

Extra Expense by Sarah Watson
What's On Your Mind - ARC Stockton

Urgh, I'm stressed to bits, I really am.
Like I don't even know where to begin.
You really wanna know what's on me mind?
How long you got?

Like I'm really struggling.

Like what you get off the dole isn't enough, it's really not enough, especially when I've got an autistic kid and it's hard just to even get to the corner shop with him. It's hard to go anywhere with him so I've gotta get taxis because my kid won't get on a bus. So that costs money. Money because I've got none. I really haven't.

It's coming up to Christmas and I haven't got a Christmas present in. That's what's wrong with us. Like I can't even give me kids a Christmas because it's a choice between rent, food and gas and electric at the moment.

So how do I get presents into that? And then the schools are asking for like donations, like bottles of wine and stuff like that and there's the teacher leaving so they want stuff like that or they're saying "ah we need money coz we're taking them to the panto" so that's like seven pound fifty a ticket.

Seven pound fifty sounds like nothing but when you're struggling to even put food on the table (*metaphorically coz I haven't got a table*) but when ye, when ye struggling to like get anything sorted, how can you afford this seven pound fifty?

There's always anti-bullying week, Pudsey, stuff like that. These pounds all add up man and I haven't got them. I haven't got a penny.

What's on me mind? Money because I've got none, like I'm struggling. I'm trying to do meal plans right and then I'm stressing meself out because I can't do a meal plan because when I'm trying it's like;

"well he won't, me son won't eat that, me daughter won't eat that. That's the cheapest option but I can't do that"

And then they're like "ah they need to healthy eat" but then that costs more money. See I can go to Iceland right and spend thirty, thirty five quid on a week's shopping. And it's all crap. Don't get us wrong, it's all beige food but because it's cheap enough it works but then that's not healthy eating. That's not giving me kids their nutrients. Then I feel like a shit mother.

I just want to be able to be like, to be able to be like these mams on the tele where they can

make home cooked meals and you can sit down and have a family dinner and everything be alright but in reality that doesn't happen does it? No. Your children constantly fight and there's always something going on. You're trying to sort something out and before you know it, it's bedtime. Because you're sat there, stressing to bits on the phone to people trying to sort something out.

You really wanna know what's on me mind? I'll tell you what's on me mind, money. With what money have I been out the country? Me kids weren't out the country but they weren't registered at schools because we had to flee DV (domestic violence/abuse) .

We had eight different addresses in two years. So yeah they haven't been registered at schools but that's not my fault. But I feel like I'm being targeted because I, they've just cut me child benefit off at the same time they just cut the Covid off, uplift off and I'm stressed because that's thirty five quid a week plus twenty quid a week.

What's that?

Fifty five quid a week I'm losing out on.
Fifty five quid a week.

I know it sounds like nothing to most people but that's a lot to me.
That's a lot.

Especially when Im just trying to start up from scratch again in a new fucking house!

Do you know what my kids will probably be getting for Christmas? A tin of Quality Street because that's all I can probably afford.

People are struggling.
People are proper struggling.

Should I tell you the truth?

I ate every three days instead of every day because I couldn't afford to make a meal out of something so I was just eating crap. I was living off bread, living off toast for a while.

Because I wanted to make sure me kids had food but I didn't care if I didn't and I end up ill coz of it and then I'm run down coz of it.

Because I'm not eating. I

'm not getting the nutrients I need but it's like well.

And then peoples going "ah you should, you should really learn to look after yourself before you can look after someone else"

I'm trying. But how can I look after meself.
I don't matter me kids do.

Comes to something though doesn't it when the footballers have gotta fight with them to feed people?

You really wanna know what's on me mind? It's like you know these free school meal vouchers you get when the kids are off for a week? Like I'm not, they're giving us that, right, but they're giving us for Asda.

Do you know where.. where an Asda is next to me?
Miles away.

So it's costing me a canny bit to get to Asda and then once I've the food I cannit carry it meself so then I've got, coz obviously ye buy tins dont ye.

You buy tins for like twenty three pence and stuff like that and it is heavy coz you're buying all the cheap shit. All the cheap tins of stuff so that it lasts coz you're not gonna get fresh stuff coz that goes off.

So then I'm trying to get a taxi and that's like fifteen quid in a taxi because Asda's miles away.

Why can't you give us for like Iceland or Aldi?
Why's it gotta be Asda?

I know that sounds ungrateful but it's extra expense man.
So it's likes what's the point of even using it.

You really wanna know what's on me mind?
I feel like I'm lower than working class.
I'm technically what you'd class as scum aren't I?

I'm sorry
But you asked