



# Diva nomiϕs

how to still be  
fabulous when  
you're broke

michelle mckinney hammond



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*This is dedicated to all of those who have learned their hardest and sweetest lessons through the things that they've lost. May you not only find wisdom on the path to restoration, but also discover the most amazing truth of all—success in life is not found in who you become or the things you acquire. At the end of the day, who others become because of your presence will be remembered far longer than your fabulous suit or the house you live in. You are you, and the things you own are exactly that—merely things. Here's to not being owned by them and to the joy and peace that knowledge brings to your life.*





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# preface

**Warning:** *If followed carefully, the information in this book will have you looking so good that no one will believe you need help. It would be wise to use all advice in moderation and at your discretion—depending on your audience, circumstance, and need.*





## acknowledgments

A VERY SPECIAL THANKS to all the folks at Tyndale for letting me spread my wings. I'm excited about partnering and growing with you.

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Thanks to all those who have walked with me through one of the hardest times in my life. (You know who you are.) Your love has kept me strong, and I can see the finish line. I love you high, deep, and wide . . . nah, I love you more than that!

# introduction

BEFORE WE BEGIN, let's get one thing straight—Suze Orman I am not! I love me some Suze; but truth be told, if I were her, I never would have ended up broke, broke, and even more broke than the previous two expressions. Are you getting that I wasn't looking so good on paper? But understand and know that I was still fabulous! Sad to say that where I landed is probably where a whole lot more people live than they care to admit. So know this up front: I can't tell you what stocks to buy, how to manage your portfolio, or what to do with your 401(k). (You still have one of those? Congratulations if you do.)

What I can tell you is my own story of a diva gone south, from fabulous to broke—although you'd never know it based on outward appearances. I can tell you how I got to broke and what it takes to make it when your taste and your lifestyle can no longer be sustained by your present budget. (Eww . . . I can't believe I said that word!) They say that hindsight is better than no sight at all, so let me say this: My girl Pamela

always says, “If people knew better, they would do better,” and hopefully that is true. So based on that premise, I am hoping that sharing my calamities with you and the solutions I’ve learned along the way will keep you from doing the same. However, if you’re already in the same boat I almost sank in, perhaps my advice will keep you afloat until you make it to the other side.

But beyond keeping your head in financially trying times and looking fabulous in spite of it all, I believe that the good Lord wants us to not just *look* fabulous but *be* fabulous through and through. In order to do that, certain divine principles cannot be ignored. You know, divine is where the word *diva* really comes from—the root of *diva* in Italian is *divine*. (We sure got that twisted, didn’t we?) By the world’s definition, divas are highfalutin, difficult, self-indulgent, and totally impressed with themselves. I guess for every *yin* there is a *yang*, so let me set the record straight: In this book, we will deal with divas redefined to a higher standard of living, loving, and overcoming—financially, emotionally, relationally, spiritually, and otherwise. All of these things are intertwined. You cannot compartmentalize a woman’s character. One bad habit affects everything else. Based on that knowledge, I had to dig deep to see that my financial dilemma went deeper than the bottomless pit my money had disappeared through. I had some internal issues that contributed to my financial demise, and I think that if you took a moment to reflect, you would agree the same was true for you.

So, first things first. As you journey with me on the road to recovery, know that you are not alone in your struggle.

Second, know it is not too late to recover. Third, recognize that whether your money issues come from legitimately falling on hard times or willful shopaholism (or a combination of both), there are valuable lessons to be learned that can actually work for you in the end. And last but not least, I can share a few secrets with you on ways to maintain your diva standards without spending money you don't have. I love that about God. Don't you? Somehow, someway, trials and tribulations all work out for the good if you let them. How? Well, if you embrace the truth, it will free you to learn from your mistakes and empower you to do the work you need to do to get the victory. You won't just get the victory, but you'll keep it—with change left over. And that, my sister, is a beautiful thing. On second thought, it's downright diva-licious!

*Michelle McKinney Hammond*





# HISTORY LESSONS

THEY SAY NECESSITY is the mother of invention. And while some have been privileged to escape the hardships of life due to gleaning wonderful counsel or through the power of discerning observance, I have to admit, I graduated from neither college. Therefore I have learned everything I now know about money the hard way.

Blame it on my genes, ancestry, whatever. I was an international baby. My mother is from Barbados, West Indies. My father is from Ghana, West Africa. I was born in London, went to school in Barbados, and finally landed in Muskegon,

Michigan, after my mother married a rather tall, handsome American, whom I call my dad. With such exotic beginnings, there was no way I could ever have a taste for anything normal.

As the child of Third World parents along with one solid American, I somehow missed some of the lessons I should have absorbed. Generally speaking, those of African and West Indian descent are known for being very money conscious. Ever saving, making sure there was a stash left over for a rainy day and retirement, being careful never to “cut your coat larger than the cloth you own,” as they used to say, our house never seemed to be in apparent shortage of funds. My parents did such a good job of supplying my every need that I assumed there would never be a shortage. The ever-indulgent Mr. McKinney (that would be my dad) was intent on my having everything I had written on my Christmas list, and so was I. Whatever he left off, Mr. Hammond, my biological father, would fill in the blanks. Imagine my pleasure as I sat opening present after present on Christmas morning and getting exactly everything I wanted. I was the envy of my friends.

Can you see how all of this generosity could give a girl the mind-set that no whim should ever be denied? This same thought process was only solidified as I grew up, made my own money, and found various and sundry ways of fulfilling my desires for all the niceties that life can supply. Somehow, I pulled it together and made it happen. Keep in mind that you are talking to a girl who had a fur coat in college, okay? And *I* bought it, thank you very much! It was not above me



to work hard for what I wanted. Where there was a will, there most certainly was a way, and I was willing to put in the overtime to have my way.

Then, fresh out of college, I was caught up in the glamour of a fabulous advertising career. I was art director, copywriter, producer extraordinaire—flitting coast to coast producing television, radio, and print advertising for top-notch clients like McDonald's, Coca-Cola USA, and General Motors, to name a few. Flying all over the country, staying at the best hotels, and eating at the best restaurants on someone else's dime only fueled my love of the best life had to offer. Meeting celebrities, walking the red carpet, and being at all the soirees that others only dreamed of attending solidified my love for looking and playing the part. I learned all the top beauty and fashion secrets from the top makeup, hair, and fashion stylists in the business. *Dabbling*, I was all that and a bag of chips . . . until I got fired. But for me, that was just a small hiccup in the scheme of life. It was on to the world of freelance, and I embraced being my own boss with abandon . . . until I got hit by a truck (literally). After three operations, a year and a half in bed, and the trial of learning how to walk again, I was still unwilling to release my diva status. You need to know I did not allow a cast that started at the top of my hip and extended down to my ankle to make me a fashion victim or stop me from getting my hustle on. In the words of the famous Tim Gunn, I knew how to “make it work.”

Any diva worth her weight in gold knows how to make lemonade out of lemons. So, as I lay in bed, leg propped up in a cumbersome piece of equipment (I called it Harry since

it was the only thing in my bed next to me), I wrote my first book, *What to Do Until Love Finds You . . .* and *bam!* I was back in the game. With one hit on my hands, I went on to pen thirty-four more books, have several best sellers, and sell over two million books. I became known as a relationship expert and singles guru, a champion of women's issues, and a life coach. Cohosting an Emmy award-winning talk show, traveling the globe to speak at conferences, I was flying high from Los Angeles to Africa and all points in between. I appeared on the covers of magazines, made guest appearances on shows like *Politically Incorrect* with Bill Maher, *The Morning Show with Mike and Juliet*—news shows, cable shows, you name it! I was on the diva track, moving and shaking. I had the loft apartment of my dreams on the river in downtown Chicago with my own office one floor up. I had wonderful jewels and clothing, along with two . . . *oops!* . . . three diva dogs. What more could a girl ask for? Believe me, during this stage in my life, if I wanted it, I found a way to get it.

When I saw Ed McMahon on television talking about declaring bankruptcy, I couldn't fathom how such a thing could be possible. How could a man who had obviously been a multimillionaire celebrity high roller with tons of money end up flatlining to nothing? But I found out. A funny thing happened on the way to my fabulous life that I thought would go on *ad infinitum*. I hit a dead end I didn't see coming.

Of course, all of this unchecked whimsy that I enjoyed, with no clear-cut checks and balances (and I do mean checks, literally), can only go so far. So here I sit at the end of my financial road, back at square one. Savings? Gone.

IRA? Bottomed out. (Isn't everybody's?) Creditors? We're on a first name basis. Shall I go on? How did I get here, you ask? Well, it's a long story that I'll share as we go along, but for now I'll give you the Cliff's Notes version. After making several business decisions that resulted in severe losses coupled with a parade of bad employee choices, my speaking engagements hit an all-time low, and my losses outweighed my gains. I had way more output than input going on. I was supplementing my losses with what I had left, but as you know, every good thing must come to an end. I had been able to stave off the impending flood but not outrun the downward tide. In short, I was just keeping afloat when a series of unexpected emergencies hit. (You know about the unplanned expenditures that happen in life, right? The car suddenly breaks down, medical hiccups . . . you get the picture.) Follow that up with the economy going south without checking with me to see if it was a good time, and I began to drown in the overwhelming tsunami of my debt. It was not pretty.

The consequences of all that had transpired had finally caught up with me. As I sat looking at my profit/loss sheet for the year, the conclusion was in harsh black and white—all my hard work had netted me exactly negative \$1,154. Every sign I had been avoiding now slapped me in the face. Negative! Can you believe it? Somewhere along the way I had missed the memo on how hard times were getting. Forging ahead with business as usual, I failed to pay attention

*A funny thing happened on the way to my fabulous life that I thought would go on ad infinitum. I hit a dead end I didn't see coming.*

to the bottom line until I was forced to. I had to reexamine what had brought me to this place. So if I may, allow me to share some diva-licious tidbits throughout this book that can make the difference between your navigating through the murky waters of lack and drowning. 'Cause believe me, sister, if you lose your boat, as opposed to your shirt, you still need to know how to swim!

### **DIVA REVELATION**

Take a look at where your parents are financially right now. That is a picture of your financial future. If they are rich, that's good news. If they're not . . . well, that means you've got some work to do. For those of you who like to blame everything on Mama and Daddy, I believe that, since Jesus destroyed all generational curses on the cross, it's now up to you to break the cycle of generational habits (I really call it generational "stupid") that can affect your future. You do know that there's a difference between curses and habits, don't you? So take charge of your life! Learn from their successes as well as mistakes and make the lessons learned count.

*Somewhere along the way I had missed the memo on how hard times were getting. Forging ahead with business as usual, I failed to pay attention to the bottom line until I was forced to.*

## WHAT'S A DIVA TO DO?

- Take a good, hard look at how your parents handled money. What was their mind-set? Spending habits? What was the outcome?
- Check yourself. In what ways are your money habits similar?
- List what has worked and what has not, as well as what you want your financial landscape to look like. Make a list of resolutions about how to move forward based on your observations and conclusions.
- Do not make unfair comparisons if your financial level is different from your parents', but remember that the fundamental issues remain the same. It's not what you spend; it's how you spend it!

