

## A tribute to everyday men

Driving in Sydney's peak hour traffic I passed a motorist in trouble. He was a young man whose car had died at a dangerous intersection where four lanes of cars from three different traffic arteries diverged into one highway. While reaching into the driver's side to guide the steering wheel, he was using the rest of his body to inch the car forward.

As I drove past, his precarious predicament came into full view. As did another scene: an older man running towards him. The second man appeared to be an energetic 50 year old. He ran strongly, skillfully dodging cars, and wore a triumphant smile that said 'Hang in there, mate. I'm on my way.' Clearly he was on a rescue mission. I waited at a red light at the next corner and watched in my rear vision mirror as the scene unfolded.

Within metres of each other a silent communication seemed to pass between the two men. With perfect timing, and without a word spoken, the young man jumped into the driver's seat while the other pushed the car over a small rise to give it momentum. The older man then ran out beside the car, his hands raised high, and successfully stopped two lanes of fast-moving traffic so that the vehicle could safely roll to the side of the road. The whole incident, which occurred in less than a minute, was almost ballet-like in its grace

and skill. Steps were performed swiftly, perfectly, instinctively. I knew I had just witnessed an everyday display of male prowess.

My journey continued and I found myself dwelling on the incident. I like to consider myself a contemporary woman who can change the tyres and check the oil of her own car. But I couldn't have done what these guys did. Not in those traffic conditions, and certainly not without stressful hesitation. That's not to say that a woman like myself can't develop those skills. But the point is, like most women, I haven't. There are some things that men just know how to do better than us. Call it nature, call it nurture. Whatever its origins, it's a cultural reality.

The society I live in is increasingly critical of men. An unfortunate side-effect of some strains of feminism is that male strength is viewed with suspicion; as a threat to hurt rather than as a power to help and heal. Male interests are often dismissed as limited, rather than as an expression of a unique perspective. So many acts of male service and loyalty are taken for granted. It saddens me when men and their 'maleness' are pitted against the gifts of women. Because, quite frankly, I know too many wonderful men who just don't deserve the subtle put-downs they receive in the media or in popular banter about gender relations.

They are the men who, for decades, have faithfully brought

home the pay-check to support their wives and children, even when the job doesn't thrill them.

They are the fathers nursing a crying child while their wives breast-feed the newborn.

They are the male couriers who turn up to my workplace to lug heavy boxes.

They are the names on the war memorial in my suburb.

They are the council workers who pick up my rubbish.

They are the men who quietly mow the lawns, mend the roof and clear the drains. I recall the day our drain was blocked. None of the females in our household wanted to touch it. It was the male in our midst who willingly put in his arm and pulled out a handful of muck.

I am reminded of the readiness of so many men to place their bodies on the line in order to save or serve. In the Port Arthur massacre it was the men who shielded the women and took the bullets. When we hear of miners or soldiers or police rescue workers killed in the line of duty, chances are, most of them are male.

Men, like women, have their strengths and weakness, virtues and sins. They are no more noble, good or talented than women. But they are noble and good and talented. Let's never fail to affirm that. •

