THE BAM ALLIANCE®
A Community of Independent Advisors

Transforming a Money Memory

Monica Jennings

A variety of evaluative tools have been developed over the years to help financial advisors understand a client's core motivations, identify what is truly important to them and then incorporate that knowledge into a meaningful and satisfying financial planning experience.

One vital area of exploration centers on understanding your relationship with money. I experienced an unexpected discovery in my own relationship with money during a recent conference session with Tim Maurer, Director of Personal Finance for The BAM ALLIANCE. We were discussing the question, "What is your earliest money memory?"

Whenever I've been asked that question in the past, the same memory came to mind. When I was around 7 or 8, I'd get a Kennedy half-dollar coin every week as an allowance, and soon had accumulated a number of them. One day, my parents told me about savings accounts and asked me to consider depositing some of my allowance in one. Sounded like a good idea, so I took my precious coins and put them in the bank for safekeeping.

Then a day came when I wanted some of my money back, so we went to the bank and the teller counted out my withdrawal in a number of dollar bills. I looked at them, dismayed that I didn't get my original Kennedy coins back. My parents tried to explain, but all that mattered to me was that the Kennedy coins were gone.

Up until this point, every time I recalled that story, I thought it was just a cute anecdote about childhood naiveté.

But on this particular day, I listened as Tim asked another advisor whether his memory was a good or bad one. I felt a jolt of awareness as I realized that my memory was a bad one, or rather, one that had a negative effect on me. The experience had made me feel stupid about the realities of money.

That epiphany, in turn, catapulted me forward to another memory from college. My father asked me a question about a then-current event taking place in the financial world, and I had no idea what he was talking about. He admonished me, asking how I could be a business school student and not be aware of what was going on in the real world. The same feeling arose. Stupid.

I started thinking about how these incidents had affected me going forward.

It occurred to me that they contributed to an issue I still struggle with—feeling insecure about the validity of my knowledge and fearing constantly where the gaps in it may be. Tim's talk created a shift in my thinking. I now focus not on fear and uncertainty, but on how I'm going to manage this discovery.

My story doesn't draw a direct connection between a childhood money memory and how I deal with my personal finances as an adult. However, there's definitely a relationship between it and other aspects of my life.

And since the fact is that our "money life" is deeply integrated with all the other aspects of our lives, this personal discovery may yet prove connected to money behaviors which may not be serving me very well, ones that I might be able to eventually transform into positive forces.

So if your financial advisor asks you about your money memories, or to imagine how you would respond to a certain question under a particular set of circumstances, let go of any skepticism and give it some quiet, considered thought.

Ideally, discoveries you make will help your advisor work with you to craft a financial plan that you'll be motivated to enact. The bonus could just be some startling insight into other areas of your life. Enjoy the exploration.

About Monica Jennings, Founder, Jennings Financial Planning, Honolulu, HI

After a career in corporate finance beginning in the early 1980s, Monica Y. Jennings, CFP® established Jennings Financial Planning to create a place where planning your financial future would just feel right. As part of a growing organization of advisors, researchers and national thought leaders, we are devoted to helping people just like you achieve their most important goals.