



Acts of Kindness

Do You Need a Hand?

You could not have missed the floods that swamped parts of Victoria this year, either directly by being a victim to their sweeping invasion or indirectly through living your friends' and relatives' experiences vicariously. Perhaps you had the role of onlooker with a few degrees of separation, witnessing in the media the daily stories and dramatic pictures of those whose lives were upended, staunchly and often tearfully relating their daily reality.

The following tale is of kindness experienced by one of our family members whose home was on watch for the encroaching waters from the nearby Goulburn River...

As he lay down to sleep on the night during which the river was due to peak, he realised that although he had spent the day sandbagging the front of his house and garage, there were small sections where water would be able to seep through, or go round, or go under his barricade. Although it was mid-night and he was bone weary, he knew that he would not be able to sleep if he did not try to block these gaps.

On his own, compassionately leaving his equally exhausted partner to sleep on, he shovelled sand into the hessian bags and reinforced what already was a wall of bags a metre high. His attention was caught by two teenagers riding by on their pushbikes (as teenagers do on Saturday night in a pending flood!) They called out to him, "Do you need a hand?" He quickly replied, "Yes, I'd love a hand!" What followed exploded all the usual assumptions about teenagers. They worked efficiently and co-operatively alongside the beleaguered homeowner.



As they worked, they watched the water only a road's width away, beginning to enter the road. The homeowner was doggedly ramming sand into more bags and focussed intently upon the task. His RAV sat in front of the garage – his getaway vehicle.

One of the teenagers asked, “If it covers the road, how are you going to get away?” The answer now was blindingly obvious: the window for leaving was closing fast; to stay would secure his house but he and his partner would be stranded within it and the car lost to the floodwaters. He had to go now!

There followed his frantic re-entry to the home, rousing his partner to help stow emergency items into that vehicle, but first toilets and drains needed to be sealed to prevent a back flow ...

Finally, as the water completed its crossing of the road and sucked at the base of the sandbag levy, they began gingerly to drive away. Not a moment too soon! The usual route was no longer possible. Many of the streets were already an inland sea. He had to get out of the car – the water lapping the bottom of the door – gumboots limit nearly reached – and scout ahead for a road that would allow them through.

Having reached their destination, his original family home, they sat down to reflect. The teenagers who came past, the unlikely ‘angels of mercy’, not only selflessly assisted him save his home, but they also asked the question that shocked him out of his myopic obsession to fortify the barricade, potentially mistiming his escape route. A hand offered and a perspective given.