

Title: Single Mother, Multiple problems

Abstract: When I was growing up, the economy and unemployment rates weren't as bad as they are now. I had many jobs to choose from. I didn't have a choice though, in that they took a percent of my check every month which I didn't agree with. Now as a single mother raising a son mostly on my own, I am receiving the assistance I bad mouthed so badly. The help I am receiving from the state isn't enough in today's economy and it still isn't enough to cover my month's expenses. With all of this turmoil and hardship, I still have hope that all of my effort will not be for nothing. I hope that with some sweat and work, I will be able to someday finish my education and be able to provide for my little family the best that I can.

Key Words: Single mother, recession, welfare (state help), unemployment, college, family.

“Is the father helping you at all?” What a stupid question. If he was, would I be begging from the state? No. I would be working, holding my head up high and I'd have my sense of self worth back. “When was the last time he helped you with your son financially?” Never! I realized I was alone with an infant and I came to the state for help. I need help. “And how much are you currently paying in rent?” Too much. Like everyone else. The economy of today is not what it was when I was a kid. I used to be able to leave a job for no reason and have a new one within the week. I didn't have a son to worry about trying to afford diapers for in a world where college graduates are taking fast food jobs because that's all there is. Since I've been alive the world has taken an interesting twist. With it, my life has also twisted somewhat. I am a single mother during a recession.

Life was simple, colorful and fun when I first started working. I had so many jobs to choose from. I went to work, got paid and spent my money on whatever I wanted. I wasted thousands of dollars on cds and crafts and I never went without a meal. Things had started to slow down, but I was still finding work. There was still work to be found at the time. I had heard

words like recession, economic crisis, government bailouts and such but there was never any reason for me to pay attention. Around the time I had started a brand new cooking job, trying to learn a new style, I realized I was pregnant. This is when those words first came into play. I had gotten pregnant at a job that fired me since I was in my probationary period still and the reality of the economic situation hit me. Hard. Pregnant and scared I looked for a new job. Things must have just gotten bad because for the first time since I started working at the age of fifteen, I couldn't find a job anywhere! This is the first time I was hit by the realization that the state of the world had become so bad that good, hard working people were being turned down. I started to notice my friends who had graduated college asking me to visit them at work at the Gap or at Perfumania. What? You're how far in debt to your college and you're making nine bucks an hour at the Gap? It wasn't right. My baby needed to be cared for and even though jobs were scarce, I found one. At Jelly Belly in the outlets. Go me.

I had started watching the news, trying to make sense of the world I was about to bring a child into. The statistics on the unemployment rate and news of an entire neighborhood of people losing their homes made me wonder how I was going to stay afloat with a child to take care of and no work to be found. Until my baby daddy split, I had had a somewhat upbeat mood about raising a child in these circumstances. Surely two incomes could support a child, right? Even if hours were being cut, hundreds of people were being let go from big corporations (which made me wonder what was going to happen to smaller corporations), and money was tight everywhere. The hand I was dealt didn't end that way though. I ended up alone to try and raise my child. I had to do something drastic. Since I was already going to have to apply for medical to be able to deliver my child without being in more debt than I already am, I came to the conclusion that I

was going to have to go beg from the state for more than just medical bills. I needed to beg for assistance in being able to support my son.

When I started working and found out I was going to be losing a chunk of my check every week to help the people on welfare I was upset. “Why should I pay into something don’t ever plan on using” was my philosophy and I held to it like glue. In the end though, I marched through the double doors into the busy little hub that is social services. I took my number and found a seat. Talk about intimidating circumstances. I was one of the few white people in the waiting area, the women working there are cold and indifferent, and it has all the warm and fuzzy feelings of a morgue. We’re there because we have to be, not because we want to be. Or at least in a perfect world that’s how it would be. With the economy the way it is, I’ve noticed that it’s almost easier to make it if you are a single mother. My sister lost a good job and went to social services to sign up for food stamps because unemployment wasn’t enough to cover all of her monthly expenses living away from home. She hit several walls in trying to do this and she eventually went back in to see what the holdup was. The woman behind the desk looked my sister in the eye and said that since she is single, on her own and young that she was essentially on the back burner. She went on to tell my sister of all of the benefits awarded single mothers and suggested coming back when she got pregnant. I was disgusted. My sister, who like me, has worked since a young age, wasn’t trying to get something for nothing. She’s paid into unemployment like everyone else. She just wanted help and this woman is telling her to go get knocked up? What has the world come to? Oh ya. Things have gotten so bad that instead of looking for steady employment, people are learning new ways to ride the system. That’s what this world has come to.

On top of these benefits being oversold, they are under distributed. As a single mother of one, paying low income rent and being the sole provider of my miniature family, I make a whopping four hundred and sixty or so dollars each month. I spend more than half of it within the first week on necessities. Diapers, wipes, car insurance, rent, a payment to my lawyer from the custody battle my ex put me through and any odds and ends that life may throw at me destroy any chance of saving for a rainy day. The rest of my money goes to gas, cigarettes and food to keep me going at school. More often than not my mother has to pick up where the state left off at the end of the month. She isn't necessarily in any better shape. We live on her boyfriend's ranch in a double wide. Times are hard. "Do you have any assets in your name? Such as real estate, bonds, inheritance...". If I did, would I be here letting you look at me like I'm some sort of cancer on society? This woman doesn't know that instead of selling my food stamps for beer money, which is a common practice amongst some of Hollister's finest, I have to choose between gas for school and eating for a week. She looks at me with judgmental eyes not understanding that just because the state is helping doesn't mean that I don't have to wear clothes that were all too big for me before I just lost fifty pounds in less than six months because of all of the times I had to go without for my son. "How many bank accounts do you have?" There's no reason to have a bank account if you don't have any money.

I'm attending community college. A gift from the state. But I'm not so sure anymore that it's a useful gift. The new trend is for someone to put time, money and effort into graduating a college and then end up working at Foot Locker for minimum wage. My cousin went to Santa Clara State University. She graduated after five and a half years of making sure she was as valuable in her chosen field as she could possibly be. She's currently working at Trader Joes. My father spent four years training to be in the electrical union. He's now unemployed but making

money on the side doing massage. I'm going to school full time to be an ultrasound tech. There are days that I don't even get to see my son because I stay at campus for so long and others where I read so much my eyes hurt for hours. Maybe I can end up at a really nice retail store. Like Gucci or Kenneth Cole. I'm crossing my fingers for a key position.

The working world of today is cruel and unforgiving. Good, hard working people are out of work and hungry. Students who've busted their butts at university for years are circling want ads for bus boy and janitor positions. Well qualified people are being passed up for cheaper labor. It's scary and it doesn't seem to be slowing down at all. I keep hearing how "This has been going on so long, it's bound to get better soon" and "There has to be an upswing soon". But will it? I can't help but wonder if this is going to keep happening. If I'm doing fifteen units and stressing myself out, am I doing it to better my situation or just prolonging the same job I could be doing right now? It's disheartening. I want to work. I want to contribute to society. I want to earn my own money instead of asking for it. Since those options don't seem to exist to me, I had to change my wants. Now, I want to do the best I can do at school so that I can be as valuable as possible to provide a decent life for my son. A life not based on survival. I grew up in survival mode. My mother raised my sister and me on one income. Back then it was possible but not preferable. Hopefully by the time I am out of school and trained in my chosen perfection, the economy will be more stable. If by chance I am still a one income family, than I can only hope the working world will be a slightly kinder, more accepting place. After that I want to be able to go find a job in the field I just trained for. I'm crossing my fingers that by the time I graduate, the economy will have been somewhat restored to as booming as it was when I was growing up.