

Duped Couple Learn Hard Way to 'Put it in Writing'

By Harriett Muhammad

DEAR HARRIETT,

I have been reading your column for some years and couldn't make up my mind to write you until now. I have had this on my mind every since December 7, 1965. My husband and I purchased a house in May of 1960, with a down-payment of \$200. We had never purchased a house before. The man that we first started renting from asked us if we would like to buy it and pay \$40 a month notes, just like paying rent, so we agreed.

ON DECEMBER 7, 1965, he said we didn't own the place anymore. My receipts were on brown paper bags, Christmas cards, envelopes, —just anything that was available. They were also undated. We took our payments to his other tenants and their receipts were the same way. I was confused and didn't know what to do, so I took all the papers I had to a real estate man. He told me I didn't have a contract to tell how long I would have to pay—just a warranty deed with my name and my husband's name on it at the top.

He took us to a lawyer, but the lawyer just told us to take it for experience and always get a contract and legal papers before you buy anything.

I WANT to know if there is any justice for me and who can I go to get it. I have spent over \$3000 on this place, now he tells us we can just pay \$10 rent a week and that he would come and tell us when it is time to pay tax and insurance. I want to do something, but people keep telling me there is nothing I can do. I can't get help from my husband — he told me to just forget it. We are not the only colored people that this man has taken advantage of and I think something should be done to stop this get-rich-quick plan of his. We need help. I had

to get this off of my mind.

MRS. H.L.M.

WICHITA FALLS, TEXAS.

DEAR MRS. M.

I'm afraid the advice you have been given is right, for without legal proof of ownership, you don't have a case. You have learned through experience the necessity of having legal documents, but this is not the only nor the best way to learn.

Here is what you could do to help prevent other people like yourself from being taken advantage of: why don't you and your husband go back to these tenants and your other neighbors and ask them if they would be interested in informing others in your neighborhoods about their legal rights.

IF YOU can go together in a group to a lawyer you know, he could assist you in making hand bills or pamphlets that briefly describe in plain language all the do's and don'ts concerning contracts and other legal documents. It would only take cooperation and a small donation from each of you to have this pamphlet printed. They could be distributed to all the people in your neighborhoods.

If there is no group of lawyers in your town who have pledged to assist the underprivileged, this move may stimulate the formation of such a service. The only way we black people can accomplish anything is to band together in ACTION.

THERE IS much that we can do to change the daily situations with which we are faced in our neighborhoods if we would but act. Something on your mind? Write and tell me about it.

HARRIETT MUHAMMAD
P.O. BOX 8382
LOS ANGELES, CALIF.
90008.