

The other day, a friend and I were walking in our neighborhood and sat down for a few minutes to chat at the base of some concrete steps. These steps were at the base of a patio that was attached to one of the UO sorority houses.

We chatted for a few minutes, until a stressed-looking person came out, and asked us to leave. When we asked why, she said, "you're making the ladies uncomfortable." I would have liked to ask more questions, but I was too dumbfounded in the moment to come up with anything coherent.

After wading through the layers of vitriolic anger that originally sprung up in me, this is what I want to say to them: I've lived in this town for years; I'm from here. I stay in your neighborhood. Maybe you just moved here for college, and have been taught some version of stranger danger that makes you believe that anyone you don't recognize, or isn't from your college or in-group is scary, but your understanding of threat is misplaced. If you screamed for help, I would come running. If you were scared of a stalker and not sure what to do, I'd sit down with you to make a safety plan with your friends, and the people you live with and live near. If there is someone having a mental health crisis in your lawn and you don't know how to handle that without calling the police, I would go with you to approach them and figure out how to help, so that both their and your safety could be preserved.

Sometimes, the most powerful thing you can do is get to know your neighbors. Try a plate of cookies next time.