

Beginning Anew

By Janet S. Porter

The Life and History of Phineas Wolcott Cook, p. 10-11
using his own words

CHARACTERS (4 - 2 males, 2 females)

Phineas Wolcott Cook (PWC)

Ann Wiles (his friend)

Birdseye Norton

Irene (his mother)

PWC: *(Holding the letter)* I received a letter from my friend Ann Wiles at Goshen. Being here in Norfolk to work has been very hard, especially because Birdseye Norton can't even pay me the money he promised and I'm away from home with no money to get back. Let's see what the letter says:

Ann Wiles: August 1, 1837.

Dear Phineas.

I'm sorry to say that your mother has moved to Milton. Your Uncle Moses left word with Damon Beacher to tell her the time was out for her to give possession of the house. He told Beacher your father had sold the house to Uncle Moses and he wants it right now, even though your father has gone to Michigan and your mother is alone in the house with your sisters.

He further told Beacher to go and warn her out of the house, and if she did not go within 20 days to go and put her things out into the streets, which errand he claimed he was proud to do. I'm glad to say your mother and two younger sisters got out of the house before he threw them out, and they are now living in Milton in a house belonging to Daniel Hall, father-in-law of your sister Eliza.

I'm sorry to be the one to give you this news.

Your friend, Ann Wiles

PWC: Uncle Moses is a rich man. He didn't need that house in such a hurry. At least I'm glad she left before he threw her out. Uncle Moses has long been a persecutor, and I would hate to give him the privilege of doing such a task for my mother. I suppose I'll have to walk home after all. It's almost time for me to leave for Michigan.

(Birdseye Norton comes to the stage.)

PWC: Mr. Norton, I have to leave. My mother was evicted from her house, and it's time for me to go home anyway.

Birdseye: You promised to work three months, and I intend to pay you for three months' work. I just don't have the money right now.

PWC: But could you pay me part of it. I need to get home and haven't a cent even to buy a piece of bread on the way.

Birdseye: All right. Here's \$10. It's all I have. I'll have to pay you the other \$35 at the end of the year.

PWC: Mr. Norton, by the end of the year, I'll be in Michigan. That's why I came to work for you. I need money to get there.

Birdseye: I'm sorry. There's nothing I can do. If you're in Michigan at the end of the year, you'll never get your money because I don't have it right now.

PWC: At least I have something to show for the summer. Ten dollars isn't much for a whole summer's hard work, but I'll try to be thankful for it.

(Birdseye and PWC leave the stage and his mother Irene enters. She sits in a chair sewing as PWC comes in.)

PWC: Mother, I'm back home. But I'm sorry never again to be at our old house and farm. I hear it's now in the hands of Uncle Moses.

Irene: Yes, that old goat. Your pa lived in that house for 32 years. He sold Moses the place for a good price, \$2,209, with the promise that I could live there until we leave for Michigan. The way old Moses keeps his word, it's lucky your pa gave \$900 to Salmon and Eliza to keep for him, or Moses might have found some way to get it out of him. I have received a letter from them in Michigan saying they have bought the land, and that Salmon and Eliza are helping him make a farm out of the Michigan prairie. At least we'll soon have our own home again—just not in Connecticut.

PWC: Now we will have to begin anew

Irene: Doing it away from Uncle Moses will be a good incentive to make the best of everything. We'll do fine—the farther from here, the better.

PWC: We're almost ready to leave for Michigan to meet Pa. I'm going with my brother Daniel and his family, but Birdseye Norton could only pay me \$10, so I have almost nothing to show for the summer, and the same for almost a year of work. No one could pay me. What shall I do for the fares on the Erie Canal Barge and the Lake Erie steamship?

Irene: Your pa left money with me and I'll let you have \$36, but you have to promise to pay me back, son. You and I won't get along if you forget who loaned you this money.

PWC: I promise, Ma. You're good to me. We should be there by the end of October, but when are you coming?

Irene: Your brother Darius is working right now. He says he'll bring me and your sisters next summer in 1838.

PWC: Then that's when I'll pay you the \$36.

Irene: And you'd better not forget!

(PWC takes the money and begins to leave the room. Then he turns to his mother)

PWC: Don't worry, I'm afraid to forget to pay you back. You and Uncle Moses know how to collect money.

Irene: Posh, I'm nothing like your Uncle Moses.

PWC: But you collect money like he does.

Irene: You'll think so if you don't get a job and earn some money when you get to Michigan. Now Goodbye.

PWC: Goodbye, Mother. I'll see you in Michigan next year.

Family Discussion

Can family tragedy be a blessing in disguise?

Leaving Connecticut and the home and land which had been in the family for five generations was a tragedy to the Cook Family. The only ray of light in their lives was that they would be getting away from old Uncle Moses.

Change and loss are always difficult, and very often traumatic. Yet because the Cook family had gone through such changes, they were prepared to hear the gospel of Jesus Christ. When we have faith that God will support and help us through everything, even financial reversals can be a blessing in disguise. Maintaining that faith may help stir our minds to new ways of thinking and new sources of strength.

The key to gaining a new depth of understanding from our trials is to be humble and teachable.

"Draw near unto me and I will draw near unto you." (D&C 88:63)

"This is how we show Him that we want to be rescued... You will feel His love. And the desire to walk in His light and follow His way will grow with every step of faith you take."¹

¹ "He Will Place you on His Shoulders and Carry you Home," Dieter F. Uchtdorf, *Ensign*, May, 2016, p. 103.

August 1, 1837

Dear Phineas,

I'm sorry to say that your mother has moved to Milton. Your Uncle Moses left word with Damon Beacher to tell her the time was out for her to give possession of the house. He told Beacher your father had sold the house to Uncle Moses and he wants it right now, even though your father has gone to Michigan and your mother is alone in the house with your sisters.

He further told Beacher to go and warn her out of the house, and if she did not go within 20 days to go and put her things out into the streets, which errand he claimed he was proud to do. I'm glad to say your mother and two younger sisters got out of the house before he threw them out, and they are now living in Milton in a house belonging to Daniel Hall, father-in-law of your sister Eliza.

I'm sorry to be the one to give you this news.

Your friend, Ann Wiles