



What
they
could get

Government Clerks Can't Have Homes

What
they
wanted



...if we could find an inexpensive cottage in a modest neighborhood quite a ways out

....or a cozy little apartment on a sunlit court where children could play



61%

OF ALL FEDERAL EMPLOYEES IN WASHINGTON EARN LESS THAN \$2000 A YEAR

Budgeting 20 percent of income for rent, these employees should be able to find adequate modern dwellings for their families at the following figures:

- \$16.66 monthly for those earning \$1000 a year
- \$20.00 monthly for those earning \$1200 a year
- \$23.33 monthly for those earning \$1400 a year
- \$26.66 monthly for those earning \$1600 a year
- \$30.00 monthly for those earning \$1800 a year
- \$33.33 monthly for those earning \$2000 a year



By
One of Them.

There are no homes within the reach of the average Government clerk in Washington. After days of weary search, I know this to be true. The budget experts say you may spend one-fifth of your income for rent. For me and my husband that means \$30 a month and there are plenty of others in the same boat, since something like 60 per cent of the Federal employes in the District earn less than \$2,000 a year. If by any chance you've heeded the pleading of eminent sociologists for all healthy and mentally competent Americans to produce 3.8 children, your problem is just 3.8 times as difficult. But let me tell you what happened to me when I tried to find a home for my family in Washington.

I began by seeking a house, because I thought it was so much better for the children to have a yard to play in and we'd be willing to live in a very modest neighborhood quite a way out if we could find an inexpensive little cottage. Well, we couldn't, so I needn't have bothered selling myself the idea. The woman who runs the home-finding department of a local newspaper will tell you she has constant demand for small places renting at \$30 to \$40 a month, and in two months' time all she's been able to unearth is one cottage for \$22.50, with an outside privy.

I didn't want anything like that, so mentally I moved myself into town in a cozy little apartment that might have something of a yard or a children's playground. Some of them do. Yes, some of them, but not for the price we can pay. But I didn't know that to begin with, so I headed for the Northeast section, where I'd heard there are some darling apartments built around courts. There are and they are delightful. The enclosed court is a picture of what a lawn should be. The buildings are neat and they face a vacant lot so that there is fresh air and sunshine. I felt better as soon as I saw them. Of course, the rent was a bit more than we should pay—\$35 to \$45 a month—but I was telling myself: "We just won't have that work done at the dentist and I'll get along another winter without a new coat."

So, with visions of sturdy children playing in a small court I mounted the stairs to the second floor to interview the resident manager. He wasn't quite as enthusiastic as I expected when I told him I wanted to rent one of his apartments. He was sorry, but there were no vacancies. Yes, there was a waiting list, but there wouldn't be any use putting our name on it, because there were only 56 apartments and the list already contained over 200 names.

Followed a series of journeys up steps and down steps. During the process I looked at apartments renting for \$25 without heat and \$47 with heat, snatching one item after another out of our budget until all we had left were two headings, "food" and "rent." But I needn't have bothered, for it was always, "no vacancies."

Finally, I decided to go straight to a firm dealing in rentals. I went not to one, but to several, and made the dizzying discovery that rentals of \$30 a month aren't even carried on their lists. Very meekly I inquired how one discovers apartments renting at that figure. "I don't think you'll find many," was the answer. "I don't know of one myself. But maybe the newspapers—"

AN, yes! I bought a newspaper. Not so many listed after all. The price eliminated most of them. "Adults only" eliminated nearly all the rest. (Do the sociology professors know that apartments are rented to "adults only"? Still, I must find some solution. I phoned the numbers listed in the few remaining ads that seemed to have possibilities, only to find they had not. Then I sought the lady in charge of a newspaper home-finding department.

She took my name and address and started thumbing through lists of apartments. I mentioned the price and she stopped. "Nothing like that in Washington." I insisted there must be something and succeeded in making myself her particular problem. She gave me street numbers. I went forth sanguine with hope, but didn't come back that way because I had been viewing a succession of unattached rooms spotted through dingy wooden houses and misnamed apartments. I had been viewing weather-beaten rooms containing a plate gas stove and the doubtful privileges of using the "shared bathroom" on another floor, and I had been viewing actual slums whose tiny windows revealed nothing but fire escapes and littered roofs.

Finally, I was convinced. Washington can't be like this, but it is. There are no decent two-room apartments for rent at \$30 a month. They were right, all of them. I was in a mood to take advice. "Please, lady, where do Government clerks live?" She brightens. "This is something she can deal with."

"They board," she explains, "in private houses or if you prefer you can just rent a room in a house and eat out. Lots of 'em do. Now there's a room out Northwest not far from Massachusetts avenue. That's a good neighborhood..."

The lady was correct, damnably so. It was a good neighborhood, and it was a nice, large room. It needed to be by the time my husband, my children and I were installed. Of course, it has its drawbacks, but what a relief to be settled. Settled? We are practically wedged!

All we needed to make life complete was the letter from our parents saying they were looking forward to visiting us in our new home. That's a point. Shall we return the letter marked "unknown at this address" or should we explain that it is an old Washington custom for an entire family to reside in one room? That we have to entertain guests on that sidewalk because the children are sleeping in our only room and that we've run an extension to our reading lamp into the hall so that the light won't wake the baby, and besides, this gives us a vantage point from which we can watch for an opportunity to get into the bathroom.

When our landlady told us there were just two ladies to share the bath with us, she neglected to mention that they would each do tremendous amounts of laundry work whenever my husband wanted to shave.

I can laugh about the way we live—sometimes. But when I think of the thousands—of decent, intelligent people—earning less, and of the ugly, dirty houses into which they must crowd, I don't feel like laughing. Am I there, some humane solution?

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