

The Wealthy Peasant

By Shauna Madsen

Introduction

Everyone has a story, but who spends most of their lives dissecting, reflecting, and observing current circumstances or past events? Not many, and you know why? It's painful shit. Whether we ponder the relationships we are in now or the ones we blew up in the middle of the living room floor on the way to the taxi patiently running up the meter out front, what do we look for so we don't make the same mistake again? Where do we even begin?

How many times have you said to yourself, "If only I knew then what I know now!"?

Hindsight is a lousy teacher. Teachers are there to show you the way, like a mentor or a coach. They aren't there to press your nose to the rearview mirror, reminding you of the loss, grief, and torment you either caused or received. Teachers pre-pave your way with ideas, lessons, and knowledge to help move you forwards. They don't expect you to get it all right 100% of the time. Still, if you get it wrong 99% of the time, they will give you a failing mark. Maybe not these days, since kids aren't allowed to fail or get a zero on a test, but I tell you, the teachers I had in school weren't scared to fail me, call me a failure, or hand out the strap when they thought I deserved it.

Everyone has a story, and I don't know a soul who has had a storybook childhood, except my grandchildren. If I could come back as anything next time around, I would be one of my daughter's children. Her kids have parents who listen, interpret, spend time understanding and communicating, and they laugh, play, and allow their kids to be themselves and grow into confident little people.

OH, if I knew then what I know now. I would likely have written a trilogy by now.

I was afraid to tell my story, and I've buried it for so long. I've transferred it from handwritten loose-leaf, between two PCs, across four external backup drives, onto my first Mac in 2012, my second in 2016, my third in 2019, and finally to my MacBook Pro in 2020. I avoided

my book until it dawned on me that I'd been creating distractions out of fear—fear disguised as distractions because I was afraid of being found out.

You see, I've held some impressive jobs. I've been an entrepreneur for more than thirty years, and I've spoken on stage at business conferences with hundreds of businesswomen listening to me share tips on building their business. I've won awards, I've been interviewed on TV and radio, and I live in a lovely home on an acreage. People see me as successful and wealthy by their definition.

My fear was cemented in the idea that people would judge me for being married multiple times. Four marriages constitute multiple times, right? I was afraid clients, after spending thousands of dollars with me to teach them how to build a business, would reject me when I leaked the sombre truth of my Grade 9 education. I was fearful of what my family might say when I opened the door to our past and let the world peek inside.

It took cancer, a heart attack, a pandemic, and a team of angels on my shoulders whispering in both ears, or more like screaming, "YOUR REARVIEW MIRROR IS A GIFT. SHARE IT!" to finally write my story.

So, I responded, "Fine, fine, I'm doing it," and I took a trip to Costa Rica for a writer's retreat to reignite my story. If it can help you take steps toward a life you love, I've done my job, and I will kindly give the angels a much-deserved holiday.

I want to share how a slight shift in how we see ourselves can change the course of everything. A dysfunctional childhood does not define who we are. Abusive relationships are not an excuse to remain a victim. A lack of education is not a reason to settle for mediocrity or accept less than what we dream for our future.

I didn't write *The Wealthy Peasant* to say, "I did it, so you can too," although I believe that to be true with all my heart. I wrote my story because the world is a mess, and I know the ripple effect we make by becoming the best versions of ourselves. It is my earnest hope that enough people become their best selves so the world pays attention and wants a little piece of what we have, through attraction rather than promotion.

Why *The Wealthy Peasant*?

Society defines wealth as an abundance of valuable possessions or money, and a peasant is a term often used to describe a poor person of low social standing.

The status quo dictates that we measure success by material gain, and society passes judgment based on outward appearances. Whether it's the car we drive, the clothes we wear, the colour of our skin, our spiritual beliefs, or the number of followers we have on social media—we are judged. I have been persecuted for defending my values, exiled for believing in God the “wrong way,” ridiculed for being myself, and beaten for speaking my truth. Oh, and humiliated for having 425,000 km on my Jetta. WTF?

True wealth is not found on the bottom line of a spreadsheet. It is internal. It is a flint that sparks our genius and illuminates our path. It is an attitude that carries us, fuels our persistence, and feeds our tenacity. Wealth is an attitude and a knowing. We can share it and never lose it. It grows with every step we take. Nobody can take it from us.

I learned the hard way, in every way.

As a child, I escaped reality with the help of *Nancy Drew* and my collection of fairy tales. I internalized the romantic endings of each book, adopting the idea that good always prevails over evil. I imagined myself as the good witch or the princess whose dreams came true if she believed in the possibility of a happily ever after.

My mom said I followed the rules of the relationship formula by marrying representations of my father. And I didn't do it once; I did it repeatedly, thinking each time would be different. I clung to my childhood ideas that good will always prevail over evil, and all I had to do was believe. If I focused on the good, and I became whatever I thought was the person I was supposed to be inside the relationship, we would live happily ever after.

I didn't see my father's habits and qualities in the men I was attracted to until the end of each relationship. I was unknowingly attracted to the familiar, and the true qualities of each man remained hidden below the surface at the beginning of each relationship. I may have wanted the fairy tale, but I was drawn to what I had grown up with, and my dad set the stage.

He was an abusive alcoholic, absent as a father, and controlling as a husband. He quit drinking when I was fourteen, but that was too late for me and my three siblings. The damage was done, and it took each of us years to repair some of that damage. My mom was a child

herself when she married my dad at the age of seventeen, and her father was an alcoholic, so she only knew what she had grown up with.

We didn't know what we didn't know, and so we believed our lives were the norm. If someone had asked me if I was happy as a child, I wouldn't have understood the question. What was happy? Was it a feeling, like the pain of loneliness that gnawed at my insides?

My parents broke the cycle of alcoholism that plagued both their families for generations. When Dad quit drinking, our family fell apart, Mom and Dad divorced, and we all began our own journeys to recovery. It all had to happen exactly the way it did. My dad has grown into a wonderful man and has helped hundreds, if not thousands of alcoholics live a life of sobriety. The rest of us, including my beautiful mother, have put in the work, made the effort to become better versions of ourselves, and we have reaped many rewards.

My mom once told me the world wasn't ready for my story. But now, with all that is happening in the world, my story doesn't seem so horrific. People have become desensitized to horrors of all descriptions, so the time has come for *The Wealthy Peasant*. My story seems like a preamble with everything from emotional and physical abuse, single parenting, choosing between adoption and abortion, spirituality, religion, rape, survival, workplace harassment, poverty, homelessness, alcoholism, marriage, more marriage, abandonment, failure, success, fear, love, and heartache. My story or parts of it will likely be familiar to you, and I hope I can give you a seed of inspiration if you are stuck and unsure how to navigate the next steps forward.

Disclaimer #1:

Spirituality and religion are two very different concepts to me. Whether you belong to a church or not, believe in fate, destiny, God, a higher power, a Great Spirit, or you believe in nothing, or something completely different, it doesn't matter. I talk about my own spirituality, partially because I think it's a fascinating topic but also as the thread that ties my stories together to make sense of it all.

I have very broad beliefs about most things in life because I've spent more than fifty years dissecting, reflecting, observing, and consciously making choices to sort through the pile

of shit between my ears. I've discovered profound truths about life, love, and relationships that many people can't see, take for granted, or can't be bothered to explore. This life we live is multidimensional and ever-expanding, and the wealth you hold inside of you is all you need to be, do, and have everything you can imagine. It doesn't matter what your past is telling you, and the things you worry about for the future do nothing more than waste your precious time and energy.

Disclaimer #2:

My stepfather used to say that if I didn't have chaos in my life, I'd create it. That was true to a degree, but in my defence, I was diagnosed with ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder) at the ripe age of fifty-five. Over the years, I've learned coping skills to work with the squirrel I call Surel, who has been freeloading for years, stealing ideas, creating distractions, and causing all kinds of havoc for me. This is a disclaimer to give you a heads-up on how I write, tell stories, and pretty much live my life. I don't apologize for it, except when I miss an appointment or forget to put the milk back in the fridge. To keep a positive spin on what others see as a "disorder," I have relabelled ADHD as *Awesome Divas Have Dreams*, and I am sticking with that.

Disclaimer #3:

A few names have been changed because it was a smart thing to do.

