

Dear W.C.,

My mother and I have lived together most of our life. She is now seventy-four and I am fifty-five. My mother has struggled with her mental health her whole life. It was not something someone talked about when she was young and it seems like it still is a subject that is hard to bring up. I have heard people tell her to just snap out of it or to take a pill and you will be fine. After watching her daily struggle for as many years as I can remember I can tell you it is not that easy. She was married very young as her parents did not understand her special needs. My father only stuck around until I was four years old and then he left. As far back as I can remember I have been the only one to help calm my mother when she becomes agitated or loses her grip on reality. People do not understand why I can't work. I used to work full-time sometimes leaving her with caregivers. I would either come home to find my mother missing or arguing with her caregiver. Now I have to watch my mother around the clock and she cannot be left alone. We have lived in our motor home for the past eighteen years. It is in very poor condition. Our lot rent and utilities are overdue because my mother needed to go to the dentist. I had to sign up for a payment plan for her dental visit and had to get her medications to even get her to the dentist. Our car is in need of tires and some repairs. It has all just become overwhelming so quickly.

Dear Readers,

Just as this devoted daughter stated in her letter, we do not often talk about mental illness in our communities. With estimates of over thirteen million Americans having a serious mental illness, it would be expected that some of the clients we bring our assistance to would suffer from this kind of illness. It can indeed be very disabling and limit a person's capability to be employed and maintain shelter. I have also seen the effects of some of the medications that are used to help make our fellow creations lives more "normal". For some they are a God send. For others they have a long list of side effects that can be almost more disabling than the mental illness they are supposed to treat. This daughter and her mother were willing to share their experience of living in poverty while struggling with a mental disability with all of "You".

I called the daughter to arrange a time to visit. I know from past experience that an unexpected visitor could throw off a person that suffers from bipolar disorder or schizophrenia. This phone call would give the daughter time to prepare the mother for the stress my visit would no doubt bring. My goal for this visit was to remove some of the stress from their lives not increase it.

I drove up to the mobile home to find a very old trailer. I could see they had tried to make it look more cheerful by the addition of several flower pots and two old plastic chairs outside but there was no hiding the need for some repairs. I noticed the curtains on the window pulled aside and saw an older woman looking at me. When I waved she looked away and closed the curtain. That gesture was enough to let me know my visit was not welcomed by both women.

I was greeted at the door by the daughter and after introducing myself and showing my identification she invited me inside. The mobile home was small and I stepped right into the kitchen area where the mother sat at a table next to the window. The daughter tried to introduce me but the mother looked away and refused to make eye contact. When the daughter asked if I would like to sit down the mother said, "Why is this man here? I don't want him here." The daughter began to apologize but I told her not to worry, I completely understood. The daughter said, "Most people don't understand why she acts the way she does. I appreciate your understanding."

The mother got up and turned on the television in the adjoining living room, obviously not wanting to be part of our conversation. The daughter said, "Well at least she is not in a complete tailspin. She is mad you are here but not yelling at you or me so that is good. You were right about me letting her know you were coming. It gave her time to try and accept it." I told the daughter about the many visits I have made over the years to homes where one or more members of the family struggle with a mental illness. These years of experience have given me a chance to know what sometimes works and what sometimes does not. A surprise visit has never been an approach that worked.

I asked the daughter if I could look around the trailer. I could see she was embarrassed but she agreed. I saw the mother watching me as I opened the refrigerator and cabinets. I could see her confusion and concern. The daughter noticed as well so she went to talk to her mother to calm her down. I heard her say, "This is the nice man I told you about Mom. Remember? He is here to help us." The mother replied, "What do we need help with? We are fine. We have always been fine. Tell him not to touch my things." I answered the mother, "Don't worry I will not touch any of your things. I am just making sure you have enough food and toiletries."

As I quickly looked over their few belongings I could see they lived quite frugally. They had some food but not any of it was fresh fruit or vegetables. I made a list of necessary food and other items as I made my way around the trailer. I noticed the row of prescription bottles that the daughter explained were for the mother. She said, "I do not like to give her all these medications because they make her so drowsy and she has so many other bad side effects. I only use them when she has to go somewhere, like the dentist, or if she is working up to an episode. Sometimes they can come on quickly and other times it may take a few days." I asked the daughter if she was taking any medications at this time and she showed me the medications she took on a regular basis. She said, "These were prescribed by her psychiatrist years ago and they do seem to make a difference." The daughter showed me the small room she and her mother shared. I noticed the two twin beds were the only things that fit in the room. The daughter explained, "I had to move my mother's bed in here because due to her illness there are times she does not sleep. I need to be able to keep an eye on her when she is in her manic states because otherwise she could harm herself or wander off. I sleep very lightly during those times." I asked if she needed any help as I know the strain being a constant caregiver can be. The daughter said, "No. She is my mother and I do not mind caring for her. I have cared for her my whole life and I am the only one she trusts. Every other care giver I have tried does not know how to keep her calm and unstressed." I asked if she would like help from a volunteer but she declined. I understood her refusal as I had seen

how her mother responded to me being there. I did tell her a volunteer would be dropping off some fresh food, household necessities and a variety of toiletries I had noted. I told her I would instruct the volunteer to leave the items at her door and not come inside. The daughter looked very relieved when I told her this saying, “I try very hard to keep my Mom healthy. I usually make her a fruit and vegetable at each meal but we have not been able to do that for the last few weeks. I can see the difference it has made in her behavior.” The daughter also told me she and her mother walk nearly every day the weather is decent as regular exercise helps her disposition as well.

After reviewing her bills, checking account and expenses I saw how the dentist payments overwhelmed their already very tight budget. I saw the overdue lot rent notices and utility bill late notices. I made a list of bills we would help these two women with. I also noted a few repairs on the trailer that needed to be completed. When I mentioned this to the daughter she reminded me about the mother’s aversion to strangers. She then told me how she could do most of the repairs herself if she had the materials. I looked at her with surprise as she said, “Don’t look so shocked. I know how to fix almost anything. I have had to be self sufficient my whole life. I have kept this old trailer going for years.” We put together a list of items from the home improvement store that would fix many of the repairs I noticed.

When it was time for me to leave I said goodbye to the mother. She still refused to look me in the eye but this time she did lift her hand to wave goodbye. The daughter said, “That was nice Mom. Thank you for letting WC visit us today.” The mother looked just at the daughter and smiled. I saw what that smile meant to the daughter. I knew that acknowledgement of love was probably few and far between. As I prepared to leave the daughter followed me outside. We looked at their older model car and though it was old I saw it would be a good car to have repaired and put new tires on. The daughter turned to me and said, “I know you have a lot of people that read your column and donate. Please tell them thank you for helping us. If it wasn’t for all of them we would definitely have become homeless. I also would like you to write a column about my Mom. It is hard for people to understand mental illness sometimes and I think it would help if they heard it from you.” I promised her I would do both things.

I share this gratitude for our life changing assistance with all of “You”. The stress of poverty has been removed for these two fellow creations thanks to “You”. God Bless you for your compassion and caring and sharing for all God’s creations, especially those that do not always even understand the assistance we are providing. The children, senior citizens and those that struggle with handicaps of many kinds are helped all thanks to “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.

A Very Special Thank You: Fox Charities, Paul Ziegler, Clarence & Marilyn Schawk Family Foundation, Martin Business, The Petco Foundation, Petco – Lake Geneva, St. James United Methodist Church, Interstate Insurance Group, Thelma Meyer, Delavan Service League, Margarie Egger, Elkcast Aluminum, Elkhorn Lions Club, George & Leah Rozhon, Bob & Naoma Livingston, Marilyn Carver, Carolyn May Essel, Jaqueline Schueneman, E. & Barbara Andres, William Davit, Marlee Carlson, Edward Horne, Alex Dahlstrom, Karin Collamore, Elizabeth Layhew-Kyle, Gregory Swanson, Rhonda Lee Desautels, Douglas Thorp, Landon & Mary Petrie, Margaret Plevak, Charles & Penny Gruetzmacher, Ronald Curtis, Steve Hubbard, Joan Logan, our anonymous donors and ALL of you who support The Time Is Now to Help donation boxes, and the businesses that allow our donation boxes. Anyone who would like a Time Is Now donation box in your business, please call (262) 249-7000.

Memorials: Harvey & Lois Larson in memory of their dear friend Laurie Holtan. The following donations were given in memory of Linda DeYoung: Duane DeYoung, Brian & Trudy Patten and Wilbert & Shirley Bartelt.

Honoraries: Mike & Natalie Reno in honor of Mike Reno's 26th Birthday. Mark & Laina Papenfus in honor of Dennis & Terri Carnes 50th Wedding Anniversary.

Prayer Chain: Please pray for healing for the following people: Mike, Caroline, Susan, Clarence, Ryan, Jayden, Santina, Alex, Lily, Kaitlyn, Kynesha, Brandi's Grandma, Corinne and Marilyn.

Inspiration Ministries Resale Shop: Please donate your gently used household items and furniture to the Inspiration Ministries Resale Shop. For local pick up of major items or collection appointments please call (262) 275-2264. Inspiration Ministries Resale Shop is located at N2270 State Rd. 67, Walworth, WI 53184. New hours: Monday – Saturday 10 a.m. - 6 p.m. Sunday 10 a.m. – 4 p.m. Closed on Tuesdays. Please visit often knowing your support will provide life changing assistance for the fellow creations in their care. Inspiration Ministries is home for up to 80 residents that live with multiple physical and mental challenges. I thank all of you for helping. For more information visit www.inspirationministries.org.

Please visit: www.timeisnowtohelp.org