

# A Critique Of My Personal Expenses For 2015

by Annie Margarita Yang

Last year was my first year moving out and living away from my parents. I wasn't sure exactly how much money it would cost me to live on my own, so I tracked all my expenses in a small notebook and decided to figure it out in 2016. The time is now, and to be honest, I was quite scared to look at my spending. I know for a fact that I live frugally, but I never really looked at the numbers. What if I spent much more than I thought? There were many times throughout last year when I went over my budget or I couldn't plan well enough because as someone living on my own, I didn't know what the basics/essentials I needed to have to live comfortably were.

At my new job, my boss made me create expense reports and I had to do some bookkeeping work. I became more comfortable creating financial reports in Excel and looking at how other businesses spent money. I felt like I could no longer stay in the unknown in regards to my spending habits, so I entered all my purchases into Excel and calculated the amount I spent for different categories. It was an empowering exercise. I realize that only by taking an honest look at my personal finances can I make adjustments and keep heading in the right direction. My total was slightly higher than I expected, but it is still lower than the amount most people spend. Actually, living on \$16.5k per year in NYC is very low.

## Personal Expenses Report

Category	Amount
Business	\$629.11
Bank Service Charges	\$60.50
Bedroom	\$137.96
Charity	\$49.21
Cleaning and Household Supplies	\$59.51
Clothing	\$1,059.39
Personal Development And Education	\$1,808.76
Entertainment And Recreation	\$510.60
Exercise	\$560.72
Food	\$1,918.10
Gifts	\$141.95
Hair	\$143.86

Health Supplements and First Aid	\$64.05
Kitchen	\$296.45
Laundry	\$135.42
Miscellaneous	\$4.78
Office Supplies	\$17.44
Personal Care	\$169.34
Phone	\$328.02
Rent	\$4,550.00
Sewing	\$303.86
Shipping	\$170.15
Travel	\$2,517.45
Utilities	\$275.00
Total For 2015	\$16,562.03

As I look at the detailed version of my report (I posted the general version), there were many things I could have lived without and won't need to spend much money on this year.

## **Business**

Last year in January, I wanted to start a mobile massage business. So I bought a massage table, table cart, oils, hosting for the website, business cards, etc. I got everything ready and ended up deciding to not follow through with it. I realized being young, it probably wasn't a good idea and I could have set myself up for sexual harassment by giving massages to clients in their own homes. Now obviously this year, I won't be buying any of this stuff. But there are some business expenses such as business cards, web hosting, domain names, marketing, and advertising material, that I will be spending on. So I probably will spend more this year, not less.

## **Bank Service Charges**

Now this one was honestly my mistake. I was charged two overdraft fees from Charles Schwab for not having enough money in my checking account to pay my eBay fees. I sell on eBay, and twice last year, I withdrew money from my PayPal balance before paying the eBay seller fees. And so eBay decided to charge my backup payment method, which was my checking account. If I were more careful with checking my account balance regularly and marked all my scheduled payments on my calendar, I could have avoided the overdraft fees. Overdraft fees are a *billion dollar business* in America. These banks

prey on the laziness of consumers to check their balance before writing a check or swiping a debit card.

## **Bedroom**

As I just moved last year, I needed to decorate my room. I bought some curtains, mirrors, shelves, etc. I have everything I need now. I do not expect to move or to redecorate this year so I could cut spending in this category for 2016.

## **Charity**

I have no issue with giving to charity. In fact, this year I want to contribute even more. It makes a positive impact on other people's lives, strengthens relationships, and has been studied to increase happiness. Giving makes me feel more positive and every time I give, I am in an abundant state of mind.

## **Cleaning Supplies**

This was fine.

## **Clothing**

Last year, I wanted a brand new wardrobe to suit my new career. I don't want to spend so much money on clothing this year. I'm not into keeping up with the latest fashions. As long as I look presentable, I am okay. I would rather have a conservative, classic, timeless wardrobe with high-quality pieces that will last for years and make me feel good every time I wear them.

I have enough clothes in my closet to last me only a week. I am a firm believer of [project 333](#), a challenge in which you wear only 33 items for three months (or one season) and that includes accessories. I own only 33 hangers, so whenever I buy new clothes, I make space by donating my old clothes. I know many women who have much more clothes than I do, but "can never find anything to wear." I wear every article of clothing in my closet. And I don't think people seem to notice that I wear the same clothes each week. They are too busy worrying about what I think of them than what they think of me!

Though I don't plan on buying new clothes this year, I will probably buy new shoes when the seasons change.

## **Personal Development And Education**

The money I spent in this category was not for college. It was mainly for Landmark Worldwide and for bettering myself by taking workshops or buying used books on Amazon. I am quite happy with spending money on education. I'm a life-long learner and a jack of all trades. Whenever possible, to save money I try researching online (there's tons of free information) and borrowing most of my books from the New York Public Library instead of paying for education. There are some things I cannot learn from reading a book and can only gain through experience - Landmark is an example. Experiential learning is well worth the time and money.

## **Entertainment And Recreation**

I am okay with what I spent in this category. I watched Broadway musicals, ballet shows, sang karaoke, picked up playing the acoustic guitar again, had a floatation session in a sensory deprivation chamber. All of these experiences were new and enjoyable. I got to bond with my friends and develop a deeper relationship. In 2016, I want to watch more Broadway musicals, as I've fallen in love with them! I've begun valuing experiences over possessions.

## **Exercise**

A lot of the money I spent here was for pole dancing. Pole dancing was definitely an empowering exercise. I was happier and more confident with the way my body looked as a woman. And it was definitely a full body workout and I was physically stronger than ever before. I had to quit pole dancing because I tore my medial meniscus and it hurts to do most exercises. In 2016, I cannot imagine myself spending money on exercise, though it is definitely something I value. I like to exercise by riding my bike (free) and practicing yoga at home (free). I could also add in some bodyweight exercises to my routine for strength training (also free). I don't need a gym membership. However, if I came across adult dance classes offered at a reasonable price, I would take it - not just for the exercise, but for being part of a community.

## **Food**

If I do the calculations, I spent on average \$160 per month on food or \$40 per week. This is very low in comparison to the amount other people spend on food. Many of my friends consider spending \$10 a day on only lunch to be a "good deal." Do that for five work days and that is \$50 per week on lunch.

But is it possible for me to live on even less? I would like to try. I already brought my own lunch to work every day instead of ordering something.

But when I started college in September, I started buying lunch at school because I brought my own food but was still hungry after biking six miles to school every morning. My schedule wasn't the best with long hours, so I didn't want to wait to get home to eat. There were also times when I was at Landmark, and the hours were long and I was too tired to cook, so I would go across the street to Duane Reade and buy unhealthy convenience foods to satiate my hunger. Also, there were many times I ate at restaurants so I could socialize with friends. I wonder how much I would spend on food if I *only* ate at home-cooked food.

Last year, I developed severe acne and I didn't know what was causing it. It turned out to be food because I did an allergy test last month and it turned out I was allergic to shrimp, beef, chocolate, and corn. CORN. Corn is in everything nowadays with high fructose corn syrup being a common sweetener. I have no idea what restaurants put in their food, but there might be corn in it. I have stopped eating at restaurants for one month already and my skin cleared up a lot. That is one more reason to eat only home-cooked food.

## **Gifts**

This is okay. Giving is always good.

## **Hair**

This is okay. I used to spend more.

## **Health Supplements and First Aid**

This is okay. Best to take care of my health now and prevent possible diseases than to suffer the consequences later.

## **Kitchen**

I just moved last year and needed to buy things like pots, pans, knives, spoons, forks, spatulas, vegetable peelers, etc. Now my kitchen is fully equipped and I have everything I need. I don't expect to buy anything new for my kitchen in 2016. The only thing I can think of is a yogurt maker. I've developed a love for Greek yogurt, and if I made my own yogurt, I could save some money in the food category. The savings would offset the initial cost of the appliance.

## **Laundry**

The amount of quarters I used at the laundromat to operate the washing machine and dryer is okay. Those costs are negligible. A large portion of the costs came from the laundry detergent. I believe in 2016, I could shave some of the costs by making my own laundry detergent. There are a ton of recipes online.

## **Miscellaneous**

This is okay. It was for an umbrella when it unexpectedly started pouring and I was stranded at the grocery store! I didn't know what category to put it in.

## **Office Supplies**

This is okay.

## **Personal Care**

Generally, this was okay. But I wasted a lot of money trying to figure out what skin care products worked best for my sensitive skin. I said earlier that I was breaking out severe acne from food allergies. I kept thinking it was from my skin care products so I experimented with different products. I've now found the best products to use on my face (organic and all natural) and they are very cheap. So in 2016, I expect to spend less on personal care, now that I've finished experimenting.

## **Phone**

This is okay.

## **Rent**

This is okay. It is very cheap because I negotiated with the property manager.

## **Sewing**

Sewing used to be one of my favorite hobbies. I enjoyed making my own clothes (they look better and last longer and are cheaper than store bought clothes), but after moving out of my mom's house, I stopped sewing. *But* I kept buying new fabric and sewing supplies out of habit, which was a total waste. I have lots of fabric that ended up unused. I do not want to spend any money on sewing this year. If I need to sew, I already have lots of options from my stash to choose from.

## **Shipping**

This is okay. The shipping costs were from selling my used items on eBay. So in reality, I was making money whenever I shipped something.

## **Travel**

This is okay. Forty-six percent of the money spent was toward my new bike. I won't have to buy a new bike this year - I only need to pay for the maintenance costs (very low). The bike actually saves me money because I do not need to pay for unreliable public transportation (Dear MTA, why do you always have train delays?) and it's a free form of exercise. Twenty-eight percent was spent on public transportation. Twenty-six percent was spent on recreational travel, meaning I went out of town for the weekend. These trips were fun and I made lots of new friends. I suspect this year, I'll spend less on travel because I don't need to buy a new bike. Or maybe I won't. Maybe I'll spend even more money buying plane tickets to travel the world.

## **Utilities**

This is okay.

## **Total**

So in total for 2015, I spent \$16,562 for the year / \$1,380 per month / \$45 per day. Already very low, but I wonder if I can live on even less in 2016 because I don't need to spend any more money on the initial costs of moving out. To summarize, I want to spend less on bank service charges, decorating my bedroom, clothes, food, exercise, kitchen, laundry, personal care, and sewing. I want to spend more money on business, charity, personal development and education, entertainment and recreation, gifts, and travel because these are the things I enjoy and want more of in my life.

This was a good exercise in evaluating my spending habits because now I can see whether my spending aligns with my priorities and values. I don't think I'm being cheap, though some people might call me that. Frugality and thriftiness are second nature to me. So is spending with intention. I want every dollar I spend to be done with intention. I believe money should be spent in a way that adds value and contentment to my life, which means new experiences and developing deeper relationships, not shiny

new toys, not possessions. A designer handbag or beautiful kitchen cabinets and countertops don't add value to my life.

And lastly, my ultimate goal is financial freedom and independence. The more money I save and invest now, the earlier I retire and the more options I have when I am older. If at age 40 I decided I no longer want to work or I want to create a non-profit or travel the world, I would be able to drop what I'm doing because money will not stop me from living the life I want.

*[www.AnnieMargaritaYang.com](http://www.AnnieMargaritaYang.com)*