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SHERMAN FREDERICK: The empty bowl challenge: Will you just sit and watch?



SHERMAN FREDERICK
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A troubled young man named Abraham Biggs set up a Web cam in his bedroom last week and, as the Internet world watched, began taking sleeping pills.

After about 12 hours, the 19-year-old died.

About 1,500 people witnessed it on their computers.

A few called the police. But because Biggs had tried this before and people were unsure whether it was real or not, help arrived too late.

A few Internet sickos taunted Biggs to "do it."

Most people, sadly, did nothing. They just watched.

It is tempting to blame this tragedy on the Internet. Perhaps the human disconnect inherent in the technology played a part. But since Adam ate the apple, the human ability to stand by as others suffer is equaled only by the human potential for compassion.

So here's how I see it. As a reader of the Las Vegas Review-Journal, this comes as no news alert: People in our shiny city will sleep tonight in the streets. In this economy, some moms and dads are on the brink of losing their homes, and this season they can barely provide their family with basic needs. And hundreds of children, for a variety of reasons (none of which is of their own doing) eat today's traditional family meal as wards of the state.

Can you stand by and just watch?

I'm banking you can't, and therefore challenge good citizens everywhere to participate in this worthy Thanksgiving Day exercise.

Spend the day giving thanks for family, friends and for all things in your life. There's absolutely nothing wrong with that. In fact, savor every minute, from the three-bean salad to turkey to pumpkin pie.

Then, as you sit down to digest, put out an empty bowl and ask all who enjoyed the meal to chip in a little money for those less fortunate. Explain the need to connect and why community means that being out of sight is not out of mind. If you have to, mention how people just sat and watched Abraham Biggs die.

You don't want to be one of those watchers, do you? The issue isn't how much money you can raise in any single bowl.

Every dollar helps, and combined with the thousands of families just like yours it will make a difference.

The point is it connects you and yours to the needs of others.

And that's something, friends and neighbors, for which we ought give thanks. Who's with the Frederick family this Thanksgiving?

If you don't have a favorite charity, allow me to recommend a handful of organizations.

I know these places to be on the front lines of helping lift the dignity of human beings in our community. Every dollar given to these groups will immediately do a good thing.

-- St. Jude's Ranch for Children, 100 St. Jude's St., Boulder City, NV 89005 (www.stjudesranch.org).

-- Catholic Charities of Southern Nevada, 1501 Las Vegas Blvd. North, Las Vegas, NV 89101 (Donate online at <http://catholiccharities.linklv.com>).

-- Opportunity Village (Donate online at www.opportunityvillage.org).

-- Shade Tree (Donate online at www.theshadetree.org).

-- Ronald McDonald House (Donate online at www.rmhlv.com).

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