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## 'Dark Side' of wealth explored by local author

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Local psychotherapist Thayer Cheatham Willis has tackled a perplexing subject in her new book, "Navigating the Dark Side of Wealth: A Life Guide for Inheritors."

If asked, most people would give the socially correct response that money does not buy happiness. If pressed, however, they would express nearly the opposite view, and the one held by society at large: Money



Willis

goes a very long way toward buying happiness, and most everyone aspires to obtain as much money as possible.

Why, then, are many wealthy people unhappy?

The answers are pretty straightforward, Willis said in a recent interview.

"Where there are financial resources, a person can just coast or drift, but it isn't fulfilling in the sense of making the most of your life."

The rich share many of the same goals sought by others: rewarding work, a sense of purpose and at least one or two strong relationships that include marriage and family, Willis said. Often, however, wealth, especially if inherited, interferes with achieving those goals. People can get caught up in obtaining material possessions, in guarding their privacy and in trying to live the good life.

But that's the wrong approach, Willis said: Life as a vacation may seem appealing at first, but "what makes a vacation sweet is having something to take a vacation from."

Willis has first-hand knowledge of the challenges of growing up wealthy. Her

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THAYER CHEATHAM WILLIS

LOCAL AUTHOR

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father and uncle were instrumental in founding what is now Georgia Pacific Co., and Willis never lacked in the material sense.

Though at times suffering from a sense of drift herself, Thayer completed college and graduate work, and became a licensed therapist. During those years she also underwent some therapy, including dealing with emotional issues related to her inheritance.

When news reached her of a fifth suicide among the group of affluent kids she had grown up with, she began wondering why so many privileged children struggled to find their place in the world or to be at peace with themselves. She turned her professional work to those questions.

Many people who lack money might jump at the chance to deal with the problems of being rich. And they might find it hard to sympathize with "those poor little rich kids." Opportunities for sarcasm abound; no number of jibes, however, can alter the fact that the pain and pressures sometimes caused by inherited wealth can drive some people to contemplate suicide.

The problems endured by people who grow up wealthy include feeling guilty, insecure and isolated, Willis said. They may suffer from low self esteem, delayed

maturity and lack of spirituality. They may have poor relationship skills and a checkered work history. It doesn't take long to connect these problems with the person's wealth.

As to emotional maturity, for example, Thayer noted that "none of us ever walk willingly into the kinds of experiences that mature us, and inheritors often can avoid those experiences quite well for quite a long time. The consequence of that is delayed emotional maturity."

Another example is the feeling of being adrift when it comes to career. Take away the financial pressure to earn a living, and you may well take away the drive and resiliency necessary to build a successful career.

"When times get tough at work, sometimes an inheritor will bail rather than sticking it out. Other people ... need that paycheck at the end of the month to pay the bills. But if you don't need that paycheck and your boss has offended you or has overlooked you for a promotion ... you just might not pull it together to have the courage to hang in there."

A main theme of Willis' book (published by New Concord Press) is the human need for spirituality. The spiritual challenge of wealth, she writes, establishes what life is about and what the wealthy person will or will not accomplish with their abundance.

Although her own strong Christian beliefs are evident throughout the book, Willis takes an inclusive approach to spirituality, acknowledging the broad range of ideas people can have about God. The need for the wealthy, as for so many other people, is to find true security in spirituality and in their relationship with God, rather than false security in material comforts, she writes. True security and well-being doesn't ebb and flow with one's financial fortunes.