

As a child, I lived in a little manufactured home in the middle of the woods. I was the younger of two children and my mother attended college and worked evenings while my dad worked during the day. We were poor, but I didn't know it at the time. At some point during my childhood my parents' financial situation improved, but our lifestyle didn't really change. Suddenly we had bagels and juice in the house, which we never had before, but that was the only noticeable upgrade.

My brother and I learned a lot of valuable financial habits as a result of both my parents' lower income and a generations-long tradition of pinching pennies. We were given a small allowance, but we were expected to manage that money right from the start. If we wanted more, asking our parents wasn't an option unless it was for a necessity such as shoes or a school activity. We were expected to work if we wanted money to go out with our friends, and work I did. I babysat, house sat, and worked at the local Dairy Queen. The value of a dollar was never lost on me because I had to earn every one that ended up in my wallet.

When I was sixteen, I convinced my parents to co-sign a credit card application for me and I entered into the world of debt. The credit card arrived right before prom and I treated myself to a new dress, new shoes, and getting my hair done. I looked great, but the first bill did not. My parents and I ended up having a long talk after they opened up the first credit card statement and saw how much I had spent. I wasn't proving to be the financially responsible daughter I had promised to be and they knew that they had to address it right away before things got out of control. For that I am grateful.

That month I also learned about late fees. I got my bill sent it out a week before it was due, but it arrived after the due date and Wham! My very first \$25 late fee. I was so mad when I got my next statement and saw that huge charge when I was certain that I had sent the payment on time. I called my attorney uncle to verify if this injustice was legal. He assured me it was.

I learned a lot of my financial lessons through trial and error. When I bought my first car, the salesman tricked me into buying an expensive warranty by telling me that I was required to buy it. I carried state minimum coverage on my auto insurance because I didn't know that I needed more than that if I wanted to be covered. I started working in the financial industry and saw that I wasn't the only one who was making these mistakes. When I worked collecting on auto loans, I really saw how little people understood about credit. People didn't know that their credit was being negatively impacted by their late or missed payments. They didn't know that being under-insured could be just as bad as not being insured at all. One day I was discussing this with a friend and he had the idea that financial companies should send people into classrooms to teach about credit. I thought this was a great idea and told him that I was going to work to make it a reality.

I decided to go to college and I majored in finance. I graduated with a BS in Business Administration and also obtained my insurance and securities licenses. I worked in many different facets of the financial industry, from retirement preparation to liability claims adjuster. Throughout all of my jobs, I found a lack of financial literacy among customers and saw firsthand the heartache that resulted from this lack of knowledge. I remembered my friend's idea and started to research providing finance information to young people. I originally planned on proposing the idea to a credit card company, but after my experience as a financial adviser and insurance claims adjuster, I realized that providing credit education was not enough. Students needed a comprehensive program to provide them the foundation they need in personal finance. Students need a well-rounded financial education that includes banking, insurance, saving and investing in addition to credit. I realized that the best way to do this would be to start a non-profit specializing in all areas of financial education. This was the beginning of Financial Beginnings, an educational nonprofit that is growing every day.