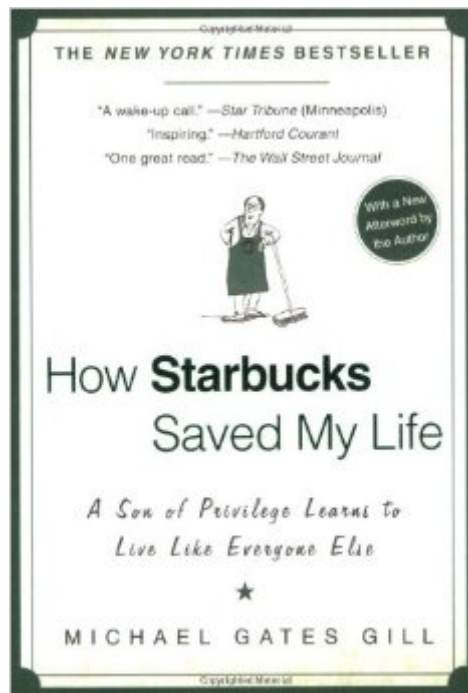


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# How Starbucks Saved My Life: A Son Of Privilege Learns To Live Like Everyone Else



## Synopsis

Now in paperback, the national bestselling riches-to-rags true story of an advertising executive who had it all, then lost it all—and was finally redeemed by his new job, and his twenty-eight-year-old boss, at Starbucks. In his fifties, Michael Gates Gill had it all: a mansion in the suburbs, a wife and loving children, a six-figure salary, and an Ivy League education. But in a few short years, he lost his job, got divorced, and was diagnosed with a brain tumor. With no money or health insurance, he was forced to get a job at Starbucks. Having gone from power lunches to scrubbing toilets, from being served to serving, Michael was a true fish out of water. But fate brings an unexpected teacher into his life who opens his eyes to what living well really looks like. The two seem to have nothing in common: She is a young African American, the daughter of a drug addict; he is used to being the boss but reports to her now. For the first time in his life he experiences being a member of a minority trying hard to survive in a challenging new job. He learns the value of hard work and humility, as well as what it truly means to respect another person. Behind the scenes at one of America's most intriguing businesses, an inspiring friendship is born, a family begins to heal, and, thanks to his unlikely mentor, Michael Gill at last experiences a sense of self-worth and happiness he has never known before. Watch a QuickTime trailer for this book.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This is the story of a wealthy ad executive who is laid off (in a case of blatant ageism) and must then turn to finding an hourly job at Starbucks to make ends meet. He has the classic rich Manhattanite

life trajectory: private school, Ivy League, corporate job with lots of income. He does spend a lot of time away from family though, which prefigures events to come later. He is, both through the reader's own instinct and his telling us so, one of those New Yorkers who has never really met middle class people. It's a sheltered life, but comfortable. Gill tells his story well and doesn't hold back on the self-deprecation, not at all. His divorce came about for the understandable reason that he met a single, 40ish woman into the arts who lived alone. Mysterious enough for you? So, intrigued and feeling emotionally unmoored with no job, he has an affair and fathers a child. His family is understandably devastated, and the scenes in this memoir of them are wrenching. Thrown out of the house, with no job, his money runs out and he must learn to be middle class from nearly scratch. He decides Starbucks would work when he reflects how he spends times there and when the local manager and him have one of those conversations blacks and whites have that sound mistrustful but are actually seeking closeness and racial harmony. From there, Gill confronts all the things that he'd never learned to do; like the simple self-satisfaction of work, independent living, how to handle solitude, and getting to know people unlike himself. Time and again, Gill points out how his pre-fall opinion of someone and how wrong he was, and his post-fall new, more mature appreciation of them.

Michael Gates Gill's "How Starbucks Saved My Life" is a riches to rags, fish out of water story about a once privileged sixty-something guy who works as a lowly Barista and learns lots of lessons. I got the feeling Gill wrote his memoir and then plugged Starbucks in as it fit. About 20% of the book happens at Starbucks. The rest is devoted to lambasting the advertising industry (they fired Gill), to family and personal tales (often about how clever Gill was as an advertising account manager), and to dozens of dropped names (e.g., tea with Queen Elizabeth, coffee klatch with Robert Frost, assisting Jackie Kennedy in a charitable endeavor, etc.) The book is about life changes for Gill, but often his epiphanies are over the top. For instance, only after he loses his job, is divorced twice, goes broke and starts work as a Barista does he discover that subways are crowded, that a black woman can run a successful business, that advertising is different from retail, and that a workaholic doesn't spend enough time with his children. His Starbucks experiences are also over the top. He cherry picks the good stuff, and leaves the impression he is designing an advertising campaign for Starbucks. Gill proclaims that Starbucks "taught" him the value of teamwork, respect for others, the value of hard labor, and how rewarding the simple life can be. Conveniently, the book is a perfect personal size that will fit cozily in a Starbucks product display. Having worked at Starbucks for several years, I know that the good things Gill experienced resulted less because of Starbucks and

more because of the special people he chanced to work with. When I worked with great people, the experience was good; when my partners were un-great the experience could be awful.

Though I'm not even a coffee drinker, much less a Starbucks frequenter, I've chosen to review this book for two reasons: (1) my strong sense of kinship with the author (though I've never met or spoken with him); (2) my desire to offset the cynically negative reviews here by reassuring readers of the book's essential genuineness (despite its recurrent sales-pitch-for-Starbucks tone). As you'll read in more detail in other reviews here, Gill claims to have stepped "down" from his Yale and top-ad-exec background, to don a Starbucks apron, serving coffee and cleaning sinks and toilets. Could this have really happened? Could a sane man really be happy with such a swaperoo of lifestyles? I think so. With my experience as an academic researcher, I've taken the time to check out Gill's background and general credibility. Why would I do that? Because this book's less-is-more message, and manual-work-is honorable message, are so important for our times. Many of the negative reviews here are cynical about Gill's alleged motives, snide about his professed new attitude toward African Americans with menial jobs, and dubious about his claimed contentment with manual labor following his ivy-league career. But my somewhat similar experiences tell me that Gill's claims ring true. I've lived and taught in New York and know the neighborhoods he describes. I've researched his executive background, read Joyce Wadler's NY Times article with photos of the Bronxville mansion, etc. Is his professed happiness with far less money and prestige credible? I think so. First, everything about him consistently checks out. And then there's my own analogous experience. After my Ph.D. done at Stanford, Yale and Georgetown, my teaching at the US Naval Academy, etc.

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