

Cakes and Bags of Shrimp

Years ago, a grocery store cashier wrote to advice columnist Ann Landers to complain that she had seen people buy birthday cakes and bags of shrimp with their food stamps. People on welfare who treated themselves to such non-necessities, the writer said, were “lazy and wasteful.”



A few weeks later, Landers' column was devoted entirely to responses to that letter.

One of Landers' readers, a woman, wrote: "I didn't buy a cake, but I did buy a big bag of shrimp with food stamps. So what? My husband had been working at a plant for 15 years when it shut down. The shrimp casserole I made was for our wedding anniversary dinner and lasted three days. Perhaps the grocery clerk who criticized that woman would have a different view of life after walking a mile in my shoes."

Another reader wrote: "I'm the woman who bought the \$17 cake and paid for it with food stamps. I thought the checkout woman in the store would burn a hole through me with her eyes. What she didn't know is the cake was for my little girl's birthday. It will be her last. She has bone cancer and will probably be gone within six to eight months."

These stories illustrate the danger of judging others and finding fault. We cannot know what people are struggling with in their own lives or within the family.

– Beecher Hunter