell into bed utterly exhausted. Both dreamt about stepping out of

their completed house on a warm summer day and laughing confidently as they took the bike out for a ride.

Sarah and David were so excited that the wedding was approaching quickly. They were determined to remain pure until their wedding night. Fortunately between working so much, living in different towns and all the work on the house there was little time left over for alone time. It was actually amazing how much time Michael had spent with David on the house and for that matter how many church families and friends would stop by for a day or afternoon to help in any way they could. The house renovations slowed considerably and would have to wait as a lot of time was now being taken up preparing for the big day; finalizing the guest list, dress fittings, tux fittings, writing their vows, scouring garage sales looking for decorations for the hall, going over changes to the menu, and having their final pre-marital counseling meetings with their pastor.

The months had flown by, and now weeks became days, and days became hours, until the minutes and seconds finally came, and then each second seemed to drag on for an eternity as David waited at the front of the church and Sarah felt faint standing at the back with the music about to begin and her to take that long walk down the aisle with her dad. When the first chords of the song filled the sanctuary, she walked forward clutching her father, thinking her legs had gone to rubber and that she couldn't walk on her own. David looked up eagerly as his bride made her entrance. His chin dropped down in awe as he caught the first glimpse of her. A tear ran down his face as suddenly he realized that everything in his life up until that point ceased to matter and this was the dawn of a new beginning and a new life for him and Sarah.

The night screamed by with speeches, camera flashes, and hugs from all their guests. Then suddenly the weeks of stress were all over, and David and Sarah were in the car waving goodbye to friends and family. It was time for David to take his new wife for a week to relax and to enjoy one another's company. Because they were so in debt and had no money the usual sand and sun destination for honeymooners would have to wait and they decided to spend a few days at Niagara Falls, and then the rest of the week on a lake where friends had loaned them their cottage for five days.

It was a clear morning. The air was breezy, and few people were out on the lake. As they lay languidly on their towels, the couple could hear disgruntled seagulls fighting over floating sandwich remains from another cottager.

“What are you thinking about?” Sarah asked David.

David lazily opened one eye, his hand on his forehead to block out the sun. “Nothing.” He nestled deeper into the sand.

“What?” Sarah flipped onto her belly and pushed up her sunglasses. “Okay, what are you thinking about right....now?”

“Nothing.”

Sarah lay back down unconvinced. “And...now?”

“Nothing.”

“What?” Sarah exclaimed, sitting back up. “How can you be thinking about nothing? You have to be thinking *something*.”

“It’s easy. I sit here enjoying the peace and quiet, the hot sun, and I go into a stress-free place where I think about nothing.”

“Wow,” said Sarah mystified, “Seriously? I’d love to join you there; I’m always thinking about something.”

David laughed and said, “You can’t join me because then it would no longer be nothing.” Sarah made a mock pout and flopped back down with a smile on her face.

Picking up on the clue, David asked, “What are you thinking about?”

Sarah snuggled in close and put her head on his shoulder. She drummed her fingers absentmindedly on his chest and murmured, “I can’t get that red bike out of my mind.”

“Really?” said David raising his head with surprise. “You too? I’ve been thinking about it this week. We never went for that ride we said we were going to take.”

“Yeah,” Sarah continued. “It’s been months, and the weather has warmed up. We’ve just been so caught up with the wedding. It was fun, wasn’t

it? The wedding. But, I have to say, I am so glad it's over and that we're finally married."

David hugged her tighter. "Yeah. Once we get back, we get to officially move in to our home, and married life really begins."

"Hurrah!" chirped Sarah happily.

"The day we get back to the house, I'd really like to go for a ride on that bike with you," David said.

"Deal!" Sarah said. She sat up and shook the sand from her hair. Noticing his eyes on her, Sarah smiled coyly. "David?" she asked innocently, "What are you thinking *now*?"

David pushed her over into the sand.

After their week of honeymooning, they drove to their new matrimonial home. And what a treat that was: no flooring in yet, no plumbing or running water, and one extension cord for power from the electrical panel outlet. David laid out the queen size blow up mattress in the dining room area, as this was the one area he had managed to clear construction dirt, dust, and materials from. He hung up some old sheets over the two doorways to try to keep the dust from blowing into the room and hung one over the window.

"I guess this is home for now," he said self consciously.

Sarah made the best of it. "It's like being at the turn of the century," she insisted. "We're pioneers. I can get water from next door, and..." She looked around. "Well, I guess we'll have to use the corner store's bathroom, or just use a bucket for now."

David hung his shoulders hopelessly until Sarah punched him good naturedly on the shoulder. "It could be worse, chum! At least we have each other."

He snapped out of his mood and grinned at Sarah, "What a trooper you are. I am sorry it's taken so long to get the house ready. Now that we live here, I'll have time in the evenings to work, and I'll get a bathroom and our bedroom done first."

“It’s okay,” said Sarah. “As long as we have each other I can put up with a lot. Let’s get some sleep so that tomorrow we can go for that bike ride.” She bounced up and down amusedly. “You know this blow up mattress is not half bad. It’s all the fun of camping without the annoyance of mosquitoes and having to set up a tent!”

“Let’s hope this house won’t leak when it rains,” groaned David.

The next morning Sarah awoke before David. She was so excited about being in their new house and going for a ride on the bicycle that she could barely sleep. Sarah got up and made some coffee and toast for David. This was an unanticipated challenge as she only had one plug, so coffee came first then the toast after.

After their simple breakfast, Sarah said, “Let’s go!”

“Where?” asked David sleepily. The coffee hadn’t yet kicked in.

Sarah smiled, “For a bike ride silly. Remember?”

“Oh yeah,” said David with a big grin. Last night he had dreamt about the bike again and so was surprised he had forgotten.

David got up from the makeshift table, two low benches with a sheet of plywood on top. He went outside, rolled the bike out of the garage, and straddled the front seat while a shorter Sarah tried desperately to get on without tipping over. After a few feeble attempts and one close call, they were both on and starting down the road.

When David tried to turn on a right hand corner, Sarah felt like they were going to tip so she leaned to the left. The bike started to shake a little as David leaned harder to this right and turned the steering wheel further to the right. Sarah then leaned even further to the left. David realized that he was not going to make the corner and a truck was coming towards them in the left lane. He pushed on the brakes, the bike promptly tipped, and both he and Sarah toppled hard onto the ground. David quickly helped Sarah up and brushed off the little stones stuck to her skin. Little drops of blood started to appear once the stones were removed.

“I think that’s enough for one day. Let’s walk home and get you cleaned up.” David suggested.

Sarah rubbed her rump and winced. “Good idea.”

David picked up the bike and to his amazement saw there was not a scratch on the bike. “Huh, how about that?” he wondered as he walked it and Sarah home. As they reviewed their seemingly failed attempt, they discovered that they had fallen down because they were not working together. “I guess that is pretty important when riding a tandem, eh?” asked Sarah.

“Well,” said David, “We both thought we were helping; just, we weren’t communicating enough, that’s all.”

David put the bike away in the garage and went in to clean and bandage his and Sarah’s scrapes.

It was now back to work and back to usual as David went to work each day delivering grocery products as a truck driver and Sarah worked in food services at a hospital. Each night they tackled an hour or two of construction, threw some food together, and fell into bed exhausted.

One Thursday night David came home all excited. He pushed open the front door to find an equally distracted Sarah. She twirled happily in the dining room. “How do you like them?” she asked.

“Like what?” David asked.

“My new shoes, silly.” Sarah mused.

David looked down and replied, “New shoes? Oh they’re nice. Uh...” he took off his jacket and continued cautiously. “How much were they?”

“That’s the best part!” Sarah excitedly replied, “I got them at half price for twelve dollars.”

“Wow! That *is* a great price!” David replied enthusiastically.

Sarah looked a little sheepish as she completed the truth. “Well actually, I did have to pay \$50 for the first pair.”

“What?” exclaimed David indignantly.

Sarah explained, “They had a buy one, get the second at half price sale. Don’t they look great?”

“Yes, but that’s not the point,” David retorted.

“Oh, yes it is,” said Sarah defensively.

David sat down on the air mattress and sighed. “I guess that’s okay.” His face lit up as he remembered and he jumped back up, grabbed a slice of bread, and stuffed it into his mouth. “I can’t argue about a great deal,” he muffled walking around the room. “Especially since I found such a good one on a snowmobile for next year. It’s last year’s model and with two hundred dollars down, there are no payments until next summer. Then it’s just \$299 a month.”

Sarah piped up nervously, “My dad always said, ‘Don’t buy toys with credit...Pay cash.’”

David snapped. He whipped around to face her. “I’ll never have the cash if you keep buying shoes!”

Furious, Sarah snapped back, “What do you mean? I paid with cash from *my* pay cheque.”

“Then fine,” David said determinedly. “I’ll put \$300 a month from my pay check in a separate account so I can buy the sled when I have enough money saved up.”

“You don’t love me!” Sarah wailed.

David threw his hands up dramatically in the air. “No way. You’re not using that one on me again! I love you plenty. I just want to have some fun and go sledding with my buddies. They all bought sleds on credit.”

“Well we’re not them!” cried Sarah. “We have so much debt from your past, and we need to get on the same page.”

Deflated, David sat back down. “You’re right,” David replied. He put his head down and sighed.

Relieved he was listening, Sarah calmed down somewhat and quietly said, “I’ll return the shoes tomorrow.”

David also calmed down and said, “No, that’s okay. We just need to be on the same page. It’s like riding the bike. If we don’t work together on our money and finances, we’ll crash and get hurt.”

Sarah sat down next to him on the bed and put her head on his shoulder. “I know I am usually the one who is tight with the money, but I find this hard too. I’m not used to having so little. I used to pay my bills and necessities and spend money on things I wanted with the cash I had left over. Now we have to pay all these bills and interest, so there is not enough left to buy the odd thing. It’s hard to accept.”

“I know,” said David quietly as he wrapped one arm around her. “It’ll be tight for a while, but we can dig out. I know we can. It’s just going to be hard until then.”

He rubbed his neck with his free hand and looked out the window. “We still have a few hours of daylight left. Do you want to try out the bike again?”

“I guess so,” said Sarah hesitantly as she gingerly ran her fingers over the scabs on her knees from the last attempt. She wasn’t exactly in the mood to go, but a glance at her husband’s face told her he could use some fun.

It was a beautiful evening. The air was warm with a slight breeze to keep the mosquitoes away. They got on the bike, and this time Sarah promised to lean with David and David promised to go easy on the corners. Off they went, and it felt like they had ridden a bike together all their lives. Faster and faster they flew as the two peddled together, becoming sensitive to the other’s movements. The wind blew in their hair, and the tall oaks lining the roadway protected their eyes from the brightly setting sun. They waved to new neighbours working in flowerbeds and teenagers shooting hoops in their driveways. Every now and then, they passed a family of bike riders or mothers anxiously chasing after children on tricycles. There was little traffic at this time of evening. Exhilarated by the swift speed they had discovered, David and Sarah felt they could bike forever. David commented over his shoulder, “It is so easy to peddle when both of us are working together, isn’t it?”

Sarah heartily agreed.

After about an hour, they stopped to take a break. David looked at the sunset and said, “We’d better think about heading back as it will be getting dark in about an hour and a half.”

“You’re right,” replied Sarah. “And what a perfect evening it was.”

Just as they were about to turn around, David pointed. “There’s a car just ahead pulled over, and it looks like the driver may need some help.”

As they closed in on the vehicle, David could not figure out what kind of car it was. He was a car enthusiast and thought he could recognize most cars from a distance, but not this one. It was a gleaming graphite gray, and sleek. A two seat convertible. David admired the lines and thought to himself that it must be a European roadster. As the couple neared the car, it became apparent that it had a flat tire. A man standing beside the car, hands on his hips, was giving it a little bit of a frustrated look. David greeted the man and asked if he could use some help.

“I sure could,” said the man good naturedly. “I have never changed a flat tire before and I probably am not dressed for it.”

David looked a little closer and saw the man was meticulously dressed from head to toe. His hair was brown, perfectly styled and cut with a fashionable waviness. He had on a perfectly pressed shirt and a patterned tie that picked up the lilac coloured pinstripe in his navy suit. His black leather shoes and belt matched perfectly, and there was not even a scuff on the shoes. His fingers were clean and his nails manicured. It was obvious that he was no blue collar worker.

“My name is Zane,” said the man as David introduced himself and Sarah.

“You’re not from around here?” asked David.

Zane replied, “No, I’m from Ottawa and was trying to take a scenic drive when I got a flat tire in one of those giant potholes. I must not have been paying enough attention to the road as I was listening to a great book while enjoying the evening’s coolness with the top down.”

David looked a little puzzled. “A great book?” he asked.

Zane replied, “Yes, I was listening to *Today Matters* by John Maxwell, and I was working at memorizing the twelve items to attend to each day.”

David breathed out in surprise and dragged his foot in the gravel. “Sounds boring to me,” he said hesitantly. “If I was in a fantastic car like this, I’d be ripping down the road with rock music blaring.”

Zane piped up, “Oh, sometimes I do, but most of the time I prefer to listen to books as I drive. It serves a dual purpose,” he explained. “I call it my university on wheels. I’ve listened to twenty four books since I bought this car two years ago. It is part of my growth plan. I figure if I listen to and or read one self help book a month, I will become a much better person over time, and most of the time I have to drive somewhere anyways, so why waste the time?”

Sarah interrupted the two, “What is a growth plan?”

“Oh”, said Zane, “a growth plan is like a calendar of planned events and daily or weekly events that I schedule in that will help me grow as a person, become more valuable as an employee or a better business person and ultimately make more money in less time is my goal. Most people put into their schedules things like; doctor’s appointments, holidays, special events, hobbies and the like and yet very few schedule in special trainings they want to go to in the year, the number of books and type of books they will listen to or read, mentors they want to find, and courses they want to take to improve themselves. As a matter of fact most people never pick up another book after their formal education except for a novel or magazine.”

David took advantage of the pause. “Speaking about your car, what kind of car is it? I’ve never seen a car with this much leather, especially with the black and red pine striping. The Trident symbol on the front is very cool as well,” he couldn’t help adding.

“Oh!” said Zane. “It’s a Maserati. It’s made in Italy and I just love the lines and feel of it. It also has a Ferrari engine that produces 390 horse power. I have changed the exhaust and added a performance chip so it now probably produces over 400 horse power.”

David’s eyes widened as he asked, “Does it have a super charger?”

“No David,” he replied smiling, “This is a naturally aspired V8.”

David wondered whether there would be room for a turbo under the hood because he could only imagine how much power this Maserati Spider could produce with a turbo kit. Zane must have read his thoughts as he said, “It is a bit hard to not use too much power and get speeding

tickets as it is. I would hate to see how much trouble I could get into if it was super charged.”

David nodded as he remembered the last few tickets that had caused his insurance to sky rocket the last time he renewed. He had promised Sarah to follow the speed limit as they couldn't afford another ticket. “Well, let's get your tire changed,” David said as he rolled up his sleeves and knelt on the ground.

Sarah leaned on the bike's handlebars and smiled at Zane. David had gone straight to work; Zane had only to stand back and watch. As he worked at jacking up the car, David bashfully asked, “What would the payments be on a car like this?” At the moment his car payment was \$600 per month and he figured this car must come in at about \$1800 per month.

Zane smiled a little and replied, “I don't believe in payments on anything except houses and investments. I bought this car with cash. It was eight years old when I bought it, and it had only 12,000 miles or about 20,000 kilometers. The car cost less than a third of the price of what it cost new. I buy all my cars used and let someone else take the depreciation. On this car someone else lost about \$10,000 a year in value, plus they probably financed it because they thought it was normal to always have a car payment. If you add interest on top of that, this car probably cost the first owner about \$14,000 a year without any gas, insurance, or maintenance costs. I paid \$38,000 for it and will keep it at least another ten years.”

“I see,” said David a little surprisedly as he started to lower the car. This was not the answer he had been expecting. He'd never considered this method of buying cars before. “I'll just put your tire in the trunk and you are set to go.”

“Wow, thanks a lot,” said Zane. “How can I repay you guys for helping me out? I may have been out here for a long time if you hadn't stopped to help.”

“It was nothing,” David replied. “Just help someone else in return sometime.”

“Done,” said Zane with a big smile on his face.

David and Sarah watched in awe as the little sports car flew off and became a dot on the horizon in just a few seconds. Sarah shoved David lightheartedly in the shoulder and wryly remarked, “You can pick your tongue up off the ground now.”

David looked worried. “Was it that obvious that I was shocked at how nice a car that was, and that he doesn’t believe in payments on anything except a house and investments?”

“Umm...Yes.” Sarah laughed sarcastically, as memories of what her parents had taught her came rushing back. “We better get going as it is now already dusk.” She got back on the bike and steadied it with her feet on the ground, waiting for David to join her. Instead, she felt herself being lifted up and deposited on the ground beside the bike. “What?” she asked confusedly. “David!”

David had jumped on the bike and was awkwardly trying to speed back down the road without her. Except, the lack of weight on the back end caused it to bob dangerously, making it appear as though it was going to flip. Laughing, Sarah chased after the bike, her threats becoming increasingly creative. “If you don’t come back here now, I’ll put salt on your toast tomorrow morning!..Or, toothpaste..in your socks!” David just hooted in reply, until the bike hit a rock and he toppled into the bushes. “Wyyaaa!” he shouted in surprise as he flew through the air. Sarah laughed so hard she thought she was going to be sick.

That night, with Sarah’s arms tangled around him, David lay awake for a long while. He had a hard time going to sleep as he was so annoyed with himself for all the consumer debt he had collected in such a few short years. This new little financial truth he had learned today made his former mistakes seem that more foolish. As he drifted off to sleep he thought of the four long years before he would have his two year old car paid off, and he sighed as he recalled all the interest he would be paying in the meantime.

SARAH'S JOURNAL

Thursday

I cannot believe how quickly time has gone by. Our wedding was incredible. I can't believe how smoothly everything went and how much fun the actual day was. Much more fun than the planning! It was tough working with the budget my parents gave me. But then, even if it had been twice or three times as much, I still would have found it difficult picking out the dress, food, location, flowers, deciding how many people to invite, etc. As much as I loved being the bride and feeling special, I am so glad that is all over. It was so nice to get away on the honeymoon and relax! And what a blessing to be loaned a cottage for five days as we really didn't have the money for an elaborate honeymoon. That dream will have to wait until a later anniversary, I think.

David and I have spent a lot of time working on the house lately. Sometimes it seems like that's all we do - work at work and then work on the house. Doing it together

makes it special, though. Plus, we've been taking a lot of bike rides during our breaks. It seems working together in life and on the bike sure makes things easier. I think even more than twice as fast and easy.

Met Zane today. He is this neat businessman who drives a really cool car. Forget what kind it was. I could never admit that to David. You should have seen my husband's drool dripping on the ground as he changed the flat tire. Wish we could see Zane again. David seemed to get it that borrowing money is for homes and business investments only. He really was shocked that a sharp guy like Zane only buys used cars with cash. It is so amazing seeing David getting these little realizations. Maybe there is hope after all that we can turn things around!

MY DECISIONS AND ACTION ITEMS

What audio book do I have that I can listen to in the car? Can I borrow one from a friend or library?

Are there books on a growth plan and when can I schedule time to build my growth plan?

What debts do I regret or new cars do I regret having purchased in the past?

What am I sick and tired of being sick and tired about?

What decisions or action items am I going to do and by when?