

A Quest for Justice

By Margaret Eden

Charlene Dunbar put her three children to bed, washed her dishes and sat up until 3 a.m. ironing a mountain of her husband clothes for a business trip. He left the next morning-- and never came home. Two weeks later, frantic with worry, she located him in another city, living in a hotel with another woman who would soon give birth to his child.

Charlene did what most women would do, she cried. However, sadness soon gave way to panic when, after a few weeks, she realized he'd left her high and dry, financially, with no intention of paying child support. What followed were dark days for Charlene that taught her a lot about the strength of her faith and about how, through adversity, God often provides great opportunity to help others and really make a difference.

Over the next few years she scraped by feeding her kids, working and she made the usual rounds of government agencies to no avail. Finally, sick of the excuses, red tape and lies, Charlene got mad. She formulated a plan born of anger and desperation. Relentlessly she educated herself about her rights and about laws governing child support. Two years later her resilience paid off. She had her ex-husband extradited from Texas back to Ohio where he stood trial for delinquent child support and was forced to pay her \$39,000. Her case changed the laws governing child support, forever.

Charlene set a precedent in the state of Ohio and the country by filing Criminal Non-Support against her ex-spouse. The national media picked up her story, and she received widespread newspaper and television coverage. Overnight, Charlene became a celebrity. People from all geographic locations and walks of life sought her advice about how to collect child support. She was bombarded with phone calls from women in similar situations pleading for help. As a result, Charlene founded the Children's Support Services of Ohio agency (CSSO). Her clients are male, female, rich, poor--they are carpenters,

waitresses, secretaries, gospel play writers and celebrities. In a little over two years she and her small staff did what all the government agencies said they couldn't--they brought 2000 Deadbeat Parents to court and made them pay.

Since that time she has appeared on *Dateline*, *48 Hours*, *Montel* and the *Maury Povich Show* to talk about the serious problem of child support enforcement that our nation faces. Movie studios have actively pursued her to do a made for television movie about her life.

In 1994 Charlene appeared before the U.S. Senate in Washington to recommend sweeping changes to state laws nationwide and to make it easier to collect delinquent child support. In March of 1995 she went to Scotland to address the child support problem there on national television.

"What we need is cooperation between the states and between countries. You shouldn't be able to renew your doctor, dental or pilot's license or hold a driver's license if you owe child support," Charlene says. "Such licenses are a privilege." Maine and Massachusetts already have similar laws in place. Unfortunately, most states do not.

In 2000 Charlene sold Children's Support Services of Ohio and today she heads up her new company I Want My Child Support, also located in Ohio. Her children are grown with successful careers of their own. The once strained relationship between Charlene and her ex-husband has healed somewhat over time, proving that people do change and grow. When a parent makes amends and accepts responsibility for their child, it opens the door once again to form strong and lasting bonds with the children once more, despite a rocky start. All the children are now on good terms with their dad. And this is the outcome Charlene wishes for all her clients.

Currently she's hard at work on a made-for-television reality series about rounding up deadbeat parents and making them pay. The number of people who have sought Charlene's help continues to expand. The most recent dollar figure of uncollected child support topped 114 billion. As long as there is a need for her services, Charlene vows to never turn anyone away. Today, she continues to be a strong

activist for the rights of custodial parents throughout the world. Her company has become increasingly more creative at flushing out dead beat parents to make them pay by placing their pictures on pizza boxes, on the internet and on ten most wanted posters.

"I didn't do it for money," says Charlene. "I did it for others out there like me who can't do it for themselves. I am the crusader for all the women left behind, for the mother no one remembers, for that wife or husband that just got shoved under the rug while he or she went out and made another new family. I do it for them."

Charlene accepted God's challenge to do something about the children in this country who could not take care of themselves. Her personal voyage of discovery provided her with the strength of character and courage to take on a country's legal system and change it. With God's help she accepted the harsh realities of life and managed to rise above them and make a place for herself and her family. Charlene's story proves that one person, properly motivated, *can* make a difference. For more about Charlene Dunbar visit: <http://www.IWantMyChildSupport.com>