

For ... About You

By Harriett Muhammad

DEAR HARRIETT: I've been in a desperate situation for the last three years, and it seems to be a vicious circle. My husband is habitually unemployed. He only keeps a job for a few months at a time before he's laid off or fired. The sickening part about it is that he doesn't seem to care. I do all the worrying. I can't make him face his responsibilities.

We have two children and another pregnancy could occur at any time. It seems that just when I am determined to get a job—boom!—I'm pregnant again.

So far, it seems we've been surviving on a "wing and a prayer." Sometimes my friends give me some clothes, my only wardrobe source right now. Other times, my children and I have been hungry, with nothing to eat in the house, waiting on my husband to bring some sort of food. I have caught them chewing on paper and sucking wood articles.

We get some kind of unemployment check, but I never see it. I must take what my husband gives me, and that depends on his mood. So, what can I do? We don't have much of a marriage, and I've about reached the point where divorce or separation is the only way out.

I guess I have something poor people shouldn't have—pride. It has made me go hungry many a day. It has made me pretend to my friends that things weren't so bad when they couldn't get much worse. It has made me think of doing things I never dreamed I could stoop to do.

I am ready to really work at getting out of this mess, but I just don't know what steps to take. Maybe you can give me some suggestions.
—E. G., Santa Monica, Calif.

DEAR E. G. You are in a mess, but you live in a state that has a reputation of being a "woman's and child's rights" state. You have many opportunities. Don't think you are in such a position that you have to "stoop" to improve your

condition.

I could tell you the "whys" of your situation with your husband—how he's in a rut that is forced upon many of our men by pressures and powers always at work, but always seemingly invisible. However, you are IN the situation now and are mostly concerned with how to get OUT.

Pride is one thing, E. G.—common sense is something else. It's good to have self-pride. Let it be the driving force that takes you and keeps you out of destitution. But don't make your little children suffer because of YOUR pride. Don't expose them to the dangers of rickets or make them a statistical figure on the infant mortality reports because you had too much pride to let others know your plight.

You say you have reached the point of divorce. Before you leave your husband, do this: go to the Bureau of Public Assistance and file an official complaint (failure to provide) against your husband. This will enable you to get the necessary assistance. This bureau has trained social workers who will review your problems with you and

your husband and point out each step available to you. They will attempt reconciliation and inform your husband of his inescapable duties.

According to California law, your husband must provide for you and your children. He has no choice, if action is taken. He either gets a job, lets the county find one for him, or he will be incarcerated. If he refuses to give you enough money from his unemployment check, this bureau can give you what you need and have it deducted from his check. Depending on your husband's actions, you will get 50, 75 or 100 per cent (if he's incarcerated) support from the bureau. If you stay together, but need further assistance, they will give you enough money to assist you in caring for your children so that you can also get a job.

This money is not charity. It's a refund on taxes that have been taken from you and was designed so that you could get your money back at times like these—when you are in need. So don't feel like you are begging—you have a legitimate claim.

Something on your mind? Write me and tell me about it.

Harriett Muhammad
2819 West Vernon Avenue
Los Angeles, Calif., 90008



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