

It could happen to you

Ignoring plight of homeless will cause more harm than good



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Have you ever stopped to listen to yourself when you complain about life? It's all too easy to think within our own limited spheres. The big picture becomes clear only when we are forced to look at it.

It happens to all of us. It happened to me.

I was really irate one day. I was just thinking about the fact that I don't have \$400 to buy this leather coat I've had my eye on. It's the perfect length, the perfect shade of brown, the perfect distressed finish. And I can't have it.

Life sucks.

I walked out of the mall that same day with a little anger, a new pair of shoes and \$60 worth of skin care in my Dillard's bag. I got into my car (which, for the most part, my parents pay for) and drove away from the mall parking lot.

I plugged my portable CD player into my tape deck and flipped through my music stash to find a suitable selection for my mood. As I was driving away from the mall, I realized I hadn't had lunch, so I stopped at a local sandwich shop and ate.

As I drove down O Street, I realized I'd forgotten about some personal items I needed to pick up, so I turned around and headed uptown to my friendly way-out-of-my-neighborhood discount store. I got some solution for my contacts, milk, new lipstick and a CD. (Only the necessities, of course.)

On my way home I filled my tank with gas and bought a magazine. Eventually, I did reach my place of

residence and put all my stuff away. As I settled down to study, I popped a tape in my VCR and made some coffee.

No matter how hard I tried to concentrate, I couldn't study. My mind was being weighed down, but I couldn't figure out exactly what was doing it.

I wonder if it was the homeless guy standing by the stoplight at the intersection by the mall.

His dirty cardboard sign said something along the lines of "Homeless, Hungry, Christian. Will work or take donations. God bless you." I tried to look busy while I was driving by him so I wouldn't have to make eye contact. It bothered me for awhile, but I'd forgotten about it 20 minutes later.

As I sat on my couch in my warm room, my guilt began to eat at me. I am a Christian, too, and I did nothing to help him. I was feeling guilty, and rightfully so.

One thought dawned on me: We are all really lucky.

You don't agree? You're wrong.

We're healthy, and we can get most of our medical help for free. No matter how we have to pay for it, we're going to a school that costs a good chunk of money to attend. We (mostly) eat three meals a day. We go out and spend money on entertainment. We live in decent houses or apartments. We have bikes or cars, or both. We have glasses or contacts to help us see. We're wearing shoes.

We take all of it for granted every day.

You ever think about this? I do — all the time. But I still feel that I'm living my life as I always have — with blinders on.

What in me justifies spending nearly \$40 every so often on keeping my hair looking shiny, or buying another pair of faded jeans because the ones I already have "just aren't the right style"?

What in me justifies not helping out my fellow man on a regular basis?

I don't know the answer. But I know how to rationalize my way out of it. It is so easy for me to claim I am

helping others. I give offering when I go to church. I was a member of Habitat for Humanity (once, when I had the time). I'm on the Human Rights Committee of the Association of Students of the University of Nebraska. I gave an apple to a homeless guy a couple of years ago.

Most of the time, I don't have a dollar in my wallet to give to the homeless guy at the corner. But I have three of them to buy a latte at the coffee shop. How much sense does that make?

It doesn't. And it's really weighing on my conscience. Is it weighing on yours yet? It should be.

A lot of us are blessed with the financial resources to acquire many things that aren't necessities. Think about the millions of others who aren't.

Think about those who can't go to the store because they don't have a bike or car and can't afford bus fare. Think of those who have been wearing the same shoes for 10 years because they can't afford new ones. Think about those who can't afford frivolous things like CDs, or makeup, or milk.

Now think about what you've been aching to buy, and how it's killing you that you can't have it. I'm betting it's not medicine for your baby, or a thrift-store coat for winter.

It's time we started aching to help others.

We all know by now the problems are out there, so why aren't we doing more about it?

"Because they aren't without some basic skills; they can find a better job."

"Because they don't want money for food; they want it for liquor, and we're not going to support their addiction."

"Because there are places for them to stay other than the Nebraska Union, so why should I even have to look at them?"

Wake up, UNL.

If we maintain this mentality, nothing will ever change. People will still be suffering, and you'll still be feeling guilty.

If you've never done anything to help out someone in need, get off of your kiester and do it. There are so many ways,

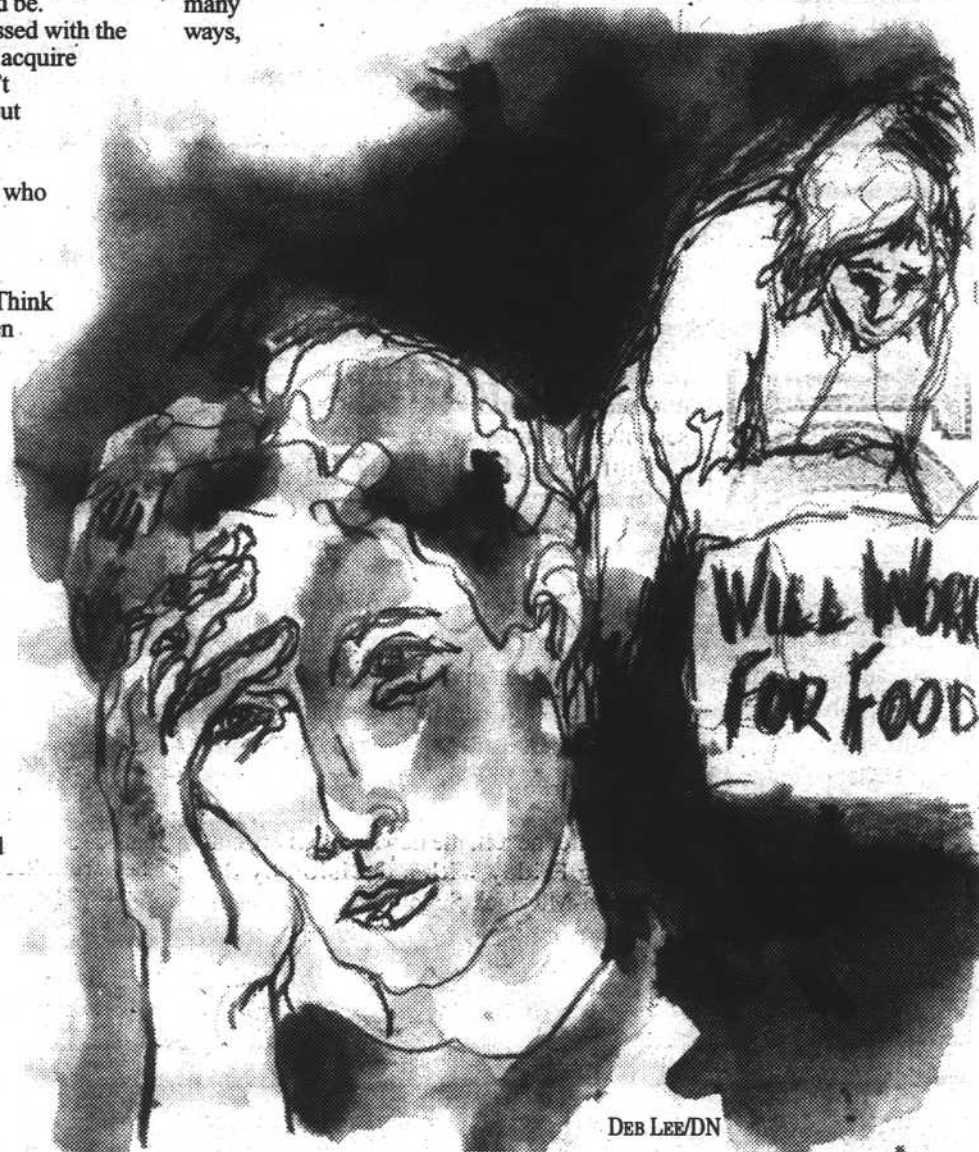
and you have time for at least one of them.

There are quite a few of us who can grab an extra can of Campbell's at the grocery store to donate to a food bank. Or take that extra buck and mail it off to United Way.

Instead of sitting around on a Saturday afternoon watching football, help Habitat for Humanity build a house, or take your old clothes down to the Salvation Army.

Quit complaining about and judging those worse off than you.

Someday you may be the one asking for help at the intersection.



After the fall

United States' society squanders its resources for unethical means



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Let me start by saying I misspoke in my last column by stating our vote might not count. The fact that Jesse "The Mind" Ventura (as he would now like to be called) is Minnesota's next governor obviously proves our vote does count. It's our opinion that might not matter.

I think Ventura's election on the Reform Party ticket is the best thing to happen to U.S. politics since Ross Perot founded the party and Al Gore became our vice president.

But how did Mike Johann win Nebraska's gubernatorial election? Especially when he lost the race in the county and city he was mayor of for

four years? If that isn't a lesson of who knows best, I don't know what is.

Alas, all is not lost. It's only a matter of time before the current system of duality crumbles under the public's pressure in support of proportional representation.

And how will this occur? "In this society that's changed so much, we need to look at different ways to get people to vote," said Nebraska Secretary of State Scott Moore in Thursday's Daily Nebraskan.

Want to get people to vote? Give them an adequate opportunity to have their voice heard. Proportional representation and campaign finance reform are the *only* methods to do so and are the *only* issues that will increase voter participation. These aren't mind-blowing concepts — just straightforward, fair democracy.

Furthermore, when adequate representatives are elected to participate in producing policies, the public becomes more interested, and the policies become equal and more thoroughly scrutinized.

Nobody can tell me the entire population of Nebraska is sufficiently represented when there are no representatives of the Asian community, no representatives of the American Indian community, no representatives of the Hispanic and Mexican community, few (if no) members of low economic classes and only one member

of the African-American community.

The Lincoln and Nebraska I know are a lot more diverse than our representatives in the Unicameral would suggest.

However, since the current system is not set up in this manner, we all have to deal with what Nebraska gets, which is a governor whose first area of economic-cost cuts would be welfare and whose last area would be the State Patrol.

So we've got a governor who would rather cut education than the police force, and who would cut aid to the poor and needy before cutting anything. Hmmm.

Does anybody know how mediocre fascism starts?

An integral component of this method occurs when a society begins or continues to reduce social safety nets (like pensions for widowed mothers, day-care subsidies and food stamps) and social freedoms (like control of a woman's body, alcohol and drug use, sexual preference, use of the death penalty, etc.).

This restrictive development is then perpetuated when the education of the future society is placed secondary to police-force buildup, which is used to enforce a controlled, socially conservative state.

When this all occurs, the general public can be easily satiated (or reprimanded), easily controlled and not

educated enough to question methods and activities of the state.

Most other western-industrialized, democratic and truly civilized societies use a quite different approach. They understand that a strong welfare state is actually a central foundation to economic and social stability.

These countries place importance on giving people an opportunity to gain experiences necessary to do the work they are adequately able to do, regardless of economic level.

They also believe all people should have reasonable health care, a significant amount of vacation from work, subsidized post-secondary education, etc.

When a general concern for humanity and sustainable development are the focal points of a society, rather than individual economic progress, a society makes great strides toward a free and respectful prosperity.

These societies have stepped closer to existing in a peaceful and respectful manner, with an abundance of social, environmental and economic prosperity. It's about time we do, because we can.

The United States and Nebraska would not be alone if they pursued a society of such ethical strength. We could join the ranks of almost every other industrialized country that has worked toward these ethical ideals

since World War II, Vietnam and the fall of the Berlin Wall. We have the opportunity to once again be pioneers.

But, until we do achieve this level of understanding and consideration as a city, state or nation, we can expect more of the same:

- More executions.
 - A larger police state.
 - Legislation of concealed weapons.
 - An increase of anti-drug and anti-alcohol propaganda.
 - Continued urban sprawl and inconsiderate development.
 - The war on the unfortunates.
- Need I continue?
- Keep a close, watchful eye on who runs your city and state, and let them know that you would like a democratic, civilized state to best protect your interests and the future.
- Martin Luther King Jr. said in his book, "Why We Can't Wait":
- "Civilization, particularly in the United States, has long possessed the material wealth and resources to feed, clothe and shelter all of its citizens.
- "Civilization has endowed man with the capacity to organize change, to conceive and implement plans."

Both statements are true, and both statements can be realized. It's time we pursue this type of civilization.

Because the current one in the United States just isn't that civil.