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# How shopaholic turned her life around after racking up £50,000 debt

By LYNETTE PINCHESS  
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SHARON Bull tried to buy happiness with lavish holidays and designer clothes, racking up a crippling £50,000 debt. But after hitting rock bottom and starting afresh, it is now the simple, free things in life that give her the most pleasure.

In her new book, *Stripped Bare*, she reveals the more she splurged, the deeper she sank into depression.

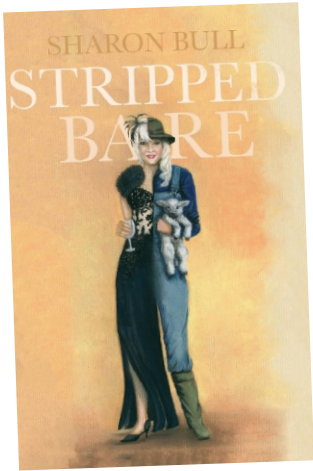
Nothing beat the buzz of flexing the plastic and walking out of a boutique laden with shopping bags full of expensive dresses and luxurious underwear.

Like a drug addict, the former sales manager couldn't wait to get her get next fix. But despite a decent salary, Sharon was living way beyond her means and the highs of spending were soon followed by a shameful comedown.

Living alone, Sharon was able to hide her spending addiction from her family and friends but the spiralling debt had a serious impact on her health.

"It got to the stage where I was starting to become ill with it. I knew it was out of control. I would buy and then I'd go home and feel sick because I knew I had debts," she said.

Today, Sharon, who lives in



Sharon's book.



Sutton-in-Ashfield with her mother, is a reformed shopaholic. Looking back on her spending habit, she can't quite believe her actions.

She said: "I had a favourite boutique in Meadowhall and I would go in and try on three designer dresses. But rather than walk out with one like most people, I'd buy the three. It was senseless. I'd probably wear a dress once and then I'd want to go out and buy something else.

"The job I was in meant I

visited the high street every single day so it didn't help. It wasn't just for myself. I'd buy presents for people and my friends' children. Even food shopping, if there were two tins of beans I'd go for the most expensive. I don't understand my mindset."

Sharon, who is in her mid-fifties, believes her spending frenzy stemmed from a 30-year problem with depression and low self-esteem which began after she left school with no qualifications.

As a teenager, she saw a psychiatrist for the first and only time to talk about her mental health. But the problem was never fully addressed and she left in tears.

"I got a career even though I had no qualifications. Going from a factory girl to a sales exec took 18 years. I was constantly wanting to better myself, wanting to look better, to dress in different things," she said.

The depression worsened after the death of her father, Kevin, in 2003... and so did her spending as she splashed out on expensive cruises and holidays.

By 2008, she was £50,000 in the red.

Forced to sell her home in Chesterfield and move into rented accommodation, Sharon faced bankruptcy but opted instead for a payment plan to repay the debt at affordable

“Even food shopping, if there were two tins of beans I'd go for the most expensive”

Sharon Bull

amounts over time.

But two years later, a shock redundancy left she in another financial crisis.

Struggling to meet the repayments, she hit rock bottom and came close to taking her life with an overdose of drink and anti-depressants.

"Thankfully I passed out," said Sharon, who then did what she should have done a long time ago.



Sharon Bull says she would rather go for a walk than go shopping for clothes after curbing her spending addiction.

"I told my mum everything. She was so understanding. I didn't want to tell her as she was on her own and I didn't want to burden her with it but she knew there was something dreadfully wrong."

Moving into her mum's bungalow was the first stage of her recovery. It was at this point, she realised what made her truly happy.

Instead of material things, she discovered a new-found happiness from life's simple pleasures – country walks, wildlife and animals.

She cleared her wardrobe of glitzy dresses by donating them to charity shops or selling them on eBay.

These days she's happier knocking around in jeans and volunteering at an animal sanctuary, instead of living a champagne lifestyle.

"If you're not contented with yourself, you're not going to find it in other people or purchasing things. Happiness comes from within," said Sharon. "It wasn't easy. I don't want for much any more. I am quite happy in my own skin."

Sharon, who has paid off a sizeable chunk of the debt, bares her soul in the book and will be sharing her story with viewers on ITV's *This Morning* on Tuesday.

She had already begun to write about her feelings in a blog and poems. But she said of the book: "There are some funny things, it's not all doom and gloom. People won't read

it and feel down in the dumps.

"I don't regret the experiences, as if I hadn't done what I did, I wouldn't be doing what I'm doing now," she said.

"I would never condemn anyone for buying anything if they can afford it but far too often people are doing it for the wrong reasons, either to make themselves feel better, or they feel pressured to live up to a certain standard.

"I'm such an outgoing person and I was able to cover things up so well. A lot of the time with mental health issues it's what goes on behind closed doors. I was so ashamed, so I didn't talk to anybody about it. I thought it was probably only me with a debt problem but when you start to open up there's a hell of a lot more people."

For anyone in the same position, Sharon has this message: "The first thing I would advise anyone to do is to talk to somebody. It doesn't help anybody having sleepless nights and worrying about it and keeping it to yourself. Secondly, don't bury your head in the sand. Face up to it."

Sharon now fills her time as an inspirational speaker and author.

And shopping?

"It doesn't bother me that much any more. I'm just not interested. I'd rather go for a walk. It's true."

■ *Stripped Bare* is out on August 28, priced £9.99.

## John found a way back to work after losing home... and sleeping in cemetery

By SARAH BRYAN  
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JOHN Crew ended up homeless and sleeping in a cemetery after losing his home.

But after being picked up by homelessness charity Framework, he has found a new job and has managed to get his life back on track.

John, from St Ann's, lost his home in January after falling behind with his bills.

He ended up spending his nights sleeping in one of Nottingham's cemeteries.

Looking back, the 51-year-old knew his drinking problem was to blame.

He said: "It was alcohol. Instead of paying the bills I would go out and spend all my money on drink."

"I started getting behind with my bills and I eventually lost my home. It was only then I realised my habit had gone too far."

While sleeping rough John was approached by Framework volunteers – and says that moment is when his life begun to turn around.

He was given a place to sleep and food to eat at the charity's night shelter, and later secured shared accommodation.

But John said that despite everything, he was determined to get back into work.

CT Skills, which delivers apprenticeships and qualifications across the UK, was recommended to him and he took his first step back onto the career ladder in June.

He had previously



worked in construction, so started a three week-long academy course to get the right qualifications for the industry he loved so much.

He said: "My course was very informal and my tutor was so laid-back – it was more like a friendship. I think that's a good way of getting people to learn because it made you want to go."

In a short space of time, John has been promoted to foreman while helping to build 438 new student apartments in the city centre.

His former tutor at CT Skills, Wes Douce, is delighted for him.

He said: "I'm so proud of John for actually getting off his backside and doing something. There's many out there that get the opportunity and then just throw it away at the end."

"He seemed a very positive individual – he always wanted to get employment and he always had that drive in him."

John believes his story sends a message to anyone who has fallen on hard times: that there is a way back to leading a successful life.

## Weather Around Britain

Saturday		°C		°F		Sunday		°C		°F	
Birmingham	rain	17	63	pcloudy	19	67					
Bristol	rain	16	62	pcloudy	17	64					
Cardiff	rain	16	62	pcloudy	17	63					
Carlisle	rain	16	62	rain	16	61					
Exeter	pcloudy	18	65	pcloudy	18	65					
Gloucester	tstorms	18	66	pcloudy	19	67					
Leeds	clear	16	62	pcloudy	17	63					
Liverpool	pcloudy	16	62	rain	18	65					
London	rain	19	67	pcloudy	20	69					
Manchester	pcloudy	17	63	rain	17	64					
Norwich	rain	19	67	pcloudy	20	69					
Nottingham	rain	17	63	pcloudy	19	67					
Plymouth	pcloudy	18	65	pcloudy	17	63					
Swansea	rain	17	63	rain	17	62					

## Around the World

Saturday		°C		°F		Sunday		°C		°F	
Amsterdam	rain	19	67	clear	20	68					
Beijing	pcloudy	35	95	pcloudy	33	93					
Corfu	clear	36	97	clear	36	98					
Majorca	clear	35	96	clear	32	90					
Mexico City	pcloudy	26	79	tstorms	26	79					
Moscow	pcloudy	23	74	clear	24	76					
New Delhi	pcloudy	33	92	rain	31	88					
New York	tstorms	28	84	pcloudy	26	80					
Paris	pcloudy	23	74	clear	23	74					
Rio	rain	22	72	pcloudy	23	74					
Rome	clear	39	103	clear	37	99					
Sydney	clear	19	67	clear	21	70					
Tokyo	rain	30	87	tstorms	30	87					

## Today's Weather

The area will have mainly overcast skies with rain likely today. A few thunderstorms will be possible, as well. Westerly winds will be gentle. Highs should range from 15 to 19C.



## Sun & Moon

Sunrise	5:34 a.m.				
Sunset	8:52 p.m.				
Moonrise	7:25 p.m.				
Moonsset	3:17 a.m.				
	Aug. 7 Full	Aug. 14 Last	Aug. 21 New	Aug. 29 First	

## Almanac

Birmingham		Cambridge		Derby		Nottingham	
Yesterday's High (°C/°F)	Hc/Hf						
Yesterday's Low (°C/°F)	Lc/Lf						
Yesterday's Precip	0.00"		0.00"		0.00"		N/A
Burton-on-Trent		Coventry		Leicester		Stoke-on-Trent	
Yesterday's High (°C/°F)	Hc/Hf						
Yesterday's Low (°C/°F)	Lc/Lf						
Yesterday's Precip	0.00"		N/A		N/A		0.02"

For more information go to [weather.co.uk](http://weather.co.uk)

## Four-Day Outlook

Sunday		19°C/67°F		13°C/56°F	
Monday	Chance of rain.	16°C/62°F	10°C/ 51°F		
Tuesday	Chance of rain.	18°C/65°F	10°C/50°F		
Wednesday	Chance of rain.	17°C/63°F	10°C/50°F		

## River Levels

Current (m)		Flood	Current (m)		Flood
River Trent			River Leen		
Bucknall	0.09	0.39	Bulwell	0.52	1.10
Clifton Bridge	1.00	2.90	Lenton	0.12	1.00
Colwick	1.17	3.60	River Soar		
Shardlow	0.66	1.70	Freemen Weir	0.19	0.47
Willington	1.40	2.35	Littlethorpe	0.54	2.13
River Derwent			River Rea		
Church White	0.57	1.60	Calthorpe Park	0.12	0.42
Derby City	0.55	2.00	River Tame		
River Cole			Perry Park	0.54	0.87
Solihull	0.23	0.42			

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