

Second Place
Paul Odell-Scott

7th grade, Stanton Middle School, Kent City Schools, Kent

Title: *Be A Good Neighbor*

This past November 2002, the Islamic Mosque in my neighborhood was vandalized. The culprit who through a piece of fire place wood through the front door window is still unknown. The cost for a new door is \$800. So, my friend's dad came up with a plan for the community to show the Mosque that we cared. This is the story of how kids in my neighborhood helped a neighbor in need.

It all started one autumn afternoon. My mom, my sister and I were on our way to get haircuts. When we drove by the local Mosque, just a couple of blocks from our house, the front door had a big hole and glass was scattered on the ground and in the front hall. We felt concerned for the congregation of the Mosque. So, my Mom called the local police station and asked if they knew about the vandalism. They had already known. On our way back from the hair cut shop we looked at the Mosque again. Reporters and photographers were in front of the Mosque. The news was getting out.

A couple of days later my dad and my friend's dad came up with an idea. They wanted to collect money to give to the Mosque to show them that their community cared. So, my friends Matt, Dan, Ben, my sister Megan, and I decided to go around our neighborhood door to door asking for donations for the Mosque. While we were collecting donations, we also had a card for people to sign and a newspaper article about the Mosque. Only two people in the neighborhood didn't donate but everyone else wanted to help. Some of our neighbors heard about the plan and were ready with their money. Some even came to our house with their donation. We continued our collection for two weeks. Then we made plans to give the money and the card with all the names on it to the Mosque.

I was excited when the day came that my friends would have the chance to give the money to the Mosque. We meet the leaders of the Mosque at their front door and gave them the \$530 we had collected. The President of the Mosque said that what we had done was the true American spirit. Everyone was smiling, laughing and feeling good about being together. They said they were proud to be in our neighborhood. We were proud because we could help someone in need. In return they shook our hands, gave us candy and invited us to a picnic they were having that afternoon. My dad and I went to the picnic. I met five Islamic boys and we had fun playing America's pastime – baseball!

Later on in the year my friends and I attended a special Islamic celebration at the end of Ramadan. They presented us with certificates that read, "The Muslim Community appreciates your response to the vandalism at the Mosque and is proud to call you a neighbor and a shining bright star for the country."

So this brings out the law of life that calls on me to be a good neighbor, just like the story of the good Samaritan. When no one would help the beaten up stranger, the Samaritan helped him. This experience has taught me a lot about life. So, my law of life is to be a helpful neighbor, and to help those in need whoever they may be.