



101 days...  
THE SPENDING  
DETOX

Claudia Chung is on an economy drive.  
Big time. Kind of ...

Last night, I ordered seven lace-embroidered bras. Two in black, two in white, two in nude, and one sassy pink in case I ever feel kinky. It sounds excessive, I know. Seven! But what if I told you they were more than 50% off the original price, with another 15% discount? And free shipping?

And that I’ve just gone wireless for the New Year? I need all seven of them to liberate my precious C cup breasts from the daily torment of metal wire digging into my upper torso. Every day my bosoms scream: “No wire, ever!” like two little bald Joan Crawfords. And I’m tired of bras that push up my tender woman bits so high — they hit me in the face when I bend down. Or bras that are so tight around my back they form a warped uni-boob. But mostly, I am breaking up with wire bras because they cause armpit butts — so relentless in their buttress it shapes your armpit fat into tiny mice-size underarm heinies. So are you still judging me for my late-night under garment purchase?

Well, you should. Because honestly ... I’m a shit show.

When Ruth (our lovely editor) and I discussed this “101 days of Spending Detox” story, it had a lot of variations. Not buying anything new, with a “how to” consignment shop twist. Maybe keeping an absurdly tight budget while I DIY most luxury items. Or pre-planning my monthly spending with a super list. But the bottom line was: whatever you do, don’t spend money on anything but the essentials.

Now, given that at this point in my life I live by the “monkey like, monkey get” philosophy, the 101 days of being thrifty was no easy feat. But I was hopeful and enthusiastic.

You see, I wasn’t always this inept when it came to the mighty buck. Once upon a time I was an ingénue living on her own in New York City and a budgeting maniac — a wunderkind of sorts. While climbing up the corporate PR ladder, I lived comfortably in a one-bedroom Manhattan apartment without a roommate, paid off my college loans in a few years, vacationed regularly without

Left: Quitting spending? It’s easier said than done.

slumming it in hostels, and bought whatever I wanted. In fact, I was so good at managing my finances I was even featured (for a total of three star-defining seconds) on the *Today* show.

“Claudia, what do you plan to do with your tax refund?” the host asked me.

And while I don’t remember my exact words — something related to squirreling it away for a rainy day — I do remember how I felt. Smug. I was the shit and all of America knew it. I’m thoroughly surprised I wasn’t jumped that morning, surrounded by hundreds of cash-strapped young professionals, and given 21 lashings in the middle of Rockefeller Center for being a supercilious asshole.

“I’d like to be the kind of person who gets her daily dopamine jolt from meaningful human exchanges. Not at the bargain bin at TJ Maxx.”

Fast-forward to present day and that same haughty jackass is mindlessly hemorrhaging money. Karma’s a bitch.

How did I go from a fiscally responsible twenty-something to the thirty-something shit show I am now? Here’s my theory. As a singleton, you don’t have a choice but to strike it out on your own. You have something to prove to yourself and the world. Pay your taxes! Send in the rent check on time! Check the mailbox (not for packages from Hanky Panky but for bills)! You do it because you have to and you get good at it.

But then one day, you fall in love with someone who is better, more established than you, smarter, knows about homeowner’s insurance and why we need it, and responsible, annually ensuring you’re not in the slammer for not paying your taxes. That’s when you turn into Rain Man minus the genius.

For the past 101 days, I’ve tried every which way to curb my spending. During

the holiday season, which fell right smack in the middle of this detox, I thought of ways to re-gift and reuse.

For instance, I toyed with the idea of using my nautical-themed blank cards as holidays cards by cleverly writing: “Ahoy! And Happy Holidays!” And I thought about going to Costco and picking up gallons of their signature Kirkland Extra Virgin Olive Oil and making vast amounts of homemade oils to give as gifts. If I put them in mason jars, it’s all so shabby chic, I thought. “I hope you will enjoy your homemade rosemary oil when you are out at sea in 2017. Do not use as shark repellent. Love Claudia.”

Of course, this didn’t happen. I spent money on gifts but I also spent more on myself than anyone else on my Christmas list. Ultimately, I was an epic loser.

Some other failure highlights: Not buying anything new with a “how to” consignment-shop twist: The first week, I found a brand new, tag-on Marc Jacobs star-patterned dress in my size at Goodwill in Chelsea. I was addicted immediately. I am still weaning myself off.

Keeping an absurdly tight budget: I gave myself a \$20-a-week allowance, not including essentials. But, since food is an essential, I started to buy various grade A imported fish sauces and other pricey obscure condiments I didn’t understand.

Pre-planning my monthly spending with a super list. The list just got longer and my spending justification next to it more colorful: “\$50 sushi dinner with MM — used dinner budget for birthday day gift for assistant teacher. Bought MM chai tea (\$5) instead because his grandpa died. Sad.”

It’s clear to me, more than anyone, that I am a shadow of my former New York City self. And I am fully aware that my money issue is the Cadillac of problems. But that doesn’t mean I don’t want to change. I’d like to be the kind of person who gets her daily dopamine jolt from meaningful, genuine, and sincere human exchanges. Not at the bargain bin at TJ Maxx. So, I’m going to keep trying. Next stop: buy everything in cash.

But at this very moment, suffice it to say, I am just a monkey waiting for her box of bras to arrive in the mail.