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Howard Sends Convent Squatters Packing!

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Some legal maneuvering turns the tables on the squatters

Earlier this month, we first told you about the problem facing the Franciscan Handmaids of the most pure Heart of Mary Convent.

Nearly a year ago, they gave temporary refuge to a local woman named Muriel Campbell who had approached the nuns.

The agreement was for Ms. Campbell to stay for one month at the nuns' Staten Island convent. A contract was drawn up from mid December 2009 to mid January 2010.

But when Ms. Campbell moved in, she never moved out. Ignoring the nuns' numerous letters requesting her to honor her agreement, Ms. Campbell told the nuns that once a person has lived somewhere for more than 30 days, they didn't have to leave. She was claiming "squatter's rights" in the convent!

Unable to make headway, the nuns contacted Help Me Howard. He tried to contact Ms. Campbell, but the work address she had given the nuns was fake. So instead Howard paid a visit to her son, Vincent Campbell, who had also been staying at the convent, after Ms. Campbell moved him and her grown daughter in. Once again this was without the nuns' permission and was not part of the agreement.

Ms. Campbell's son, also happens to work for the Staten Island Borough President's office and that's exactly where Howard found him.

Vincent denied everything, but the ruckus attracted the attention of Staten Island Borough President James Molinaro, who offered to speak to him.

In order to do everything legally, Howard contacted Manhattan real estate attorney, **Adam Leitman Bailey**.

Bailey confirmed that even though Ms. Campbell had misrepresented herself, legally the nuns couldn't just kick her to the curb:

"Once somebody has lived in a premise a long time, usually 30 days, you no longer can kick them out and throw them in the street. You have to start eviction proceedings in court. We call it a summary proceedings in housing court. You first have to send them a notice, before beginning the actual legal proceedings to evict them, which in itself can take a long time."

Offering to take on the nuns' case, **Bailey** explained what he did for them:

"We started eviction proceedings with a notice and called Ms. Campbell. She told us over the phone that she no longer lives there and she gave up her rights of possession. So now we no longer need to start an eviction case. The nuns can now secure her belongings and either return them or store them."

So Muriel Campbell and her family have moved on and the nuns have their convent back. Yesterday Howard met up with them as they were getting the convent's locks changed and cleaning out the room Ms. Campbell had used. She had already removed her property from the house. They were thrilled and thanked him profusely.

Another important tip about dealing with squatters or evicting tenants, try to videotape the moment when you remove their property and put it into storage. That way you can record what you're removing, making it less likely they'll accuse you of stealing something.