

She Says... **Money Matters**

If Aoife Stuart-Madge had known a joint bank account did not mean doubling up her shoe fund, she might never have signed up. Now she's entering the seriously grown-up world of savings and forward-thinking



It's fair to say that my husband and I are compatible in a lot of ways. We both love Will Ferrell movies and hate seafood, and we both think that eating cheese and onion Hula Hoops and drinking a strawberry milkshake while watching back-to-back episodes of *Breaking Bad* is a perfectly acceptable way to spend a Saturday afternoon. And when I did one of those totally scientific compatibility equations you used to do in the back of your school book (you know the one: Aoife Stuart-Madge love x...) we scored a whopping 91 per cent. So suffice to say, we are pretty well matched. But when it comes to money – and more specifically how and when it should be spent – we couldn't be more different.

You see, I've never exactly been what you might call a 'saver.' When I was 11, my best friend and I would wash the neighbours' cars on the school holidays to earn extra pocket money, and while she earnestly saved up to Dhs20 a week, I blew my daily earnings on sweets and magazines before I'd even made it home. By the end of the summer, she'd bought herself a shiny new pair of pink roller blades, while all I had to show for spending two months elbow-deep in a bowl of lukewarm Fairy Liquid was an extra filling in my molar and a stack of *Just-Seventeen* mags (which my mum later confiscated until I was old enough to understand the problem pages.)

Things didn't improve when I got my first real paycheck from my Saturday job at the local supermarket when I was 15. By then, I'd already discovered the joys of Topshop and Miss Selfridge, so my paltry wages were spent before I'd even got them. I might as well have been paid in choker necklaces, ribbed tight tops and coloured Levis (it was the '90s, after all).

Later on, adulthood may have brought me a 'proper' job, but it also brought with it a wealth of untapped shopping resources, which I wasted no time in utilising: store cards, credit cards, student loans... So to fund my developing shoe fetish, I continued to spend everything I earned, and some. And, with a (rented) pad of my own to decorate, Egyptian cotton and scatter cushions were also begging for a share of my graduate salary. But while I may have been living on beans on toast come the end of the

month, I was eating them in a beautifully accessorised flat, while wearing really pretty shoes.

Rainy Day, New Wellies

It's not that I'm deliberately frivolous, you understand, it's just that I've never really grasped the concept of 'saving for a rainy day.' I always wondered what exactly people were going to spend their savings on when that elusive rainy day finally came around. Splash out on some nice boots and a new brolley? (because if that's the case, I've already purchased a stunning pair of croc-print Jimmy Choo for Hunter wellies I was saving for a music festival I never went to, so I really shouldn't worry).

You see, I've always been a live-in-the-moment kind of girl. The do-it-now-and-worry-about-it-later kind of girl. I'd think nothing of splurging on a drop-of-a-hat, blow-out weekend away, even if it meant all I had left for the rest of the month was a tan and a mini-bar bill.

So when I recently got married and my husband and I decided to combine our salaries in a joint account, I figured it could only mean one thing: extra shoe money. What I wasn't banking on (excuse the pun) was that this very grown-up move would mean that I would have to become a lot more grown-up about my spending choices, now that there was someone other than myself to think about.

You see, unlike me, my husband is very good at managing his money. He cleared his student loan years ago, pays off his credit card as soon as he gets paid, and he even thinks about The Future. That's



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not to say that he doesn't know how to have fun, it's just that he'd rather spend time saving for that amazing holiday, so we had something to look forward to, not to mention some money to eat for the rest of the month when we got back.

So when it quickly became transparent that I was about as familiar with saving as Lindsay Lohan was to a quiet night in, we agreed to draw up a budget list and start putting money aside.

Being forced to write down everything I spent each month initially came as quite a shock to someone who's financial ethos was to keep spending until the ATM stops spitting it out. But when I took a look at my purchases (one month, I spent enough for a return flight home to Ireland on underwear alone), I was forced to concede that maybe I didn't need that matching stationary set after all. (I mean, when was the last time anybody wrote an actual letter?). And maybe 20 pairs of almost-identical black stilettos could be construed as overkill. And maybe I *might* have a teensy weensy shopping addiction.

Hello, Recessionista

But like any addict worth her shoe collection will tell you, recognising you have a problem is half the battle. After which, I went through various stages of recovery. First there was denial ("But it was on sale!"). Then came anger (watching my girlfriends buy out the mall while I silently seethed). And finally came acceptance, when I acknowledged that some things (like a mortgage for a house or a fab holiday) are worth saving – and sacrificing the odd shopping splurge – for.

I've since become a changed woman: I've acquainted myself with my local shoemender (we're now on first-name terms) and have made old shoes like new again; I've recycled former wardrobe staples, swapped The Dubai Mall for the Outlet Mall, and I save for big purchases.

By delaying gratification, I always have something to look forward to. And my life now has some forward-motion.

In fact, I'm practically a fully-fledged recessionista. Don't get me wrong, if I saw a pair of Prada shoes on sale, I'd have to snap them up – but only as a fashion heirloom for my future daughter, so it technically still counts as delayed gratification, okay? ■

PHOTOGRAPH: JULIET DUNNE. DRESS: TOPSHOP. SHOES: STEVE MADDEN. MAKE-UP: INGLOT. ILLUSTRATION: EMILY NOOROLLAHI