



DISTRICT COURT 15-1-04
 GWENN S. KNAPP
 MAGISTERIAL DISTRICT JUDGE
 BOROUGH OF WEST CHESTER (EAST)
 COUNTY OF CHESTER

DISTRICT COURT BLUES

Too loud, or not too loud? *That is the question!*

West Chester Borough Ordinance §73-3—It shall be unlawful for any person to make or cause to be made a noise disturbance within the limits of the Borough of West Chester....

In District Court 15-1-04, alternative sentencing options are offered in a small number of cases (less than 1% of those filed) in lieu of a portion of the financial penalty imposed. If it appears that a defendant and the community might benefit, s/he may be given the option to, among other things, write a personally meaningful essay about their experience. Following are excerpts from essays written by young people who have pled or been found guilty of violating the above West Chester ordinance. Those who have completed their alternative sentencing have not repeated this offense.

(In the interest of promoting proper use of the English language, essays may be edited for spelling and grammar.)

◆ **As a resident, you should treat your neighbor the way you want to be treated.** Noise pollution is a big problem because we all share the airwaves. You can't put a boundary on them.

For us, one way of dealing with the noise problem was to simply turn down the music so it wouldn't be so loud. Second, our parties usually lasted till 4 or 5 am, and we have learned to dramatically cut down the time. *It's not just better for our neighbor, but we have gotten more sleep on the weekend also. So, when Mondays roll around, we're not so lethargic.*

One thing that really made our parties loud was the people on the back porch talking. We sent a lot of people to the back porch because we didn't want them to smoke cigarettes in the house. Now we do not let anybody outside for any reason because, in conclusion, being a good neighbor is respecting your neighbor.

◆ **One evening, I had a few friends from home come to West Chester to visit. As newly twenty-one year olds, we hit the bars downtown.** Having a little too much to drink, we all came back to my house to hang out and watch television. With my surround system blasting and loud voices coming from my window, it was very easy for our noise level to increase as the night went on. Around 4 am, officers came to my house. They informed me that I would be receiving a ticket the next day.

When I woke up I had a serious conversation with my parents. They explained the importance of being considerate of your

neighbors and remembering that not everyone in West Chester is a WCU student. Many people in West Chester have jobs and families, and need peace and quiet late at night. They had me try to imagine that my neighbors were my parents — I would *never* want to wake them up that early in the morning.

It all started to sink in. Of course you can't pick your neighbors, but you can pick the kind of relationship you want with them. The next day I made a point to talking to my neighbors and apologizing for the times we have been loud. I made them feel comfortable about coming to our house and talking to us if there are any problems. I realized our neighbors were all nice, caring people who only wanted what everyone else wants – respect.

◆ **When you become a part of a neighborhood, you take on many responsibilities.** You have to make sure your sidewalk is clear after a snowfall, to keep your trash neat and tidy for the trash men, and to have respect for the rest of the neighborhood.

Since the noise violation I received, I have been mindful of my neighbors and neighborhood. I feel the only place to go from here is up. I try to keep an open and personal relationship with my neighbors by saying hello or asking how their day is going. I also turn music either way down or off after ten o'clock. I do not want them to look at me and turn their head because I kept them up until two o'clock in the morning the night before.

I imagine myself down the road with my husband and family and maybe I will have a newborn that cannot sleep because my neighbor will not keep it down. *Even now there are some nights when I am trying to study and all I can hear are people walking up and down my street screaming.* At times I have gotten out of work as late as three o'clock in the morning and all I want to do is to sleep, but I cannot because of the noise.

I guess I never realized the severity of this issue. Actually sitting down to write this paper has been a real eye opener for me as well as my entire house. *When it comes down to the bottom line, anyone knows it is all about respect* — respect for your neighbors, your roommates, and your friends. Without respect for other people this entire world would be a jungle.

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I now have a better understanding and appreciation for the neighborhood that I reside in. I know everyone works hard and takes pride in making this an enjoyable place to live, and I do not want to be one of those people who messes it up for everyone else. I like living in West Chester, I like the university and I like living in my house, and I would never want to do anything to ruin that for myself.

◆ **When I look back on the night we received noise violations for a loud radio, I realize that I made a mistake.** I put myself in a bad situation, and was stuck suffering the consequences. The first and most important thing I learned is my responsibility to be a good resident of the community. By attending WCU, I am included in the town of West Chester. Being considerate and respectful of others is probably one of the most important things about being a good neighbor. I know I want others to do to me as I do to them. With that said, what I did that night was unacceptable. If I had just come home from a long day of work, or I needed to study for a big test, I definitely would not want to be distracted by neighbors. *So, as I was angry that night for what my neighbor had done, I now respect her decision and accept the fact that I was the one who made the mistake.*

◆ **There is nothing I can do to change what happened that night, but there are things I can do to prevent things like that from happening in the future.** I would like to avoid paying silly fines for such a stupid reason. It's not a hard thing to do. My friends and I have arranged to live in a house next year. I would get pretty annoyed if every night we were having the cops called on us, so I think we need to practice being a little quieter when it is appropriate. We realize that not everyone living in the houses around the campus are students. Many homes are occupied by families or couples. Courtesy is a common law that should be practiced more in today's society.

My roommates and I have discussed what happened that night over and over again. We didn't just push it out of our minds because it's over. We all understand that we are going to be living in West Chester next year and we have to respect the rights of our neighbors. I would expect the same thing from my neighbors at home or at school. This experience has taught me to realize that there are people around here that will call the police on you if they think things are too loud or out of control. I am looking forward to next year very much and I would hate to see it ruined by another experience similar to this one. There are just too many things to enjoy in West Chester and I would much rather deal with the positive parts than with the negatives.

◆ **I have set goals for myself as far as our house is concerned. I sat everyone down and explained to him or her that we all need to be more responsible and stop getting noise violations.** We discussed how we would not have parties very often and even when we do, we will keep the music down so we do not disturb others. I plan to make myself more aware of the needs of others around me in the West Chester community. As part of being an all around more responsible person, I am going to take control of some of the things that go on around the house.

Being a good neighbor means I need to think of my neighbors even when it means that I may have to give up having some fun. When I want to have a party I need to take into consideration what day of the week it is and what time things will be on. If I were a working person going to work the next day, I would not want to be bothered with some college kids that are up late

making lots of noise. Also, parties can make a lot of mess and I have to take responsibility to clean up and to pick up the trash that is created so my neighbors do not have to worry about it.

I also have to be thoughtful when people leave my house because there is a chance that one or more of my guests may have had too much to drink and think it is funny to destroy property of neighbors, which could be my direct neighbors or anyone in West Chester. As the one who had the party, I should be responsible by making sure guests do not drink too much and that they are under control when they leave my residence.

It is very important to be aware that people need sleep. If someone is tired and others are being a nuisance and keeping them awake, that person gets easily frustrated, and this causes problems. I plan to change my plans and go to a bar or to a movie instead of having a party so my neighbors will be able to sleep through the night. Even if it is not too late, I respect my neighbors and keep my music volume low enough so they do not have to hear it outside of my house.

It is my goal to be a better neighbor and to take more responsibility. To do this, I am taking more initiative and having more influence on the things that happen in my house. I hope my neighbors will like me better, and that I will help to give college kids a better rap. I hope the neighbors will become friendlier.

◆ **After receiving a noise violation in the borough of West Chester, I came to realize we need to have more respect for our neighbors.** A few nights ago, there was a raging party up the street from my house. *The noise was irritating while I was trying to study for my midterm, and it distracted me. I now understand how our neighbors felt.* They were probably tired or trying work while we were causing a disturbance. I didn't realize that being loud was a problem until someone else bothered me. It made me feel inconsiderate and I feel bad to have caused anyone an inconvenience.

The next time we decided to have people over, we were aware of our volume because we didn't want to upset anyone. We realize this is a college town, but there are many people who live in this town who do not go to college, and we can get in their way.

I hope to not bother our neighbors again, and I hope to never be in that courtroom again. Now we are trying to make a positive difference in town. If I hear a loud party going on, I politely go to the residence and tell them to keep it down. Usually, they respect us and keep it down. This was a warning that we did not receive. Instead, we had 7 officers in our house.

I've also decided to become a part of a local project. Riggstown Revitalization is a group of people who want to make the town more appealing to the eye and keep things beautiful, getting rid of trash and ugly things on our streets. Keeping the noise down and having a beautiful neighborhood keeps everyone happy. No one wants to ruin a neighborhood or town that they are proud of.

My roommates and I do not want to leave this peaceful town. It is very convenient to live where I feel safe walking the streets to get where I need to go. I want to keep West Chester a wonderful place to live in. *It starts with turning down the volume and turning up the initiative to make this town a place to be proud of.*

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