

GOOD NEIGHBOR
by: Roger Bernabo

I was at peace and resting. I had taken a personal day from work to relax while my children worked hard at school. My private serenity ended when my door bell rang. Danny, who had just moved into the neighborhood, stood at my door. Dressed in a soiled T-shirt and jeans Danny had obviously been working. Perspiration beads appeared under his cap.

"Hi, how's it going, Dan?"

"Could you help me. I need a bumper jack, do you have one?"

"Be glad to help you, Danny, but I don't have one. I have a small hydraulic jack and it's better for changing a flat anyway."

"No, it's not for a flat, I got another problem."

"Oh, what's up?"

"I got a plumbing problem. I was using a snake (this plumbing tool has a rounded steel head at the end of a very long steel rod) and it's hung up in my outside sewer drain. I thought if you had a car jack I could use it to free it up."

"I don't have one Dan, but I'll bet between the two of us, we could pull it out. I'll come help."

"I'd sure appreciate it. My wife is out now. She told me to get a plumber, but I thought I could save \$50.00. If I don't get that snake loose its gonna cost a whole lot more and she's gonna be furious."

"Dan," I said, "Rest assured, we'll get it out. Let me get my gloves."

While we walked to Dan's house, he explained how this was their first home and he was just learning how to do routine homeowner chores. I could not help but feel for him as I had been in the same shoes but a few years ago.

Luckily for me, Mr. Fixit lived next door. I had learned a lot from Terry before he moved. I truly wanted to help Danny, as sort of a payback to Terry.

I was very happy Danny asked me for help. Normally no one in the neighborhood asked me to help them fix anything. I could tell Danny was putting his trust in me. I knew we'd get that problem solved!

The steel rod had an undesirable appearance arching up out of the drain in front of his house. It was located just a foot or two away from the home's foundation and brick walls.

We grabbed the snake as I counted, "One, two, three, pull!" Nothing.

Again and again we tried but the stubborn demon seemed hopelessly stuck.

Not wanting to let Dan down I said, "Let me fool with it, maybe I can work it loose."

Dan nodded, but I could tell he was suffering some anxiety. I knew he had to get it loose. It would be best if we got it done before his wife got home and then he could be a hero. Or he could just say the plumber couldn't come until tomorrow.

Fishing, I pushed the rod deeper, then tried backing it out. Sometimes it got lodged deep only to go back to the original position after lots of coaxing and sweat. I was losing patience and Dan was losing time.

I shook my head and looked at Dan. I was afraid we had failed. Dan was just as dejected. Then I noticed his pick up truck.

My mind was in overdrive as I boldly proclaimed, "Dan, I just figured it out!" Dan was all smiles.

"All we have to do is back your truck into the yard. We'll wrap this end around the bumper and just yank it out."

Dan was excited, "You know, I had thought of that earlier but I was afraid to try it."

"Don't worry Dan, go get your keys, we'll have this

Dan was excited, "You know, I had thought of that earlier but I was afraid to try it."

"Don't worry Dan, go get your keys, we'll have this fixed in a minute and your drain may be cleaned out too!"

Dan hurried to get his keys. I felt handyman proud at solving Dan's plumbing problem.

Dan bumped his pick up truck over the curb into the front yard. It was facing away from the house and the menacing snake.

I wrapped the cable around the truck bumper.

"Dan, hold on, I need to get by the side of the house. That thing will be flying everywhere when it comes out of the drain."

A few seconds later I shouted, "Go, Dan."

Dan lightly pressed the gas. I was peeking from the side of the house but could only observe the truck fish-tailing. Dan stopped the truck. I looked at Dan. We were both a little puzzled. Never fear, I had a better idea. Usually home jobs required a bigger hammer, but this time.....

"Dan, give it more gas," I encouraged.

Dan nodded, although he was visibly less sure.

He turned his head and stepped on the gas. Peering from the side I saw the truck moving forward. He stopped and we went to examine.

There was more snake out of the drain but something did not appear right. Where was the end of the menace?

We looked at each other for a moment. We were both experiencing that gut wrenching, sinking stomach feeling. The kind that arrives when one understands they have just made a very costly mistake.

Realization dawned. The snake, being made of steel, had cut through the cast iron sewer pipe leading from the house to the street. Adding to this injury the DAMN thing was still stuck. I didn't have time to tell Danny how badly I felt because Mrs. Flores was pulling into the driveway.

She looked aghast as she saw Danny's pick up truck in the front yard and two grown men appearing guilty and ill at the same time.

I always felt brave, but I told Dan I'd see him later. I could hear bits and pieces as I made it to my door safe and sound.

I really wasn't sure if I should, but I did call Dan later that evening to see what he was going to do. He told me he could have the plumber re-lay his line for \$400.00

or

he could dig up the line himself and save \$200.00. I told him if he decided to dig up his line I'd help him. For some reason Dan never said a word.

The next morning a plumber and some big equipment were in the middle of Dan's yard.

* * *

We wave to each other and smile but Dan has never asked me to help him again.

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