

WEEKEND

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Ask Yolonda

Why the high mortality rate among infants in black community?

By YOLONDA GAYLES
Syndicated Columnist

Dear Yolonda: Have you seen the figures for the infant mortality rate in the black community? They are absolutely incredible. According to the U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, the death rate for black infants is nearly double that of white infants. Why?

I have an even greater interest in solving this problem than some. My niece's beautiful baby daughter died after being in this world for only six hours. That was over six months ago, but my niece hasn't gotten over her baby's death yet. I think it's essential that we do something about the situation, but what?

Marie J.

Dear Marie: I have seen the infant mortality rates, which currently are estimated at 23 deaths per every 1,000 births for blacks, and 12 deaths per every 1,000 white infants.

Parenting experts say that a great percentage of the infants who account for those heavy statistics are the offspring of teen-age mothers. And teens have a history of neglecting to see a doctor in the early stages of their pregnancies, a time when medical consultation is crucial. I'm not suggesting that this is what occurred in your niece's case, but at least narrowing matters down gives us a base from which to attack the wider problem.

Still, there's something that we each, individually, can do about this problem. For those of us who find ourselves in the company of young, expectant mothers, we have to do no more than to open a friendly dialogue with them. Ask whether or not

they've visited their physician. My experience is that most young people welcome having a mature, concerned person to talk with.

What I try to say in this column is that we can't wait for the right program to come up with solutions, particularly when we're speaking of something that affects the health and welfare of our children.

Boyfriend Backs Off

Dear Yolonda: I've been dating a guy for six months, but there's one problem. He has a girlfriend who lives in another state. When she comes to town, I don't see him for a while.

When we first met, we agreed on a noncommittal friendship. But then we began to spend most of our free time together, and I guess my feelings have changed. They have gotten pretty strong for him.

He must not feel the same, because he wants us to start dating other people. Now, that's what we were supposed to be doing from the start.

I don't like the idea. I know I brought this all upon myself, but I'd like to know what I should do. I'm afraid of getting hurt. What do you think?

B.R.

Dear B.R.: He's backing off the relationship for one of two reasons: Either he's becoming too involved, or he sees that you're becoming too involved.

So, what to do? You can either accept a diminished role, and hope that he'll change, or you can try to find someone who values your feelings.

Got a problem or a gripe? Ask Yolonda Gayles, P.O. Box 19112, Chicago, Ill. 60619.

Flirting: Most men don't know how

Flirting -- a simple and necessary prerequisite to a relationship between a man and woman who are strangers to one another.

And although women are adept at it and are often dropping signals, most men are ignorant of the essentials of this ancient art, according to an article entitled "The Eyes Have It" in a recent issue of *Gallery Magazine*.

"The most surprising thing I found," says Cynthia Kline, one of the many experts on flirting interviewed by writer Charles Downey for the article, which appeared in the February issue of the magazine, "was

not that men don't know how to flirt. I expected that. The shocker is, most men don't know when a woman is flirting with them."

Downey, a freelance writer from Southern California, has written for *Money*, *McCall's*, and *Mechanics Illustrated*.

Among his tips: "The basic idea in flirting is for a man to reflect confidence and basic animal strength"; "By all means, try not to appear desperate; the man-in-need image is a definite turn-off"; and "Compliments are a good portion of the art of flirting, but make sure the compliment is heartfelt and you're not trying too hard for effect."



Vandross with songstress Dionne Warwick.

Broadway Is My Beat

Billy Dee Williams: Being a sex symbol has its liabilities, too

By JOEY SASSO
Syndicated Columnist

Observation in covering the night beat: Having newspaper columnists and press agents describe you as one of the sexiest men in the world does a great deal for your ego -- especially if you're so shy you address your wife as "ma'am."

Billy Dee Williams was in a diddling mood when he made the above observation during a Las Vegas interview because writers have been hailing him for years now as the black Clark Gable.

"I didn't believe all the guff I was reading about myself," Billy Dee says, "until I made 'Lady Sings the Blues' and all the PR stuff went out. I just laughed about it and so did my friends. They knew me better. Then, when I would touch a woman's hand and

she would fall to the floor, I suspected something was up."

Billy Dee said he didn't mind the spotlight as a sex symbol at all until women started bringing their babies to him to touch.

"That got a bit heavy," he says with a smile. "I figured next they would be asking me to part the Red Sea or something."

Billy Dee regrets that all the sex symbol publicity hampers his career. "They tell me now that in all my pictures I have to get the girl or else," he shrugs. "Suppose I don't want the girl; what happens then?"

Singer **Michael Jackson** is planning a book of his poetry, photographs and paintings, and the publishers can't wait. They figure that anyone who can put an incredible six singles in the Top 10, as he



Prince Of The Soaps

London-born Darnell Williams, 29, who plays Jesse Hubbard on the popular soap opera "All My Children," disagrees with his fans' consensus about his sex appeal. Darnell says, "I think Jesse is a lot sexier than Darnell."

Musical Notes

She gave him break by firing him

Luther Vandross, whose new Epic Records LP "Body Talk" is climbing the charts with a bullet, recently confessed the role Roberta Flack once played in getting him to record on his own.

At the time, Vandross was a background singer and vocal arranger working with people like David Bowie, Bette Midler, and Quincy Jones.

"I was out on tour with Roberta," Luther explains, "just grooving along singing in the background. She took me aside one day and said, 'Look, it's about time you get hooked up with a record company and make your own album.' Then she told me how she was going to introduce me to a bunch of lawyers and managers."

But Roberta knew advice would not be enough to get Luther out of his comfortable background slot. So she took her position as motivator one step further. Says Luther, "She fired me!"

Painful Exercise

Midnight Star's Bo Watson recently discovered that physical exercise isn't always good for your

health.

Watson was practicing his karate backstage at one of the concerts on Midnight Star's current tour for their platinum LP, "No Parking on the Dance Floor." He tried a crescent kick on a metal railing, felt a strange pain shoot through his lower legs, and discovered that he couldn't walk.

Watson hobbled out onstage for the the show ("Fortunately, I could still dance," he says), then headed for the doctor, who diagnosed a chipped bone in the heel.

Objected the Midnight Star martial arts expert, "It's the POLE that's supposed to break, not the foot."

The Breaks

Break Dancing is going to be epidemic all over your neighborhood movie screens soon. Both Sidney Poitier and his long-time friend, Harry Belafonte, are making films about the new dance or whatever it is, although neither will appear in the films they are making.

highly wicked in a very humorous way -- just an extension of Eartha Kitt's sense of humor." Her disco record, "Where Is My Man," is selling well in Europe but has not sold widely in the United States...

Well, I told the Temptations never to play Kalamazoo, but they did and as soon as they hit town, one of them, **Richard Street**, found out his ex-wife had obtained a bench warrant on him for non-support. Street, 41, and his bodyguard tried to take it on the lam after the group's second performance in Kalamazoo but the cops pinched the two and they had to spend a night in the slammer. Richard's out on the street now, free on a \$100 bond...

Film historians are calling it one of the major photo finds of the century. *OUI* magazine proudly calls it "Mommie Barest." In an exclusive pictorial,

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