

LIVING IN WYOMING

SUSAN ANDERSON

How bowling built a better community — and paid the rent too

I looked a lot like the elderly woman in the famous television ad who rasped, "I've fallen, and I can't get up."

The recent snowfalls have created some 9-foot drifts on Casper Mountain, and I managed to fall down in one of them while cross-country skiing.

I wasn't hurt — I was just lying there flailing around in the wet, deep snow like a turtle on its back. And I wasn't with any other



skiers. (I did have a cell phone in my pocket though.)

But I would never go skiing totally alone — my golden retriever Molly was with me. And after I tried various methods of hauling myself to my feet while trying to stop her from licking me to death, I just grabbed on to her 75-pound frame and pulled myself up.

Saved by a dog!

This little drama reminded me of one of the ways I think Wyoming people are unusual. People who can frequently find themselves in a pickle without tons of rescuers around can get very self-reliant (or dog-reliant).

I'm convinced that our smaller numbers in Wyoming mean that many grow up knowing in their bones that if something needs to be accomplished — they will have to do it themselves.

For me, a prime example of that is a petite, Wyoming woman named Lisa Eades.

Faced with the unfathomable tragedy of losing her beloved young son Jason to a brain tumor, she responded by thinking of the other parents in her shoes.

And she realized how many of them were missing their house pay-

ments while traveling with their sick child to get medical help.

From that realization, she went on to found Jason's Friends Foundation — dedicated to providing help when it's needed to families dealing with certain tragic and life-threatening childhood diseases.

Though she considered herself lucky to be able to pay the bills while suffering with Jason through his last year, she knew about the people who finally lost their jobs or just quit because of unending doctor appointments or a sudden turn-for-the-worse in their child's health.

So now, Wyoming families facing the fear and sadness of a child's illness can pick up the phone and call Jason's Friends for help.

Lisa's story brings out the best in other people.

The bowling event that Jason's Friends embraced to raise money is a showstopper. The simple idea of getting together teams to bowl for a day brought in \$140,000 this year. It's only the fifth year for the event.

In a town of 50,000 — that's about \$3 a person. It's equal to what the MDA Telethon raises in the state in its yearlong effort, aided by the television broadcast.

Plenty of good efforts for other organizations in Casper involve the labor of lots of people to net \$30,000 from a fundraiser. The day of bowling raises five times that amount.

It's a fun event. It's one everyone can support. And it started with one woman's pluck and desire to do something about a problem.

While self-reliant, Lisa also knows how to reach out for help.

When she was stuck in a snowdrift in the car last week with her toddler — she had the sense to pick up her cell phone and call her husband.