

Dear W.C.,

I am writing to see if you can help my neighbor. Yesterday he was very upset when he told me he had received an eviction notice. My neighbor is a single father of two children. I see him lovingly care for his children every day. We talk every now and then when we pass in the hall or when I see him outside playing with the kids at our apartment building. He told me a few months ago that he lost his job and was looking for work. I know the children's mother left in the last few months too. I don't believe I ever saw her sober when she lived here. My neighbor never shared with me the details of where she went and if she is helping with the children. I know he is a good person and just trying to do the best for his kids. I am a retired senior citizen trying to get by on my social security so even though I wish I could I am not able to help this man and children.

Dear Readers,

I called the senior woman to fill in some of the details on her neighbor. We spoke for a while and she answered all my questions. When I told her she was very helpful the senior woman laughed, saying, "I'm retired with no family of my own. I have nothing but time to watch my neighbors and feel like I am a part of their lives." I find this to be true for many of our seniors living on their own. I asked the senior woman how she was getting by and she shared that sometimes it was a struggle. I shared with her some resources for senior citizens that she was not aware of and also asked if she would be willing to help with her neighbor if needed. She was very excited to be asked to help saying, "I have asked my neighbor several times if he needed any help with watching the children while he went on interviews or if he just needed a break. He always tells me no because I think he feels bad accepting help." I told her she may be right but we would work on that when I paid a visit. After our long phone conversation the senior woman reassured me she would call on the senior resources I referred to her. I hung up promising to talk to her again soon.

The same day I drove to the address provided by the senior woman. I knocked on the door of the apartment and waited for a response. I did not hear anyone inside so after several minutes I left a note on the door and walked back down the stairs. Just as I was walking to my car I noticed a man and two children in the distance walking towards the apartment building. I got in my car and waited to see if they could possibly be the father and children I wanted to visit. I watched as he hurried the children towards the entrance. I decided to get out of my car and approach the man and children. I caught them just inside the entrance and the father turned to me in surprise when I called out his name. As I handed him my card and tried to introduce myself I could see the fear in his eyes. I knew he must be thinking I was there to evict them or for some type of collections. I immediately reassured him by telling him about The Time Is Now to Help. He still looked suspicious and said he did not have time to talk. I told him I was there to help and that one of his neighbors had referred him to our mission. He still did not look convinced so I told him to look at the materials I handed him and to call me when he was ready to talk.

A few hours later I received the call I was waiting for. The father left a hesitant message acknowledging that he and the children did need help. I called him back immediately and

told him I was available to talk. I offered to come back to the apartment. The father said, "That would be great. I am so sorry about how I acted earlier. I did not know who you were so I thought you were there to evict us or repossess my car. You really gave me a fright." While we both laughed over this comment we also knew that scenario could very easily have been a reality. My hope was to prevent that from happening to this father and children.

I arrived at the apartment within an hour. I knocked on the door and this time I was greeted with a smile and a handshake. The children both politely shook my hand and said hello. The younger boy that looked to be about kindergarten age said, "Can we play with our toys now Dad? I'm tired of cleaning." We all laughed at his honesty as the father had obviously made an effort to clean up the apartment before my visit. I said to the child, "If it is alright with your Dad I think you may." The boy looked to his father and I watched as he smiled at the children and sent them to play in their room. I thanked him for their consideration and was glad to see he cared enough to make an effort.

Once the boys ran to their room I took a look around the small apartment. It was like so many of the other apartments I see sparsely furnished and the temperature was on the cool side. I asked the father about their food security and he opened the refrigerator door. There was not much there. The father said he had gone to the food pantry at the beginning of the month but it was now three weeks since that visit. The cabinets were very low on food as well. I asked the father about his utilities and he said he was trying to keep his bill low enough to avoid disconnection come spring. I asked if he was keeping up with the larger winter bills and he admitted he was not able to pay them. After looking around the apartment I told the father to collect his bills, bank statement and budget if he had one. I watched him go to a cabinet pull out all the things I requested. The father sat down beside me at the folding table set up in the dining room area of the apartment.

Before we even began I wanted to find out about his job situation. I asked why he was let go and what his present job status was. The father looked ashamed as he shared the story of the children's mother. He said, "We had been separated for a while but still lived together because we could not afford to live apart. She liked to drink and go out all night. I liked being home with the kids when I got home from work and I don't drink. One day she dropped the kids off at my job and went to the bar. It wasn't the first time that happened so my boss was understandably upset. He told me not to come back until I had my life in order. I can't blame him. I've called him a few times asking for my job back but he just doesn't believe that my wife is no longer in my life." I asked if he had been applying for jobs and he said he had. He gave me a list of places he had applied and their contact information. I asked who his employer had been that fired him. When he told me his name I knew who he was. I knew this employer to be fair and a good business person. I asked the father about his present child care situation and what he would do with the children when he got another job. The father said both children were in school full-time and he would have to find after school care. He said, "I should have had the children in after school care when their mother was living at home instead of leaving them with her. I don't know what I was thinking even considering her a safe and reliable person to be with. The kids are easier to care for without her here always upsetting them and messing up their schedules."

Before I would make a call to his past employer in his behalf I wanted to be sure he would not consider letting the mother back in their lives if she returned. I asked the father, "What would you do if your wife showed up at your door tomorrow? Will you let her move back in and disrupt your lives again with her addictions?" The father said, "I know the boys miss their Mom, but not the Mom she is now. They miss the mother they had when they were young, before she began to drink and use drugs. I miss the wife she once was but not the person she turned into in the last two years. She lied to me, stole from me, and hurt us all. I don't want that in mine or the boy's lives again. If she comes back I will get a restraining order and take her to court if I have to. My priority is protecting my kids." I was glad to hear the conviction in his voice.

I called his past employer and after a lengthy conversation he agreed to take the father back on a trial basis. He did confirm everything the father had told me about the mother of the children disrupting work and leaving the children at his business. He told me how the mother would show up when the kids were at school drunk and disorderly and how the father would have to drive her home and hide the car keys. The employer said, "I feel bad because he is an excellent employee but his home life was too disruptive for my place of employment. His kids are wonderful but they do not belong in a business atmosphere. I will give him one more chance because you are helping him." I assured him the father seemed to have his priorities straight.

After reviewing the father's bills and budget I agreed we would bring his rent and utilities up to date. We also provided grocery gift cards and gas gift cards. This assistance would give him the helping hand he needed to get his financial life in order. After our long talk about what he needed to do to get his personal life in order I was confident the father and two boys would do well in the future. We were nearly at the end of our visit when I remembered the wonderful senior neighbor that had referred them to our mission. I asked the father if he had a senior neighbor he spoke with sometimes. It took him a moment and then I saw he realized that was who had referred him to The Time Is Now to Help. The father asked if this was who had been concerned about him and the boys and I told him it was. He shook his head saying, "She is always so nice to me and the boys. My wife was always so mean to her and I think that is because that woman knew what my wife was up to. There were several times she took the boys off my wife's hands because she was afraid to leave them with her. I am very grateful to her and she may have saved their lives." I told him how the senior woman seemed lonely and had offered to help. The father said, "I didn't know she is lonely. I would love for her to help. The boys do not have any grandparents so it would be wonderful if they could play with her sometimes. Only if she wants to of course." I told the father she would be overjoyed to help.

A few weeks later I stopped by to visit both the father and children and the senior woman. This time I met all of them at the father's apartment. The children were in the middle of a card game with their newly adopted grandmother. The father was on his way home from work. The senior woman filled me in on all that had transpired over the past few weeks. The senior woman had contacted some of the resources I had given to her. The father had asked if the children could spend after school hours with the senior woman and she had been happy to help. Between the senior resources and what the father insisted on giving her for watching

the children she was doing much better financially. The senior woman said she had even offered to cook dinner a few times a week and she said, "It is so nice to have a lively family to talk to and some healthy appetites to cook for." I could see all she wanted was to feel needed and this family desperately needed what she was happy to share. When the father arrived home to happy children tackling him at the door I could see how much stress was removed from his life. The father smiled when he shook my hand and this time his eyes smiled too. He said, "I am so grateful for what you did for me and the boys. We are doing better each day. Thank you and everyone at The Time Is Now to Help."

These are just a few of the people we help every week at The Time is Now to Help thanks to "You". Thank you, thank you for helping those in desperate need. Please consider donating at this time and every donation will be met dollar for dollar by the Family Foundation \$30,000 Matching Grant doubling the help that is given. The lives changed are all due to "You". Thank you and God Bless "You".

Health & Happiness, God Bless Everyone, W.C./Sal

Please Help: There are many coming to us in desperation. Our good fellow creations need our compassion. Together we make a big difference. Make checks payable to: The Time Is Now to Help, P.O. Box 1, Lake Geneva, WI 53147. The Time Is Now to Help is a federally recognized 501(c)3 charitable organization licensed in the states of Wisconsin and Illinois. You will receive a tax deductible, itemized thank you receipt showing how your donation provided assistance for the poverty stricken.

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Prayer Chain: There have been numerous requests for a prayer chain addition to our weekly column. Please pray for healing for the following people: Caroline, Clarence, Ryan, Jayden, Santana, Alex, Lily, Kaitlyn, Kynesha, Brandi's Grandma and Marilyn.

W.C. Food Pantry: The W.C. Food Pantry is located at: 205 E. Commerce St., Elkhorn, WI. 53121. This is in the old Aurora Clinic building off of Hwy. 67 just east of Interstate 43. Their phone number is (262) 723-4488.

Please visit: www.timeisnowtohelp.org