



ASK DEANNA!
*Real People,
Real Advice*

Ask Deanna! is an advice column known for its fearless approach to reality-based subjects!

Dear Deanna!

I've spent tons of money on dates and dining but get nothing in return. I try to hold on to chivalry in this day and age but women need to get with the program and spend as well. I'm tired of watching other men do the same? How do I let a woman know I want to date her but I'm not willing to part with my money too soon?

Roger D.
Atlanta, GA

Dear Roger:

You're trying to be impressive by spending money like a fake Donald Trump. If "getting something" drives your motivation for dinner and dating then you got what you deserved. Nothing. It's none of your business how other men spend their money. You should lead by example. Before your next date have a money discussion and determine who's paying or if you'll go Dutch and keep it moving.

Dear Deanna!

I'm 34 and date older women. I have no motives behind my preference. I simply appreciate these women that have old-school values. Recently, I have fallen for a younger woman, but I find myself dealing with a lot of frustrations. She's not where I feel she should be mentally when it comes to friends, money, and marriage. Am I comparing her to my past relationships, or am I just set in old-school ways?

Regretting
Online Reader

Dear Regretting:

You're very mature, and you've learned a lot from the older women you've dated, and that's a good thing. With your age, wisdom and old-school mentality, a small group of younger women can only offer you visual and physical stimulation that becomes old after a while. If you want more stability and structure, stick with what you know — unless you have time to be stressed trying to teach a young girl new tricks.

Dear Deanna!

I'm in prison and have been here for over 10 years. My children were babies when I left, and my wife always throws it in my face that I never did anything for them. No, I haven't paid child support or provided material things, but I can share wisdom. Now, they've gone astray and she's blaming it on me. I feel I can help if she would only bring them to see me.

Anonymous
Soledad Prison in CA

Dear Anonymous:

Child support and material things don't raise children. Love, support, and wisdom along with discipline and faith lead children in the right way. She should be bringing those kids to visit you every chance she gets. Children seeing their father in prison is the ultimate tool to help them do right and stay out of trouble. When they visit, help them by keeping it real about the consequences of your misdeed that landed you in prison and took your life, your dreams and your family.

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Blige proud to be work in progress

NEW YORK (AP) - It doesn't take much to get Mary J. Blige to shift into full confession mode. In less than an hour, Blige freely talks about her personal battles with issues that would take most people years of therapy, or a few drinks, to divulge. Substance abuse. Childhood abuse. Relationship woes. Insecurity issues. Even feelings of self-doubt and self-hate.

Blige's frankness in revealing her hurt, anguish and eventual triumph over troubles has been one of the main reasons why she has maintained strong success — and a devoted, feverish following — over her 14-year career. Through song, Blige has taken fans through her personal transformation, from a petulant, drug-abusing starlet to a mature, well-adjusted, sober superstar and inspirational figure.

But the transformation is not over — and Blige makes that clear on her latest work, the best-selling album, "The Breakthrough." Though she's clearly in a much happier place than where she started, she's not afraid to reveal that she's still trying to stay on the right path — and it's not an easy task.

"I'm trying to walk the walk, but this is hard," says Blige, her tinted sunglasses unable to hide the emotion in her eyes. "I don't want to be falling flat on my face in front of you guys, but I might fall flat on my face in front of you because the process of healing has started.

"And when the healing starts, the correct healing, it all hurts, because you're running straight into pain," she adds, punching her hand to add an exclamation point to her thought.

"The Breakthrough," is far from a tear-jerker, with effervescent love ballads and upbeat grooves. But the album also contains plenty of sore subjects, from relationship dramas to abandonment issues to abusive relationships.

"Mary's music is based on her state of mind at that period in time," says Sean Garrett, who co-wrote Blige's next single, "Enough Cryin."

"She represents the struggle and she's made it through, and that's just like the biggest triumph. It's like she won the race."

Blige is certainly winning the race in terms of sales: When "The Breakthrough" was released in December, it



Mary J. Blige has overcome pain to become a superstar.

shot to No. 1 with the best sales of her career, and so far has sold about two million copies, her most successful record in years.

Ironically, it was when she

decided to not address the pain in her life on a record that fans tuned her out.

Her last album, 2003's "Love & Life," was expected to be a top-seller, coming off

the platinum-selling "No More Drama." It reunited her with Diddy, her mentor and the producer of her breakout debut, 1992's "What's the 411?" and was billed as the return of vintage Mary J., with the hip-hop heavy grooves that made her the queen of hip-hop soul.

But Blige wanted the album to deal more with the struggles going on within her own mind. Though she was newly married to her manager, Kendu Isaacs, and was publicly proclaiming a rejuvenated, confident self, inside she was filled with self-doubt.

"I was never in something like a marriage before, and I was dependent on my husband to make me feel good about myself, and I was still going through insecurities — I still deal with it now, but I was really going through it then, and I wanted to unleash that," says Blige. "That's all I knew."

But Blige, not wanting to be seen as the difficult diva that she had been in the past, acquiesced to Diddy's direction. In the end, the dance beats won out over the (See Blige, Page 9)

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