

CITY & BUSINESS

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The good help forget the bad

Insurance agent, police make sad situation better.

RANDOM ACTS OF KINDNESS

Send us your stories about the Good Samaritans you have met.

THIS time it might be the messenger's fault. Maybe it's the daily serving of crimes in our scary times that we in the media feed you, but Winnipeggers seem to think our streets are inhabited by more people intent on hurting us than helping us. More people willing to give us the finger than offer a helping hand.

That's not a poll result, just my perception of your perception.

It comes from years of receiving requests to print Good Samaritan stories from people who seem so shocked by the notion there are actually decent people among the hordes of muggers and murderers that they feel compelled to share the revelation.

Usually, it's expressed the way a reader named Ida Sloan put it an email that dates back two years when she wrote: "...I have to tell someone that there are still good people in this city of ours."

Well, if you feel you must do that — and I hope you will — you're in luck. Maybe you can help the messenger change the perception good people are in the minority.

Today the *Free Press* is launching Random Acts of Kindness, a web space where you can email kindness@freepress.mb.ca with your own encounters with goodness personified.

What kind of stories are we looking for? Stories of all kinds of kindness. Large and small. Especially small kindnesses because sometimes they seem the largest.

The most recent example arrived in my email last week from St. James resident Mackenzie Cummings.

"I am writing you today," she began, "to express my sincere appreciation to the Winnipeg police and to a wonderful woman at my insurance company."



GORDON SINCLAIR JR.



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Elise Gottmann-Cummings is all smiles as she sits with her mom, Mackenzie Cummings (right), and insurance agent Cheryl Gibson.

Mackenzie lives in a lower-middle-income area where she runs a daycare out of her home. And last Saturday she decided to have a garage sale.

"My oldest daughter who is five desperately wanted to help with the money and so I let her hold on to our two cash pouches and was helping her with counting out the change for people."

Then, while Mackenzie was busy helping someone, one of those cash pouches disappeared. It was her wallet, and it was stuffed with money. "My daughter was crying because she was blaming herself, and I was crying because I was blaming myself when my mother reassured us that it wasn't our fault, it was the 'bad people's fault.'"

Oh yes, those "bad" people again. But then, to her surprise, the good people took over.

Starting with her call to police. "The non-emergency response operator was amazing on the phone."

She didn't get the call-taker's name, but later I did. For the record, it's Rosa.

"Even though I know people's things get

stolen, houses get broken into and people get hurt every day, she made me feel that my problem was just as significant as anyone else's."

Mackenzie's next priority — after cancelling her credit cards — was replacing her driver's licence. But when she arrived at Richard Wayne Insurance she realized she had no money.

And it was five minutes to closing. Mackenzie was grateful when Cheryl Gibson, the woman behind the counter, told her: "Go and get your bank card, and I will wait for you."

When Mackenzie returned, she went into more detail with Cheryl about the garage sale and the wallet.

"At the end of our talk, my licence was ready, and I asked how much?"

"Nothing," she replied, "it's not your fault so why should you pay for it?"

There was no charge because Mackenzie had a police incident number, but it was the way Cheryl had been so accommodating and kind that impressed Mackenzie. "I thanked her profusely again and returned home feeling a little better about the situation."

But there were more good feelings waiting

when she arrived home. The police call-taker's supervisor, a woman named Janette, had called back to let her know officers were searching the area for suspects and her wallet.

"Wow," Mackenzie thought. She concluded with these thoughts:

"This story may not have the happy ending that I would like, but I think it still has a happy ending. I learned that the police force, which has been under public scrutiny so many times in recent months and years, IS still here for its citizens."

Of course, she had to add this: "The simple fact is that the 'bad people' seem to far outnumber the good people most of the time."

That's not true, of course. I counted one "bad" person we know of in this story and at least three good. That's the good news. And there's lots more where that came from. Just remember to email and read Random Acts of Kindness. It's good for what ails us.

And our skewed perceptions.

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