Behind-the-scenes heroes

Imagine what it would be like to be the one to clean up after the day's activities, to have the dubious honor of emptying waste cans, sweeping the hallways, restoring the bathrooms and cleaning up after uncalled-for messes, a task considered below the dignity of many. Imagine rising 4:30 a.m., unlocking doors and making sure that things are pleasant and presentable, often without praise or appreciation for the non-rewarding behind-the-scenes efforts, often to have hard work shunned and disturbed within minutes.

One of the most enjoyable smells I appreciate these days is walking into the lobby of the local post office and being greeted by the aroma of cleaning fluid and floor wax, symbolic of the dedicated efforts of someone who worked hard to make my 15-second walk to the mail box more pleasant.

I know the lady who makes that effort; I've often met her in the lobby and chatted with her. I've seen her face break into a shining radiance when I have complimented her tireless efforts to carry out her responsibilities as janitor of the government agency.

I will never forget the appreciation my school teacher friend often expressed concerning the hard work of the school janitors where he taught junior high history for 30 years. As a token of his appreciation, he stayed after school and voluntarily cleaned his own room, spraying Pledge on the desks which he lined up row by row with certain cracks on the old blackboard.

During a visit to his school one time, he introduced me to one of his heroes who remarked, "There's no greater reward that Mr. Sprunger's expressed appreciation for our work."

I will never forget the day when someone asked me the question, "What would you do if you ran out of things to write stories about?" (A really unlikely scenario!) My reply was quick and affirming, "Do you see that fellow over there sweeping off the sidewalk? What a great a story he would make from inside his world, the things that he sees, the people that he greets, the little

things that are meaningful to his heart, and how worthy would he be of such coverage?”

Behind-the-scenes heroes, the real special people of our lives, there is no end to those who fit such an honored list – janitors, street cleaners, garbage collectors, stage hands, Sunday School teachers, cooks, classroom assistants, waiters and waitresses, waiver case managers, caretakers, unheralded laborers, countless volunteers and unseen friends who speak just the right word, say just the right prayer at the right time.

Everyone lives in a world, their world, and while society today is full of plenty of “me-ism,” there are still the selfless heroes who hover in the background, work hard and find deep satisfaction in making lives better for others without praise or accolade.

Our Lord set the picture quite clearly when he referred to those who boast of themselves from the street corners and those who who pray quietly and carry their tasks out behind the scenes in closets and in the background.

Emphatically, He referred to the “closet people” and said, “And THESE are the ones that gain the approval of the Heavenly Father,” not these, as He refers to the reward-seeking boastful.

“Walk a mile in my moccasins” is the old Native American phrase referring to living in the world of another and feeling what their circumstances are. “Walk a Mile in My Shoes” was a song that expressed that same experience when I was younger.

And just perhaps, “rest awhile in their hearts,” and then knock on the closet door and say, “thank you,” with appreciate to all of those responsible for the pleasant moments in our world, and just maybe, without expectation, doing something to contribute to the pleasantness of the world of someone around us.