

Emery's Story from THIS IS HUNGER



MAZON

A Jewish Response
To Hunger

"We were one of those couples that purchased the house we could afford, so we could have that slice of the American Dream: our own home. We didn't just jump into it blind—we had two stable incomes.

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I was working for a gentleman in home renovations and when his business was hit by the recession, he started paying me late. Then he just stopped paying me altogether. I had to quit the job to look for a new one that paid me for my work. I've been applying for jobs I'm qualified for, that have openings, but I've gotten no response. Being unemployed has cut our household income in half, and my wife and I are having to make decisions every day on how to allocate what little monies we have: are we going to eat or are we going to pay the light bill? We never lived extravagantly, but there are no luxuries now, no more vacations. We are fighting to hold on to what little we still have.

In the six years since we bought our house, this month is the first time that the mortgage wasn't paid on time. I had to borrow from one place to give to another. I pawned the title to my truck to supplement income. We don't qualify for mortgage assistance or food stamps. That's frustrating because you hear about all these programs to help people like us, but then they tell you you're not eligible. I'm not out to shirk my responsibility or take something that's not mine, but I just don't want to keep sliding further down.

Choices have to be made. We've changed how we feed ourselves. I like fish a lot, but now we can't afford it. What we buy is limited to more processed foods. Last night for dinner, I ate some crackers and cheese and some kind of, shall we say, processed meat. There are many times that instead of making myself a salad, I'll have ramen noodles. Granted, ramen is full of sodium and other things that aren't good for you, but it's just basic sustenance and you can buy a case of them for a dollar and change.

It's a tough, tough time, and sometimes it feels insurmountable. I just re-enlisted in the National Guard to do right by my family. I mean the military is one job that as far as I know is always going to be there. It gives us health insurance and a part-time steady income. My wife worries because I am scheduled to go to Afghanistan in 2015, but that could change.

I have been working ever since I was fifteen. To wake up and realize you are among the unemployed is a shock. But we will get through it. My wife and I are a team."

Emery in his front yard, Mississippi