

Thinking Of Renting Out Your Home? Don't Get Stuck With These Tenants

July 22, 2013 11:32 PM

Reporting [Liz Collin](#)

MINNEAPOLIS (WCCO) – The housing turnaround has many Minnesotans looking to upgrade. But if you're thinking about buying a new home and renting out your old one, this story should serve as a warning.

We found one family moving into rentals across the metro and living for free for months at a time. WCCO-TV also found out how these renters have been able to skirt the system for so long and what they did to at least one property that has them in even more trouble.

For Cody Johnson and Amy Macht, it finally felt like the right time to make the move to a bigger home in southeast Minneapolis. But after a few deals fell through on a sale, Cody listed his property for rent instead.

"Going into it we felt really good," Cody said.

It didn't take long for them to get a signed contract from a family that seemed to be the perfect fit. "Four children, enjoyed the school district. Their kids were going to go to school by Ford Parkway," Amy said.

"These people seemed very polite, very nice," she added.

While they may be polite and nice, they were living for free for three weeks when we stopped by.

We asked Daniel Helms what was going on when we spotted a cell phone in his hand and cable TV in the background.

"It's the bills I have to pay. Get the f— out of the way," Helms said as he slammed the door in our face.

After a moment, Helms opened the door to talk more.

"What gets me the most is the fact that, I guess, there's people out there like that," Cody said.

The first red flag came when the Helms wrote a \$1,700 security deposit check before moving into Cody's home.

"I deposited it, and the next day I had noticed in my Wells Fargo account that it had bounced," Cody said.

That's when Cody and Amy started their research. Turns out, they ran a background check on the wrong names. Cody and Amy say the Helms had spelled them wrong. So by the time they ran the real names it was already too late.

Daniel and Rachel Helms have a long history with the law. Both have suspended driver's licenses, a felony for fraudulently receiving public assistance, charges for not paying bills and not paying three other landlords.

Melissa and Mark Damon are one of them.

"Oh, we were angry," Melissa said.

With a new baby in the family, their first home in Richfield came up short on space. Again, the Damons decided to buy something new and list their old house for rent and, again, the Helms found them.

Only this time, Mark and Melissa didn't do a background check.

"I just want to make sure nobody makes the same mistakes that we did," Melissa said.

Almost every day, Melissa says Daniel had a different excuse. He would text her as to why he couldn't pay. The last reply came when the Helms were told since they weren't paying they needed to leave.

"We get a text back, 'Sorry you're going to have to take us to court. We have nowhere to go. The judge will have to tell us when we can move,'" Melissa said.

It took four months for a judge to order the Helms to leave. The Damons were paid \$900 by the Helms – \$6,400 short on rent and not even enough to cover the mess they say the Helms left behind.

"One thing to not pay me, but then to, like, destroy my house and damage it that way – that's a whole other story," Melissa Damon said.

There were holes in the walls, carpet stains, and water damage along with a pile of trash spilling out of the garage. There were 66 bags of garbage in all.

Now, back to Daniel Helms' side of this story. He told us he's always wanted to pay but he hasn't been able to find work as a painter to cover his bills and that he's the victim of people writing him bad checks.

"None of this has ever been intentional," he said. "Ever. It really pisses me off that you think that it is," Helms said.

With a U-Haul hooked up to a suburban they're not licensed to drive, the Helms said they'll be moving with their four children into a hotel after costing Cody and Amy \$2,500 in lost rent.

The Helms moved out of Cody and Amy's house a couple of days after WCCO-TV's cameras stopped by. The couple found 30 cents on the floor when they went in to clean up the place. The Damons had a court date with the Helms last week. The Helms never showed up. A judge ordered that they pay the Damons \$10,000 to cover the rent and damages. If they don't in the next month, the state of Minnesota can start garnishing wages.

If you're planning to rent your property the [Landlord Protection Agency](#) says include a pre-screening prospect card with your rental listing online. There you can ask about things like credit and current jobs. Do as much pre-screening as possible. Make sure you get a copy of a prospective tenants' driver's licenses and [run a credit report](#) and background check before a tenant moves in.

Also, make sure you cash the security deposit and first month's rent check again before they move in.