

24 MILLION

**CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS
FOR ALIENATED FATHERS IN AMERICA**

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***“Helping fathers maintain an active role
in the lives of their children”***

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INTRODUCTION

Of the millions of fathers in America statistically categorized as “absentee,” there are countless numbers of fathers who have tried desperately not to let their children fall by the wayside. These fathers were once excited, eager and willing to make sacrifices on behalf of their children, but somewhere in their journey, as a result of one or more discouraging incidences, they have given up or have been worn down.

Many times more attention is given to problems rather than solutions. With the rate of father absenteeism in America having reached epidemic proportions, much of the spotlight has generally been on “dead beat dads” who fail to follow through on their responsibilities. 24 million children living in biological father-absent homes is an astounding statistic, especially when a person tries to imagine the number of fathers in America not living in the same home with their children. Yet, among those fathers statistically categorized as “absentee,” there is an uncounted number of fathers desiring to be in relationship with their children but not able to for any number of reasons. Thus, the mission of the Fatherhood Support Network and the goal of this book is to bring more attention, resources and energy to help committed and responsible fathers who have been forgotten (and gone underappreciated) by society. We want to shift the trend such that more focus, attention and resources are devoted to those fathers who feel “alienated,” but greatly desire and are committed to maintaining an active role in the lives of their children.

We want to encourage, motivate and inspire fathers who are wavering in their commitment to remain committed to the lives of their children even in the face of confrontation with a court system that disregards or devalues their rights and feelings as a father. At the same time, we want to hold fathers to a higher standard and reestablish correct thought processes so that they will learn how to parent even in the midst of unhealthy co-parenting (though this is not an acceptable excuse for giving up on their kids). And, most

importantly, we want fathers who are feeling weary, frustrated or “alienated” to know they are not alone. There are hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of men in the United States and throughout the world who beat the odds. They have weathered the storm and are currently playing an active role in the lives of their children.

The Fatherhood Support Network is committed to developing a nationwide network of support groups and an online resource database that can be accessed by fathers who are feeling alienated to the point of giving up on their children. As a starting point to developing these greatly needed resources and raising awareness of this epidemic, we are using the publication of this book as a platform to allow “alienated” fathers, who have not fallen by the wayside despite the challenges with which they have been confronted, to tell their stories in their own words. These stories, however, are the exception. Too many fathers abandon their children only because they do not have the emotional support or tangible resources they need in order to remain committed. With the support of the community and other organizations, we can help many individuals who would otherwise simply become another statistic of father absenteeism.

I urge you to join the movement in supporting fathers across the country who are committed to playing an active role in the lives of their children. Whether it takes the form of donating your time or money, many men, children and families will greatly benefit from any positive action you take to address the epidemic of father absenteeism. There are a number of ways in which you can lend your support to this very important cause:

- 1) Make a financial contribution.**
- 2) Become a Network Site for Fatherhood Support Group Meetings in your local community.**

- 3) **Become a Volunteer.**
- 4) **Adopt an Alienated Father in your local community.**

For more information, visit our website at

www.FatherhoodSupportNetwork.org

or

www.FatherhoodSupport.org.

Thank you in advance for reading this book and making a valuable contribution to the Fatherhood Support Network's mission of helping fathers maintain an active role in the lives of their children.

Anthony Parnell, M.S.W.

Executive Director

The Fatherhood Support Network



“Helping fathers maintain an active role in the lives of their children”

F.A.T.H.E.R.s

- F** – Fathers
- A** – Aiming
- T** – Together to reach their
- H** – Highest level of
- E** – Equality and
- R** – Responsibility

MISSION

The mission of the Fatherhood Support Network is to inspire, support and empower fathers, particularly those who have been alienated by an imbalanced legal system and unhealthy co-parenting, to continually play an active role in the physical, spiritual and emotional development of their biological, adoptive, and surrogate children and the broader community, despite any obstacles or challenges they may encounter.

What We Do:

- Significantly reduce the number of absentee fathers throughout the United States.
- Provide direct support and resources to alienated fathers who are confronted with challenges and obstacles to maintaining an active role in the positive development of their children, such as an imbalanced legal system and unhealthy co-parenting.
- Build a Network of Fatherhood Support Groups throughout the United States that provides a safe haven and comprehensive support services within local communities, primarily targeted towards alienated fathers who are committed to maintaining an active role in the positive development and lives of their children, despite any challenges they may encounter.
- Maintain a nationwide online database and network of fatherhood and parenting resources that significantly increases access to support services for current and expecting fathers and alienated fathers in particular.
- Collaborate with other organizations that are committed to providing resources and developing programs aimed at reducing the number of absentee fathers, particularly fathers who are responsible and committed to parenthood, but lack the emotional and financial support necessary to maintain an active role in the positive development and lives of their children.
- Promote and provide educational programs that teach positive parenting skills to current and expecting fathers of all ages.

INTRODUCTION

- Develop and implement Fatherhood Support Groups, Parenting Classes, and other programs that support the social, emotional, educational, and physical development of men of all ages in becoming more responsible and loving parents who positively impact the growth of their children in order to make positive contributions to society and to live healthy, productive, and happy lives.
- Conduct research on educational, social, psychological, economic and environmental factors that have a direct impact on the development of men of all ages and their ability to accept responsibility to actively engage in the process of parenting their biological children.

Five Key Strategies

For Overcoming Challenges and Obstacles in Maintaining an Active Role as a Father/Parent

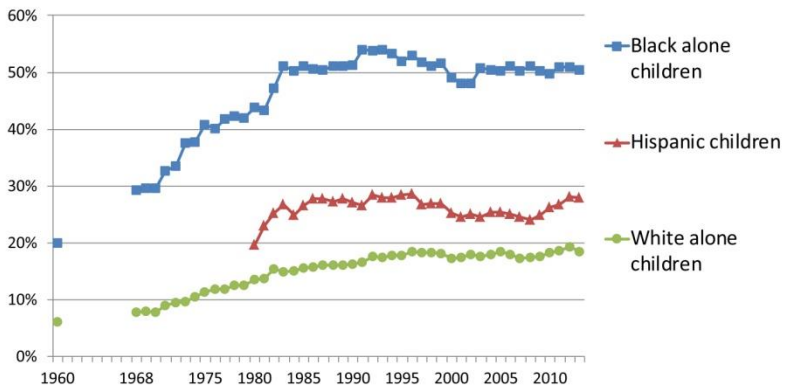
- 1) Do not take the challenges caused by a broken system personally.
- 2) Stay encouraged and remain strong.
- 3) Seek advice and support from other men who currently maintain an active role in the lives of their children—men who have overcome their own challenges and obstacles.
- 4) Do everything you can within your power, and accept the things that are out of your control.
- 5) Remind yourself daily that your value as a father cannot be measured in dollars and cents.

CHAPTER 1

24 Million

Twenty-four million children in America live in biological father-absent homes (according to the U.S. Census Bureau 2010). This equates to a staggering one-out-of-three children. In 1960, only one out of ten children (11%) lived in biologically father-absent homes. Some of the key contributors to the dramatic increase in father-absent homes over the last few decades, according to research, are the sharp rise in rates of divorce, out-of-wedlock births, and incarcerations according to National Vital Statistics Reports from the National Center for Health Statistics.

Figure CH-2-3-4. Percentage of children under 18 living with their mother only: 1960 to 2013



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Decennial Census, 1960, and Current Population Survey, Annual Social and Economic Supplements, 1968 to 2013.

Notes: Direct identification of both parents began in 2007, resulting in the ability to identify children living with 2 unmarried parents.

The collection of race and Hispanic origin has changed over time. Before 2003, respondents had to select a single race.

Persons of Hispanic origin may be of any race.



Available at:

<https://www.census.gov/hhes/families/data/children.html>

<https://www.census.gov/hhes/families/files/graphics/CH-2-3-4.pdf>

More significantly, the absence of fathers in the homes and lives of children has many far-reaching consequences negatively impacting

the development of children and communities as a whole. The National Fatherhood Initiative contends that there is a “father factor” in nearly all of the social issues facing America today. In fact, children who live absent from their biological fathers are:

- **Four times more likely to be poor.**

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Children's Living Arrangements and Characteristics: March 2011, Table C8. Washington D.C.: 2011.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Children's Living Arrangements and Characteristics: March 2002, P200-547, Table C8. Washington D.C.: GPO, 2003.

- **Twice as likely to drop out of school.**

Source: Edward Kruk, Ph.D., "The Vital Importance of Paternal Presence in Children's Lives." May 23, 2012. <http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/co-parenting-after-divorce/201205/father-absence-father-deficit-father-hunger>.

Source: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. National Center for Health Statistics. Survey on Child Health. Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1993.

- **More likely to be incarcerated.**

Source: Harper, Cynthia C. and Sara S. McLanahan. "Father Absence and Youth Incarceration." Journal of Research on Adolescence 14 (September 2004): 369-397.

- **At greater risk of substance abuse.**

Source: Hoffmann, John P. "The Community Context of Family Structure and Adolescent Drug Use." Journal of Marriage and Family 64 (May 2002): 314-D)

Source: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. National Center for Health Statistics. Survey on Child Health. Washington, DC, 1993.

- **More likely to be victims of physical and sexual abuse.**

Source: Sedlak, Andrea J. and Diane D. Broadhurst. The Third National Incidence Study of Child Abuse and Neglect: Final Report. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. National Center on Child Abuse and Neglect. Washington, D.C., September 1996.

Source: Heather A. Turner, "The Effect of Lifetime Victimization on the Mental Health of Children and Adolescents," Social Science & Medicine, Vol. 62, No. 1, (January 2006), pp. 13-27.

- **At greater risk of teen pregnancy.**

Source: Teachman, Jay D. "The Childhood Living Arrangements of Children and the Characteristics of Their Marriages." *Journal of Family Issues* 25 (January 2004): 86-111.

Additional Sources:

FATHER FACTS, 6TH EDITION • © 2011 National Fatherhood Initiative
The National Center for Fathering

These statistics are a clear indication that the involvement and role of both parents in the lives of children is vital to the healthy development, safety, and ability of children to fulfill their future potential. So, the question that begs an answer is, "How can we decrease the number of father-absent homes in America?" Or, in the least, how can we significantly increase the number of fathers who maintain an active role in the lives of their children when not residing in the home?

Addressing a large-scale crisis such as father absenteeism requires a long-term and comprehensive strategy that encompasses political, economic, and social support intervention. More specifically, a plan of action needs to be developed and implemented to address each of these factors individually and collectively. There are a number of short-term and cost-effective interventions that can be implemented on the individual and community level.

A shift in the prioritization of resources allocated to addressing the deep-rooted crisis of father absenteeism in America is an excellent starting point. Seeing the dismal statistics regarding father absenteeism, it is easier to focus more attention on the plethora of "absent," and particularly non-committal fathers, than on the *committed* and *highly motivated* fathers in America. While it is true that there are millions of fathers who avoid and will not accept responsibility for their children, there are also countless fathers who

are fully committed, responsible, and motivated in maintaining an active role in the lives of their children.

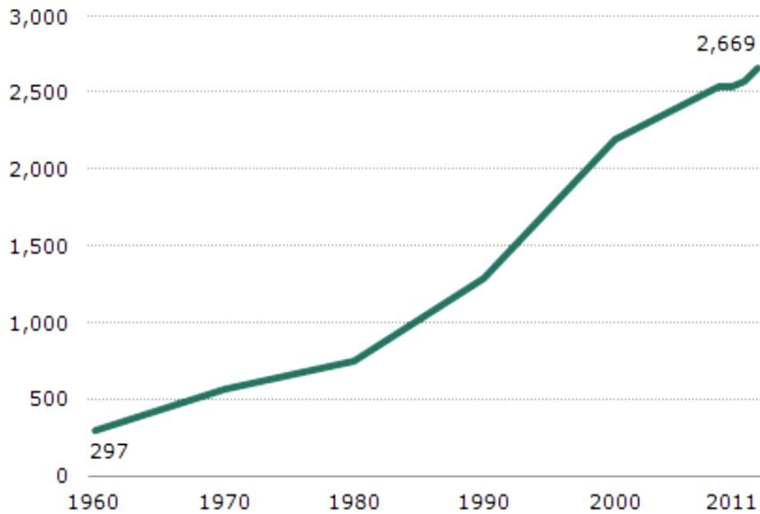
The fact that there are 2.7 million single parent fathers in America is one clear indication of the broad pool of committed fathers in America. Equally significant is the rate at which single father households has increased since the 1960s.

“In 1960, about 14% of single parent households were headed by fathers, today almost one-quarter (24%) are. The number of single father households has increased about ninefold since 1960, from less than 300,000 to more than 2.6 million in 2011. In comparison, the number of single mother households increased more than fourfold during that time period, up to 8.6 million in 2011, from 1.9 million in 1960. As a result, men make up a growing share of single parent householders.”

Source: Gretchen Livingston. “The Rise of Single Fathers: A Ninefold Increase Since 1960.” Pew Research Center, Washington, D.C. (July 2, 2013) <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2013/07/02the-rise-of-single-fathers/>, accessed on May 12, 2014.

Rising Number of Single Father Households, 1960-2011

In thousands



Notes: Based on household heads ages 15 and older who have children younger than 18 in the household. Fathers who are married but their spouse is absent and those who are cohabiting with a non-marital partner are classified as single fathers.

Source: Pew Research analysis of Decennial Census and American Community Survey (IPUMS)

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KEY PARENTING STATISTICS

- **There are 67.8 million fathers in America.**
Source: United States Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 2010 Annual Social and Economic Supplement.
- **There are 74.7 million children under the age of 18.**
Source: United States Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 2010 Annual Social and Economic Supplement.
- **62.2% of children live with their biological *mother and father.***
Source: United States Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 2010 Annual Social and Economic Supplement.
- **24.8 million children (33%) live apart from their biological father.**
Source: United States Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 2010 Annual Social and Economic Supplement.
- **20.3 million children (27%) live in a home with no father**
Source: United States Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 2010 Annual Social and Economic Supplement.
- **2.7 million children live with their father only.**
Source: United States Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 2010 Annual Social and Economic Supplement.

There also are millions of fathers no longer residing in the home for various reasons, but continue to maintain frequent contact with and who play active roles in the lives of their children. More specifically, the Pew Research Center estimates that among fathers not living with their children, 67 percent of black dads see their children at

least once a month; 59 percent of white dads see their children at least once a month, and 32 percent of Hispanic dads see their children at least once a month. {Source: Gretchen Livingston and Kim Parker. "A Tale of Two Fathers: More Are Active, but More Are Absent." Pew Research Center, Washington, D.C. (Wednesday, June 15, 2011)}

<http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/files/2011/06/fathers-FINAL-report.pdf>, accessed on May 12, 2014}

We, therefore have strengths to build upon in addressing the epidemic of absent fathers in America. One of the primary strengths is that there are a broad pool of fathers who are committed to parenting and playing an active role in the lives of their children. Therefore, solutions to the pervasive problem of father absenteeism should be approached from the perspective that support and resources should not only be given to encourage absent fathers to play an active role in the lives of their children, but should also be given to the millions of fathers currently involved in the lives of their children to help maintain their involvement.

Additionally, when reviewing and analyzing the research and data regarding biological fathers who are absent from the home, the number or percentage of fathers who desire to maintain an active role in the lives of their children but struggle, can easily be ignored. This statistical gray area is a category of fathers that this book names "alienated" fathers. These are fathers who once were committed to maintaining an active role in the lives of their children, but for any number of reasons, have abandoned their children. Or, they currently maintain a strong level of commitment, but are on the verge of giving up because of a variety of difficult life events which obstruct their efforts to maintain an active role in the lives of their children.

This is an important to highlight because fathers who currently maintain an active role in the lives of their children often experience many of the same challenges and obstacles that were initially

experienced by fathers who no longer maintain an active role in the lives of their children. More often than not, it is these shared challenges and obstacles that serve as the impetus for fathers, initially involved, to becoming discouraged to the point of abandoning their children.

To gather greater focus, attention, and resources for fathers who are committed, but feel *alienated*, we must dismiss the myth that all fathers who no longer maintain an active role in the lives of their children have done so because they are irresponsible, lazy, or fear commitment. Instead, there often are extenuating circumstances that discourage, or in some instances, prevent fathers from maintaining an active role in the lives of their children. A countless number of fathers for example, lack many of the material and non-material resources needed to maintain a consistent level of involvement. This includes not having built-in support systems to counter or buffer against a wide range of major life events and circumstances often beyond the father's control.

Common Deterrents Experienced by Alienated Fathers:

Imbalances in the Legal System

- Stereotypes that fathers should not have the same rights as mothers (i.e. equal visitation rights, equal child support rights)
- Limited or lack of visitation rights (approved or not approved by the courts, including instances while father is making voluntary or involuntary child support payments)

Financial Hardship

- High Child Support Payments (that impede with the individual's basic income-level needed for self-sufficiency)
- Inability to afford legal representation

The Cost of Legal Representation

- Inability to pay for high quality legal representation due to income level or as a result of child support payments and other court mandated expenses, therefore significantly reducing income level

Unhealthy Co-parenting

- Children turning against their fathers because of negative information fed to them

by attorneys, court representatives, mothers and/or other extended family members, and community members

- Poor examples and role models of healthy, committed, responsible fatherhood
- Negative or unhealthy generational patterns

Because of these, it is important to look at the environmental factors that must be navigated and the context in which many “alienated” fathers are trying to administer their role as a father. Resources need to be devoted to support fathers who are experiencing challenges and obstacles in maintaining their commitment and involvement in the lives of their children. Fathers cannot and should not be expected to do it alone. Support systems must be put into place to provide fathers who want to be there for their children an opportunity to feel empowered and the ability to easily access those required resources. Once resources are in place, information about the availability of these resources needs to be promoted locally and nationally.

We also must take caution not to overlook the day-to-day challenges experienced by many of the millions of single fathers in America. When closely observing the socioeconomic and demographic makeup of single fathers in America, “single fatherhood is generally more prevalent among younger, less educated, poorer, and non-white fathers:”

- More than one-third (36%) of fathers who are living at or below the poverty line are single parents.
- One-fourth (26%) of fathers lacking a high school diploma are single fathers.
- Some 27% of fathers under the age of 30 are single fathers.

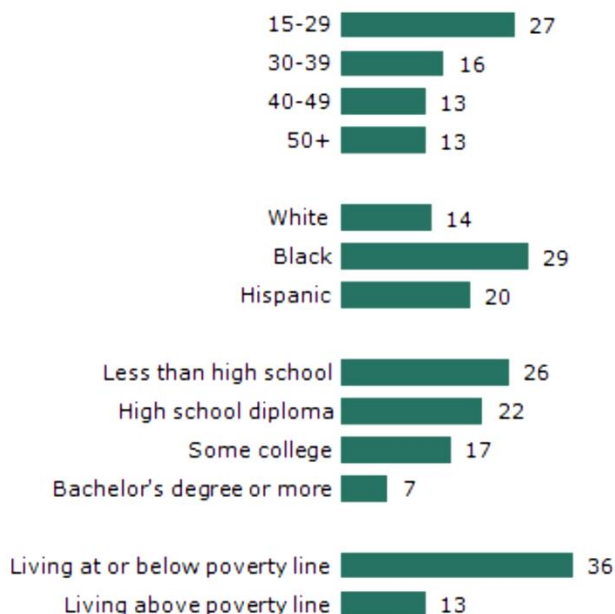
- Almost one-fourth (24%) of single father households are living at or below the poverty level.

Source: The Pew Research Center

These statistics reveal an easily identifiable group of fathers who would benefit from additional support available for their efforts to care for their children. Young fathers, for example, can benefit from experienced parents who might serve as mentors. Less educated fathers can benefit from accessibility to free- or low-cost parenting classes. Also, poor or low-income fathers can benefit from greater accessibility to low-cost childcare, housing, and job opportunities through job training or career counseling.

Which Dads are Most Likely to be Single?

Among household heads who are fathers, % who are single fathers



Notes: Based on household heads ages 15 and older who have children younger than 18 in the household. Fathers who are married but their spouse is absent, and those who are cohabiting with a non-marital partner are classified as single fathers. White and black includes only non-Hispanics. Hispanics can be of any race. Other racial and ethnic groups not shown.

Source: Pew Research analysis of Decennial Census and American Community Survey (IPUMS)

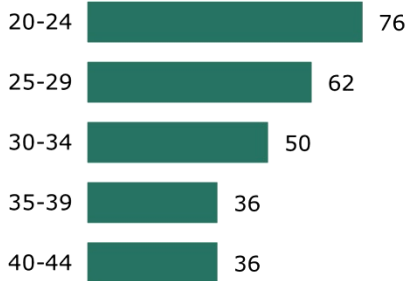
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Source: Gretchen Livingston. "The Rise of Single Fathers: A Ninefold Increase Since 1960." Pew Research Center, Washington, D.C. (July 2, 2013) <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2013/07/02/the-rise-of-single-fathers/>, accessed on May 12, 2014.

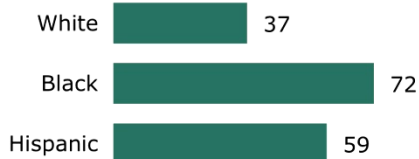
Share of Fathers with Nonmarital Births

% with biological children

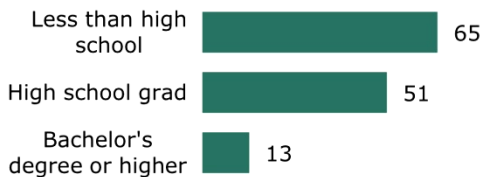
Age



Race and Ethnicity



Education



Source: Pew Research Center calculations of the 2006-08 National Survey of Family Growth

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Source: Gretchen Livingston and Kim Parker. "A Tale of Two Fathers: More Are Active, but More Are Absent." Pew Research Center, Washington, D.C. (Wednesday, June 15, 2011)

<http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/files/2011/06/fathers-FINAL-report.pdf>, accessed on May 12, 2014

There are millions of single parent fathers, and hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of alienated fathers ready and willing to receive the support necessary to remain actively involved in the lives of their children. Without the appropriate social skills and the availability of needed material and non-material resources, these fathers are at greater risk of abandoning their children. You, however, can make a difference in these fathers' lives and in the lives of their children.

24 Million and the founding of the Fatherhood Support Network are presenting a “call to action” for fathers and for the broader community. It is to call to action fathers to take greater responsibility for the rearing of their children. It is to call to action the community at-large to offer greater emotional support and financial resources to the “alienated” fathers of America.

Start today by looking around and observing. The issue of absentee fathers in America is so pervasive you soon will identify a father struggling to maintain an active role in the lives of his children, or more sadly, one who has already given up. Offer him emotional support. Offer him a listening ear. Offer to accompany him to a court hearing. Offer to accommodate or monitor visits with his children.

Every positive act has tremendous value and significance. Your contribution could mean a child graduating from college instead of being incarcerated. I urge you to join the movement today!

Chapter 2

An Unforgiveable Mistake: Corey's Struggle

On September 2003, at about six o'clock in the evening, while on my way to play basketball, I was pulled over in my car by police. Why? I had no idea. I wasn't speeding and I hadn't run a light.

Growing up in New York, I frequently saw the police harass citizens; I never wanted to have anything to do with them. So, as a 28-year old African-American male pulled over by the police for no apparent reason, an uneasy feeling overcame me, putting me on edge.

The policeman walked up to my car, and as expected, he asked for my driver's license and registration. After handing it to him, I started thinking, "While this guy is harassing me for no reason, I'm gone miss my game!"

Nearly ten minutes passed, and the officer still hadn't returned to my car. I was starting to get worried. In my rear view mirror, I could still see the officer sitting alone in the front seat of his police car. The very next moment I suddenly saw a second police car pull up followed by a third one. That's when nervousness began to set in.

The officer who had pulled me over finally got out of his car and started walking towards me. With the window still half cracked, I couldn't believe the words that came out of the officer's mouth, "Sir, would you please step out of the car?"

I hesitated for a moment. I was trying to digest what he had just said. In that brief moment, before I could fully get out of the car, I heard words that did not seem possible or logical. The officer stated, "There's a warrant out for your arrest."

"What? A warrant? For *my* arrest!?" I quickly replied, "I haven't done anything."

My verbal protest didn't deter the officer. Within moments, I was handcuffed and placed in the backseat of the police car. It wasn't until he started driving me to the jail that he explained to me that a warrant for my arrest had been issued by the state for failure to pay child support.

Hearing that just made me even more confused. That was not possible. I had been paying my \$400 a month in child support like clockwork for more than five years. I always paid on time, never missing a payment. In some instances, I paid days or weeks in advance. So, how in the world was it possible that I was being arrested for not making child support payments?