

Coping with the cost, by Crystal.

Coping with the cost

A personal story

How I avoided student loans

by Crystal (March 2011)

When people learn that I managed to avoid college loans, I'm often asked how that happened. It was a mixture of work, luck, and help.

Planning for college

For as long as I can remember, I knew I'd go to college. It was a given. I can't remember my family overly pushing me that way, but my grandparents and parents went to college, so I was going to go too. My family is also open

about money, so I always just seemed to know that college would be expensive. So, I started babysitting and pet-sitting when I was twelve years old so that I could save for those magical four years of college education. I also planned to get a "real" job as soon as I turned sixteen. My plans changed, though, when we moved overseas. [...]

I was scheduled to start college, and I still had long-distance courses that I needed to finish before I could graduate from high school. [...] That is also when I applied for my first "real" job — as a help-desk attendant for the 24-hour assistance desk in my future dorm.

Putting the "work" in Work-Study

Luckily, I received a few scholarships, including a very large Academic Achievement Award that covered a big part of my actual class expenses. But my parents also worked at least 20 hours a week at the help desk and applied for other on-campus positions.

By my second year of college, I was engaged. [...] I was still trying to pay my own way through college, but I kept falling short about \$1200 every semester. I was living as cheaply as possible, splitting a room for \$288 to save money, and even staying under \$3 a day for food. But making \$5.25 an hour just couldn't cover everything my scholarships left behind.

I worked part-time in the Games Room on campus throughout my last three years in school. During my last year, I was a blackjack dealer for office parties (the legal kind of gambling in Texas, where the players could win raffle tickets for prizes). I also found a third job as a tax-office receptionist during my last semester. I took loans from my parents for whatever my scholarships and my paychecks couldn't cover.

A Final Piece of Help

By the time I graduated from college (with honors), I was working Mondays, Wednesdays, Fridays, and Saturdays at the tax office; Tuesday and Thursday evenings from 5pm-1am at the Games Room on campus; and I was a blackjack dealer Friday and Saturday nights. In short, I was working almost 60 hours a week in three different jobs, commuting to campus every Tuesday and Thursday for my last twelve hours of classes, and ended up owing my parents a little more than \$8000. [...]

A few months after all of that, my parents forgave my \$8000 in loans as a late graduation present. I was really broke, but at least I didn't have any loans. As I said in the beginning, having no student loans was a mixture of work, luck — and help. (I know I'm lucky to have received the help from my parents.)

www.getrichslowly.org

