



The Reason for the Season

AS I WATCHED THE NATIONAL NEWS THE DAY after Thanksgiving, my heart sank at the dreadful reports of “Black Friday” pandemonium and the deplorable behavior of people. A man collapsed and died in a Target in West Virginia, while people stepped over his body to get to the items they so coveted; a woman in L.A. pepper sprayed fellow shoppers to get ahead of them in a line for electronics; there were numerous stories of shoppers getting into fistfights and skirmishes as they raced to get their hands on merchandise.

Is this what our holiday season has come to? People showing no compassion for their fellow man, putting themselves and their wants ahead of others as they greedily fight over *things*? These *things*, made from wires, plastic and computer chips bundled together, have taken a higher precedence than people. We are more likely to reach out our hands to grab the last must-have item on a shelf than we are to reach out a hand to someone in need, or to offer them love and support.

Christmas is a season meant to celebrate belief, faith, love and the birth of Christ, yet we have replaced it with greed, selfishness and ill-will. I turned off the TV and sighed. I needed one of those Scrooge moments where he wakes up filled with the Christmas spirit and renewed faith. Then it happened: I remembered Ben*.

Last year, an “elf” named Bernie contacted me and invited me to fly along with him and 65 local kids and their personal escort elves on an adventure. Known as the Spokane Fantasy Flight, it is a once-in-a-lifetime experience for a handful of disadvantaged children in Spokane, who are taken on a whirlwind adventure to the North Pole to visit Santa Claus (story on page 140). These children have experienced homelessness, poverty and despair. For one boy, life had been particularly difficult. As I sat in seat 1A next to Bernie, he told me

about Ben, a 10 year old boy who had been abused and abandoned by his biological parents, and had been placed in one foster home after another. His life had been filled with heartbreak and pain. One of the few dreams he dared to hold onto was to fly on an airplane. As a participant in Fantasy Flight, at least one of his dreams was coming true.

I had thought about Ben often over the last year, lifting up a prayer for him, and hoping that somehow, the kindness shown to him by those involved with Fantasy Flight had given him something to believe in and offered him a glimpse of the kindness that is out there - if you look for it.

An email arrived in my work inbox not long ago, from Bernie. It was an update on Ben, passed along from one of his social workers at the Salvation Army.

“Ben never had a chance to celebrate holidays and typically felt shy and awkward in any type of social gatherings,” she wrote. “The Fantasy Flight helped him to believe that there are indeed good people on Earth. He’s slated to be adopted by the end of this month. He aspires to be a pilot. His grades have soared since taking the Fantasy Flight. He now soars in Boy Scouts, art classes, school and TaeKwondo. His foster parents – soon to be his adoptive parents– adore him, his pets adore him, he has friends and he now knows how to smile all because he believes life can be full of love and opportunity, because of people he has learned to trust! He is an amazing child with so much potential to blossom in life by giving back to others who will someday need him and thrive in return, by receiving all of his wonderful gifts and talent!”

I read those words over again as I tried to purge the memory of the Black Friday story from my memory. It is a small victory to hear of this young boy’s transformed life, but it is a victory indeed. The difference it made for him to have just a few hours with people who took time to love him, care for him and take an interest in his life made a huge difference.

That is a message of hope that should be brought to light this holiday season. We may not be able to make up for the poor behavior of others, but we can be responsible for our behavior and actions. We can choose to give our love, time and best to someone who needs it.

As the holiday season gets into full swing, I hope there are more stories like Ben’s to be told in our community and on our pages. Stories of hope, love and joy; the meaning of the season!

Merry Christmas!

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