

Remembering the First Time

Financial advisers talk about their first foray into investing— and what they learned from it

By [CHARLES PASSY](#)

You never forget your first—investment, that is.

Journal Report

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For many financial professionals, that first foray into stocks, mutual funds or any other type of investment is what shaped their view on the markets and inspired them to enter the field. Which is not to say the investment always paid off. Either way,

the lessons learned can stay with a pro for a lifetime.

With that in mind, we asked some financial advisers to share their stories of first investments.

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Mark Riddix

Mark Riddix

P resident, New Horizons Financial Management, Baltimore

The investment: Principal Funds Inc.'s [Capital Appreciation](#)

Fund

The story behind it: At 19, Mr. Riddix was inspired to invest by a college professor who taught a course in the subject. The professor "had just spoken on how he had earned over a million dollars in stocks and mutual funds," Mr. Riddix recalls. So, the novice investor started searching "for a fund highly rated by Morningstar with a low-minimum requirement." He found the Principal fund, which "contained a nice mix of companies from diverse industries."

How it turned out: Mr. Riddix initially invested \$250 and kept adding \$50 each month. The fund returned 11% to 12% in the six years he held it. "I finally ended up selling it in 2001 to use the proceeds as a down payment on my first home," he says.

Lessons learned: Traditional investing can pay off. The "experience motivated my future career path to become an adviser," he says. He also learned to look more closely at every investment. "Although I liked the fund, I did learn over time that the sales charges were a bit on the high side for a large-cap blended fund," he says.

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Jonathan M. Satovsky

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Chief executive, Satovsky Asset Management, New York

The investment: Painting by Aaron Birnbaum, a

European-born, American-based folk artist

The story behind it: While this was not Mr. Satovsky's first investment, it was among his earliest as part of a couple: He and his wife purchased it soon after they married. She liked art—particularly folk art—so she

suggested the painting, which cost \$3,000 at the time.

How it turned out: It's 15 years later and the couple still has the painting. Mr. Satovsky says, "It is likely worth more than five times what we paid for it." (Mr. Birnbaum passed away in 1998, further boosting the painting's value.)

Lessons learned: Art can serve as an investment and an asset that enriches one's life in a broader sense. "We're both glad that the painting hangs in our home to this day," says Mr. Satovsky. It's also a hard asset that the couple can easily sell if they suddenly need money, he adds.

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Ben Marks

Ben Marks

President, Marks Group Wealth Management, Minnetonka, Minn.

The investment: Hogs

The story behind it: In 1975, when he was 15, Mr. Marks took note of the rising cost of pork and the fact that his family had an unused barn (his father was a soybean and corn farmer). So, he convinced his dad to co-sign a loan to purchase some 80 pigs. He also got a line of credit to buy feed.

How it turned out: Mr. Marks ended up living high on the hog. His investment of \$3,800 yielded a \$6,200 profit when the pigs grew into 200-pound behemoths. He admits his career as a hog farmer was short-lived, however. "Having earned enough money from my venture to buy my dream car, a 1974 red Chevy Camaro, I quickly became more interested in girls than raising hogs."

Lessons learned: Mr. Marks says hog farming taught him to invest in what he understands. At the time, he didn't know stocks and bonds, but he knew pigs. He learned investing can be real work: "many long hours of cleaning pens and feeding and caring for my herd." And finally, the experience was an interesting, if accidental, market timing. "Hog prices plummeted not long after I sold my herd," he says.

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Jane King

Jane King

President, Fairfield Financial Advisors, Wellesley, Mass.

The investment: Broadway show

The story behind it: When she was just out of college and making her way in the New York financial world, Ms. King was approached by a friend of a friend about investing in a show; some "offbeat" musical, she says, by one Stephen Sondheim. So, she wrote a \$1,000 check to the producers—"tiny to them, large to me"—and waited for opening night. She was rewarded with a pair of free tickets.

How it turned out: That "off-beat" show was the Tony Award-winning classic, "A Little Night Music," which introduced the world to the song "Send in the Clowns." But Ms. King didn't make much on her initial investment, save for those "free" tickets.

Lessons learned: "What I learned later is that investments in the theater rarely return money," says Ms. King. In other words, she learned that it pays to thoroughly research your investments before you write that check. But she isn't bitter about her Broadway venture, since she felt like she got to share a piece of theater history. "Sometimes the returns are not in checks in dollars," she says.

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