

Community caring

Snowstorm forges spirit that should exist year-round



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My roommates and I took a walk through the snow Sunday afternoon. We were amazed to see the damage, the 12-inch-deep snow and all the people attempting to drive in the horrible conditions. As we trekked across southeast Lincoln, we encountered three cars stuck in the uncleared streets.

Without hesitation, we muscled up behind the stranded motorists and helped them get unstuck. It didn't seem like a big deal to us at the time, but for the people stuck in the snow it must have been a minor miracle.

In the last couple of days, I've seen hundreds of neighbors help others shovel driveways, clear downed trees and push cars out of snowdrifts. Several temporary shelters have been established in Lincoln to help those without power in their homes. I know of several families who have electricity who have allowed others without power to spend the night.

The city has been full of such selfless acts of caring. The tragic nature of the snowstorm we've had has brought out the best in the people of Lincoln.

If only it were this way 365 days a year.

When trouble strikes on a grand scale as it did early Sunday morning, help is usually close at hand. The snowstorm made national news. Gov. Ben Nelson has asked for Lincoln to be declared a national disaster area. And as the magnitude of the fallen trees and power losses reached our ears, we searched for ways to help out. It's a tragedy that we all share. Who in Lincoln wasn't affected by this storm?

When we share the same problem, it's not hard to give our time and energy to help someone else. It's easy to convince ourselves to help because we're in the same spot as the other person — in this case, snowed in. The people of Lincoln have been a beautiful example of this. It's encouraging to see the helpful, loving attitudes out there.

But what happens when the snow is gone? What about those times when only a few people are in trouble

because of circumstances less visible than a blizzard? What if the troubling experience isn't one that has touched the whole city? Without a natural disaster to stir our sense of community, are we still as apt to help a person in distress?

What happens when the neighbor two doors down gets laid off from his job? His situation is easily worse than being snowed in, but where is our help and compassion?

What about the elderly widow down the street who can't take care of her yard and can't pay a service to do it for her? Are we there to help out in these less visible times of trouble?

There are countless examples of everyday problems we all have that go unnoticed because the aren't as "large" as a snowstorm that brings a city to a standstill.

A problem that isn't shared by the entire city isn't any less of a problem, is it?

It certainly isn't to the one person or family who is experiencing it. So why limit our helpful attitudes to times of distress that we perceive to be great?

Our help can't stop when the snow melts, because our hardships are going to be with us whether there is snow on the ground or not. We have to ask ourselves how we would like to be treated were we the people in need of help.

When I finished walking through the neighborhood Sunday, I realized that in the last four years I've lived in Lincoln, those were the first three people with car trouble I had ever helped. It was a sobering reality for me to realize that many

times I pass by those in need simply because I don't see their problems as significant. I can't count how many times I've passed by someone standing by his broken-down car on the side of the road, simply because I felt his problem wasn't severe enough to merit my help. I've done it because I haven't been putting myself in his shoes. I haven't treated him the way I would want to be treated.

The community has lost much from this storm, but it has benefited as well. The people of Lincoln have made many new friendships and strengthened old ones because of this snowstorm. Community and relationships are built when neighbor helps neighbor during a time of emergency. Community and relationships are maintained for years when neighbor helps neighbor whenever the help is needed.

Even without a foot of snow on the ground, anyone in trouble is still in need of help. It doesn't matter if we aren't sharing in the same trouble; others' troubles are still very real.

The helpful attitudes we've had in the aftermath of this snowstorm are the attitudes we should have all year long, not just during an emergency.



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