



Where Are the **Needy?**

BY CAROLYN J. LEDUC

I pored over my patriarchal blessing once more. One part caught my eye: “You may help the needy with your time, effort, and means.” I imagined myself establishing homeless shelters, starting literacy programs, eradicating unemployment, ending starvation. I should have talked to my parents about my plans first, but I was eager to get started. So I headed out the front door determined that the sullen old beggar at the mall would be my first “project.”

I imagined that first we’d have lunch together. He’d tell me his tragic story. I’d weep. We’d eventually become good friends. I’d buy him a suit, find him a job, witness his baptism, change his life forever. It was all so simple.

I spotted the man outside the mall’s entrance, leaning on the rusted shopping cart he pushed around town. I could see his cart was filled with . . . onions? He picked up an onion, whacked it in half on the cart, then bit into it like it was an apple. I was taken aback but undaunted. “Would you like to join me for lunch?” I asked, wide-eyed and tentative. “I have a few dollars and . . .”

Suddenly, loud, unintelligible jabber poured out of the man’s mouth. He shook his fist at me and toward the sky. His gestures were wild and frantic. Was he sane? He seemed upset with me and was definitely not interested in lunch, so I turned with an apologetic grimace and went home.

Several days later, I spied a woman with a “will work for food” sign. Recognizing my second chance to be charitable, I stopped to talk with her.

“I need gas money,” she told me. “My dad’s in Texas, and if only I can get to him, he can help me out.”

“Gee, I don’t have any cash,” I replied.

“How long will you be here?”

“Till noon.”

“I’ll be back by 11:00. I promise.” At 10:45 I was back with a gift certificate for gas. She was nowhere in sight.

“Boy,” I thought, as I walked home, “this is not turning out like I expected.” I kicked a pebble. “Helping the needy is going to be tougher than I thought. Is this something I’m supposed to do later in life?”

I kicked the pebble again. “How can I help the needy? Couldn’t I get started now? Isn’t there someone who needs my help? Isn’t there someone who wants my help?”

I arrived home. I heard crying as I walked in. It was Steven, my brother. He’d been teased at school and didn’t want to go back. The words from my patriarchal blessing echoed in my mind: “You may help the needy with your time, effort, and means.” Here was my brother in need.

“Hey Steven, you wanna go get some ice cream? Tell me what happened.”

Steven and I talked about his peers. Maybe I didn’t say anything helpful, but I could tell that my companionship meant a lot to him.

That experience with Steven taught me a lesson: the poor are just as likely to be in your home as on the streets. There are all sorts of needy people in the world—those who need food and shelter, of course—but also those who need love, counsel, and encouragement.

I haven’t given up my dream of ending the world’s social troubles, but for now, whenever I get the itch to seek out the needy, I’m inclined to go knocking at my brother’s bedroom door first. **NE**

had always felt it was important to help the needy, but you’ll never guess where I found someone who needed my help.

For ideas on helping the needy in your community, go to www.providentliving.org.