

A WOMAN ON TOP

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MY JOURNEY OF SELF-DISCOVERY
THROUGH LOVE AND MONEY

*Suzanne
Leydecker*

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This book is a memoir. It reflects the author's present recollections of experiences over time. For privacy reasons, some names, characteristics, locations, and dates may have been changed.

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My Journey of Self-Discovery through Love and Money

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If we know how to use it, then money can help us pass through this earthly existence with more ease. However, if we don't know how to deal with it, then money can destroy us.

SRI PREM BABA

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Foreword

When I began reading this book early one night, the last thing I imagined was that I would stay up as long as it took to finish it, which turned out to be sometime early the next morning.

“Why might you do that?” you may ask. The answer, of course, is, “I just couldn’t put it down.”

I had to see where it would lead, and what I discovered was that the unfolding continued all the way through to the end of the book. And the end itself, along with Suzanne’s learnings and the way she is using what she’s learned, is highly inspirational for those I might refer to as “seekers of the Light.” And thus, the unfolding continues, and continues, and continues—as endless as time itself.

As Suzanne points out, we are living at a time when change in an upward direction is the order of the day. *A Woman on Top* is certainly what I would call an “instructional manual” for those seeking a path leading to the same destination, which I refer to as “awakening into the emerging Light, consistent with the evolution of consciousness we are all involved in at this time.”

I don’t recall ever starting a book and reading it cover to cover because someone, or something within me, just had to follow the thread

to see where it was going. I am pleased I chose to follow Suzanne's path and see that it led her higher and higher into what I like to identify and refer to as "the workings of the Earth School."

May this journey lead you to your own path of awakening and evolution.

Now I think I'll go take a nap.

H. RONALD HULNICK, PHD
President, University of Santa Monica

PROLOGUE

The Elephant in the Room

The truth knocks on the door and you say, “Go away, I’m looking for the truth,” and so it goes away. Puzzling.

—ROBERT M. PIRSIG

You may be wondering why this book is called *A Woman on Top*.

One of its early titles was *Women on Top*. At the time, if you Googled “Women on Top,” you got, well, women on top, and then you got me.

Wait a minute—is this a sex book?

I hate to disappoint you. This isn’t a book about sex.

It’s about a topic even more taboo than sex. Money. And more specifically, how money, relationships, and sex are intertwined.

I remember watching an interview with Eckhart Tolle, author of *The Power of Now* and one of today’s great spiritual teachers.

A man in the audience asked Tolle, “Do you *really* believe in reincarnation?”

Tolle answered the man with complete confidence, “Really, I have no idea.”

As Tolle said in his thick German accent, and I paraphrase, choosing to believe in reincarnation makes it easier for me to understand what is going on in the here and now, but it's up to you. It doesn't matter whether you believe in it or not.

For the record, I do believe in reincarnation, but no matter what *you* believe, I think we can agree that during the course of our lives we tend to encounter the same kind of challenges again and again and again.

In fact, some believe that on an unconscious level we choose our parents, families, and life experiences—including our experiences with money—*before* we get here. And then upon the arduous journey through the birth canal, we agree to forget what we know—and forget we have chosen everything we experience in our lifetime. Some (including me) call the life challenges we face our spiritual curriculum, which we chose before we were born in order to learn what we need to learn.

I might have lost some of you here, but why couldn't it be true?

However, on a conscious level, I didn't get to choose if I was going to incarnate as male or female, black or white, gay or straight—or anything in between. I did not get to choose whether I would be born in a remote village of Uganda or in Ross, California. I just arrived.

If we knew what our life challenges were going to be and how to handle them, they wouldn't be challenges. Life would be, as they say, a bowl of cherries. We could sit around and rest on our laurels. We could bask in our successes, spend our time pursuing leisure activities, experience financial freedom, and eat all the dessert we want with no negative consequences. We would know how to handle setbacks, divorce, disappointments, and serious illness.

This is the fantasy.

Instead, the reality is we work, we struggle, and we ponder whether the job or partner we choose will lead us to nirvana. We ponder over which lifestyles and choices will lead us toward the good life.

Some are luckier than others. Most would say I am in the “lucky” category, and I am. I have lived an unbelievably magical 63 years. If I die tomorrow, I can say I have lived the fullest life imaginable.

In 2007, after my second parent passed away, I inherited more money than I had ever imagined, but that’s not why my life has been magical. Many times since, I have wished I never inherited it. Every bit of security and opportunity it offered was matched by the chaos it created in my relationships.

Even with all I have going for me, I have my challenges on this journey of navigating the calm—and the not-so-calm—seas. I am a woman, and women come with our own unique set of challenges. Maybe that’s why we give boats female names.

What *has* been magical is the inner journey created by receiving the money. While I thought I was on an outer journey of mastering money and relationships, the truth was I was on an inner journey, and money was just the catalyst. My inner journey became about discovering what true self-worth, self-care, and love without the entanglement of money really looked like.

I have had many conversations with many women over the course of my life that went something like this.

Me: “[Name of latest guy] isn’t calling me back. I think he’s so great, and I just don’t understand.” I pause, feeling sorry for myself. “I mean, we had such a good time last night. I thought he really liked me.”

My girlfriend(s): “Come on, you’re great. He’s the one who is losing out. I (we) don’t get it either, but I (we) think it’s because you come across as too powerful, and men are intimidated by strong, powerful women.”

I hated those conversations.

I've been told many times that because I come off as powerful, or tough, or strong, men feel "intimidated" by me.

Intimidated by me?

That sounded ridiculous.

I knew my friends were just trying to make me feel better and pay me a compliment, but either it was true (which didn't really inspire me to stand up and be powerful), or it wasn't—meaning there was something wrong with me.

Neither felt good.

The cold, hard truth was I looked tough on the outside, but in reality I was a soft pile of mush on the inside—which is not a particularly powerful way of being.

I got the problem but didn't have the solution.

After inheriting the money, this one question would become the major question of my lifetime:

What happens in a heterosexual relationship when a woman makes more?

My particular challenges have been the following:

1. Being a woman on top, or a woman who has more resources than most (for me it is money, but it could just as easily be intelligence, talent, connections, or any other resource).
2. Habitually saying and thinking things that keep me stuck—even when I know better.
3. Being without a soulmate in a world that seems obsessed with finding "the one."

If any of these sound familiar, I wrote this book for you.

So, I'm supposed to be the expert who will provide the "secret answer," right?

I was inspired a few years back by Lynne Twist, who states in the introduction of her book *The Soul of Money* that her intention in writing her book was about "finding a new freedom, truth, and joy in our relationship with money." She goes on to say she is "not an economist or a banker or an investment advisor."

"I have no degrees in finance or business," she states. "I do, however, have a deep and special knowledge, experience, and understanding of money. My education in money has come through direct and intimate experiences."

This is how I feel about being a so-called breadwinning woman in intimate relationships. I'm not a money expert, I don't have an MBA, and I'm not a relationship expert. I hold a master's degree in Marriage and Family Counseling and a certificate in Spiritual Psychology, and although I learned a great deal, in no way have I mastered these areas in my own life.

However, since I travel a great deal, I have had the opportunity to hear stories from around the globe. Each story is different, but they are all the same. When a woman has more or makes more than her male partner, relationships often suffer.

I have heard stories from a female taxicab driver in France, schoolteachers in New York City, a front desk clerk in South Africa, and some of the wealthiest women and men in the world. As I continued to meet women from all financial backgrounds with varying levels of education from many corners of the planet, my biggest surprise was that even though I was in the financial top one percent of people alive today, women all over the world were grappling with the very same questions I was.

This "Woman on Top" problem isn't just my problem, or a rich woman's problem, or a first-world problem; it's a global problem.

It's not related to age, economics, education, or location; it was everywhere I looked.

If you identify as a woman who feels you must sacrifice your success to have a relationship—or sacrifice a relationship to have success—I want you to know you are not alone.

I often think about the idioms we hear and say without thinking about it. We grow up hearing them repeated to us over and over again, and if we don't question them, they can become the scripts for our lives.

But just because we believe them and use them doesn't mean they're true or applicable.

See if any of these sayings sound familiar:

- The apple doesn't fall far from the tree.
- She wears the pants in the family.
- Money is the root of all evil.
- He who makes the gold makes the rules.
- The grass is always greener on the other side.

Put into today's language, they might sound like:

- My mom stayed at home with us kids, so I should too.
- She's in control of the relationship, which means he is completely emasculated.
- Rich women are bitches.
- Stay-at-home dads are losers.
- My life would be so much better if my husband made more money and I could stay home with the kids. (Or my life would be so much better if I could work instead of staying home with the kids.)

If we really want women to be successful—and if we really want men to want us to succeed—we must begin by looking at our current assumptions and choose whether they still have value for us. And if they don't, we must replace them.

I invite all of us to *question everything*—including the idioms and references we use—and consider what will serve ourselves and society best in this new world.

It's time to talk about the elephant in the room. We can no longer ignore the dynamic that happens over and over, usually behind closed doors, when women are outearning men: women feel they must diminish themselves.

To have viable conversations that actually produce solutions, we must practice calmly and directly speaking about it. Maybe if we can start talking about it together, we'll better understand how big the elephant is, whether it's hostile or friendly, and what to do with it.

So, with this book, I'm breaking the ice. I'm sharing my raw, vulnerable, imperfect story of facing my own inherited beliefs about men, money, and sex.

Although I am in no way an expert, I believe my whole life was perfectly designed to lead me to this task. Our planet is in the midst of a major transition, and it is time for us all to examine our beliefs regarding money and relationships, no matter what gender we are.

If you are a woman on top and want to fully embrace your purpose and passions while engaging in a healthy relationship, my hope is that my story will inspire you to embrace your own empowerment and stop feeling ashamed of your gifts—and begin to feel more comfortable sharing them.

If you are a wealthy woman, chances are you're going to date a man with less money than you. If you are a woman with a lot of

any resource, chances are you're going to date a man who has less of that resource than you. Rather than a curse, my life story shows that wealth—and everything that comes with wealth—is an opportunity for spiritual growth.

We are all born with gifts we don't necessarily deserve. None of us got to choose where we were born, or how much money our family of origin had, or our athletic ability, or level of beauty.

We are all also born with the opportunity to awaken into whatever we were given and use it to benefit our life experiences and the life experiences of others. Although I still have things to work on, I have finally reached the point where I feel blessed to have this gift of money.

I may not have answers, but I do have a story. My hope is that my story will invite you to examine your beliefs, see the lessons in your own story, and continue the conversation.

CHAPTER 1

The Apple Doesn't Fall Far from the Tree

Perhaps home is not a place
but simply an irrevocable condition.

—JAMES BALDWIN

I grew up in Ross, California, an affluent community in Marin County, twenty minutes north of San Francisco across the Golden Gate Bridge. In 1959, the year I was born, my parents—Patricia Lute and John Huge Robinson—bought a plot of land and built their house in Ross for \$27,000. Today, that same amount of money wouldn't buy you a driveway in Marin County. Over time, it became one of the more desirable locations to live, but back then it was quiet.

My world and family seemed normal as a child. Our home and lifestyle were basic but adequate. Others had more (and much fancier) homes and things than we did, but my family's life was simple. We went skiing for a weekend in the winter every year and spent two weeks in

the summer at a camp in the mountains. Otherwise, we stuck around home. We played hide-and-seek in the neighborhood and kickball in the field near our house with friends. Ross was a great place to grow up, and I appreciated our rural lifestyle and community—and it was all I knew.

My parents grew up in the aftermath of the Depression, which I'm sure affected their views about money. My mother was born in a small apartment in San Francisco on Van Ness Avenue, and my father in Piedmont, a suburb of Oakland, California. As a young woman, my mother worked at KGO radio station until she got married. My father worked for the Harper Group, which eventually became a branch of Circle Freight International. The Harper Group was the family freight-forwarding business my father's father had acquired in 1940 from Mr. Harper after working there since the early 1900s.

My father was always a hard worker, even as a boy. He, along with his younger brother, started off in the mailroom of the Harper Group sorting and stacking the incoming mail shortly after he turned twelve years old. My father eventually took over the company as president at age forty. His brother became vice president shortly after.

From that point on, there was always friction between my father and the rest of his family over the business. His parents and only brother did not want the company to grow. They wanted the business to remain a small family operation with its twelve employees and moderate profits. Over time, my father saw the company's potential as a successful global business. Money, wealth, and loyalty within his family of origin were big conversations in our house.

Before taking over the business, my father was very close to his family. He spent a great deal of time with his brother hunting and skiing, among other things, and they loved each other dearly. As young children, our family spent most Saturdays at my grandparents' house in

Piedmont with my uncle, my aunt, and their five children. Those were happy times. As a child I felt loved and included in my extended family.

As my father fought with his parents and brother over the growth of the company, these wonderful Saturdays simply stopped happening. By attempting to grow the company, my father was seen as going against the family. We became estranged from our grandparents and cousins. I was sad about no longer being included, but there was no room for negotiation or discussion.

When I went to my uncle's funeral forty years later, I discovered there were lingering hurt feelings. My aunt still believed my father chose money and the success of the company over love and loyalty. The story that my father broke up the family for his own personal gain continued to thrive.

Based on the sadness I saw my father carry, I don't believe he did not love his family. I believe he made the choice to follow his dream of growing the business, and they wanted nothing to do with it. No one was wrong; it was just how it happened.

In 1977, when I was seventeen, my father took Circle Freight International public. Due to his vision and hard work, he built from next to nothing a worldwide shipping business—one of the most successful of its kind globally.

My bedroom was next to my parents', so I know he worked hard. His alarm went off at 4:30 a.m. every morning Monday through Friday—and at 6 a.m. on Saturdays—so he could go running and then to work when he wasn't traveling. He was about as quiet as a herd of elephants well before the sun was up. I spent many mornings with a pillow over my head as he hit the road.

My father started running when he was 50, about the same age as most people stop. He was obsessive about everything, and running was no different. He ran seven days a week until he could no longer walk.

My father traveled nine months out of the year—every year—when I was growing up. I didn't see him much. I am quite sure he sacrificed our family's life—and love—to create something successful, but unlike his family of origin, I didn't feel resentful about his work ethic. Again, it was all I knew.

At home, the connection between love and money was cemented in my mind from a young age. Strangely enough, in many ways, my father couldn't have cared less about money. His mission was to be successful. I believe he was trying to impress his mother, his father, and his brother with his success and earn back their love. Unfortunately, and ironically, they were far from proud of him and more or less disowned him—equating the company's success with betrayal of the family.

I saw my father as an unusual and eclectic man. His messages about money were always mixed. When I was a teenager, it became apparent he was building a successful company—but he walked around in shirts with holes and outdated suits.

He did *not* like spending money.

Yet sometimes money was no issue. Christmas Eve was one example. From the age of eight and into my twenties, after our obligatory visit to my father's aging father—on our way home from our traditional family lunch in San Francisco—we would make a stop at Gump's, a high-end jewelry store in the city. We would all pile out of the car, and my father would buy my mother—and me as I got older—a beautiful piece of jewelry. It wasn't Tiffany's, but it was expensive, and I saw the price tags grow on each piece of jewelry as time went on. Looking back on our annual stop, I realized the price of the gifts increased in line with his business success.

Similarly, when I was eighteen, my father decided to get a limousine and driver. He didn't buy it for the status. He just wasn't a very good driver, and because he worked so hard, he was always tired. No one

wanted him falling asleep at the wheel. He embraced his commute to and from work so he could squeeze in a bit more work time.

Because his messages about money were always mixed, as I grew older I never knew what any given financial discussion might bring—about business, buying things, or anything else for that matter. I found it odd that he would spend money on expensive jewelry but not on basic necessities—other than at the hardware store, where we made another regular stop every Sunday after church when he was home.

I think he loved the hardware store because he could buy lots of goodies to tinker with around the house for next to nothing. He wasn't very good at tinkering, but he enjoyed his Sundays away from the office when my mother, brother, and I were forced to work alongside him in the garden and around the house. We pruned, we raked the gravel driveway to perfection, and we painted the strips of wood that ran through the egg timer-shaped piece of concrete we called a backyard.

What he bought at the hardware store was not important. He once took a trip to the hardware store with my mother because he wanted to buy a lawn mower—not an unusual purchase for most people. The salesman, of course, tried to sell them the best—and most expensive—lawn mower in the store.

My mother looked at the salesman and said, “We really don't need the *best* lawn mower you have. We just need a basic lawn mower.”

The salesman looked at her, slightly confused, and responded, “Is there a reason you just want a basic lawn mower? Our higher-end lawn mowers make mowing the lawn much easier.”

“Yes,” she said with a completely straight face, “We don't need a fancy lawnmower because we don't have a lawn.”

The salesman was shocked, I'm sure. We had a Japanese garden. It didn't have *any* grass whatsoever. My father just wanted a lawn mower. I still laugh out loud when I think of this story.

When I was in high school, my father wanted to teach me the value of money. Together, we worked out an allowance of exactly \$62.50 a month—an odd figure that stands out in my memory. He arrived at that number after adding up precisely how much it would cost me to take the bus to and from school, the cost of school lunch on average, and other monthly expenses—like movie nights with friends or the occasional trip to my favorite clothing store. His math added up to a grand total of \$62.50, so that is how much I was given each month.

To receive my monthly allowance, I had chores to do. An allowance was far from necessary; I made my own money babysitting and didn't have real expenses, but he wanted the allowance to teach me the value of money—a concept I genuinely appreciated and still do to this day.

My father was generous when he wanted to be—but always on his terms. The problem was his terms changed without me—or anyone else—ever knowing why or when. Money and love were interconnected and interchanged at will. As a young child, I had no way to know where one began and the other ended. It confused me—and I hated it.

After my father became successful, I think he was fearful as many people are of losing what he had made—or of someone taking it away—so he was protective of his wealth. He made list after list of his net worth. After his death, I found an unusually large number of lists calculating his monetary holdings scattered throughout his paperwork.

My mother also had a simple upbringing, just like my father, but she had a completely different perspective on money. She was a “do whatever you need to do to get what you want when you want it” type of woman. She was a survivor and then some. My mother was very social and enjoyed going out, playing bridge with her friends, and shopping when my father was working or out of town. She was also generous to others with her money, her time, and more importantly, her spirit. She was a wonderful soul and well-loved by many.

When I was seventeen, my parents began making plans to remodel our simple home. The transformation took our house from being nothing special to a magnificent, contemporary home at the time. As usual, there was a tremendous amount of fighting over the cost of everything. The house came out beautifully, but there were some terrible arguments along the way—mostly between my father and Francois, the French designer—but certainly between my parents as well. As with most of their disagreements, my mother just smiled and nodded.

After the remodel, my mother had her own dressing area with plenty of closet space that—of course—needed to be filled. Her favorite activity was shopping. Her addiction was shopping. Her avoidance of reality was shopping. She bought things nonstop not only to adorn the closet but to fill a hole that could never be filled. When she died years later, I filled bags and bags of clothes with the price tags still on them. Shopping was her salvation from the chaos created by my father. The more she could buy, the better.

Throughout her life, my mother was a fashion queen and often dressed in high heels and gorgeous outfits. She was an important figure in San Francisco and was regularly mentioned on the society page of the *San Francisco Chronicle*.

Somewhere along the line, she met Phillippe and Juan, who were high-end designers of custom clothing. Phillippe and Juan were a dream come true for my mother. They were purveyors of customized outfits who absolutely adored her. She was easy to adore—and I'm also sure they loved having such a good client.

Over the years, she took me with her many times to see their latest and greatest collection. I ended up with a baby pink taffeta skirt that wasn't flattering at all, several long gowns, floppy skirts, and a black silk bustier that I just recently managed to part with. My mother's shopping habits both delighted and bothered me at the same time. But I never asked how she was paying for any of it.

When I was twenty-one, my grandmother on my mother's side passed away. She was a good, kind, loving soul. She lived nearby and took care of my brother and me when my mother traveled abroad with my father. My grandmother was a little woman—only 5'2" —but feisty and opinionated. I adored her. When she died, her house was her only real asset. After my mother and I spent weeks cleaning out her thirty years of things, we sold it.

My grandmother had left a will stating that my brother, mother, and I were to get equal shares of the proceeds from the sale of her house—close to \$250,000 for each of us. Because I was just twenty-one and my brother was nineteen, we never questioned where the money went. As a matter of fact, we had no idea our grandmother had even left us any money.

When I was twenty-three, my mother decided she wanted a new car—a cute little Jaguar. This was way beyond what she could afford, but she wanted it anyway. So, she bought it.

She never mentioned buying the car to my father, and he never acknowledged the purchase. No words were *ever* exchanged over the new swishy vehicle parked in the garage one day. She didn't talk about it because she thought he would get mad—and he just ignored it.

The fact that my mother bought this expensive car without any discussion before or after was another lasting memory for me. How could they never have talked about an \$80,000 car? How did she pay for it? My takeaway was that money could mean secrets between a husband and a wife.

It wasn't until I was twenty-six, when I was busy starting my own life and taking care of myself, that I finally asked my mother about my share of my grandmother's money.

My mother nonchalantly informed me that she had spent the \$250,000 my grandmother had left me. I didn't know what to say.

“What did you spend it on?” I asked.

“Well,” she said hesitating, “how do you think I paid for all those clothes?”

She had spent all the money on clothing—including the unflattering baby pink taffeta skirt. I was devastated.

To spend \$250,000 on clothes I did not realize I was buying for myself—and for her—really made me mad. It was unfair. I wanted control of my own money, and I wanted to make choices about how it was spent.

I quickly figured out where the Jaguar had come from.

My father was a walking contradiction about money, and my mother was a spendaholic.

I was confused. Were we rich? Were we poor?

I had no idea. Growing up with such different and inconsistent role models caused both me and my brother massive confusion about how to handle finances.

Over time I realized my “normal” childhood wasn't very normal after all.

In my case, the apple didn't fall far from the tree. There would be nothing normal about my financial future either.

Acknowledgments

Heartfelt gratitude to my mother and father, who unknowingly sacrificed so much to create an environment for me to be able to see the light and share my experience with others.

To the many men in my life who taught me so much.

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I love you all along with so many others!



About the Author

Suzanne Leydecker is a mother, philanthropist, speaker, and author. Her vision is to encourage and support women to find their purpose and passion, practice self-care, and set appropriate boundaries in love and life. She received her master's in marriage and family counseling from the California Institute for Integral Studies and a certificate in Spiritual Psychology from the University of Santa Monica. She is incredibly proud of her three children, Alexandra, Carson, and Derek, who are now young adults living their own lives. She lives in Aspen, Colorado, and Orlando, Florida.

