

Those with little often give much



BARB GUY

“Dark, sweet cherries, 2 pounds for \$43...Giant strawberries, 1.5 pounds for \$55...Black mission figs, 1.5 pounds for \$50...Royal holiday grapes, 2.5 pounds for \$43...”

The gift catalog entices me with sumptuous photographs of perfect fruit and horrifies me with obscene prices. Who on Earth thinks it’s moral to pay \$55 for a pound and a half of strawberries?

Within days of receiving the catalog, my husband Chris and I happened upon an odd scene. Our bellies full of Sunday eggs and hash browns, we were driving home from downtown. We noticed 30 or 40 people in a park near Trolley Square, bundled against the cold and standing around with bags and boxes. We weren’t close enough to see much, but we could tell

the crowd consisted of people of all ages, from babes in strollers all the way to grandmas and grandpas.

About 20 feet from the crowd, a handful of counter-culture types, hippie-ish young people, were seated on the ground with a series of large cardboard boxes in front of them, facing the crowd.

In orderly fashion, one by one, people moved past the boxes, selecting things to place in their bags. Then they would go to the end of the line that had formed, wait their turn, and make another pass along the boxes.

Round and round the people went, slowly, methodically, while Chris and I sat parked down the street a ways, trying to ascertain what was happening.

Eventually people began to leave. As people passed us, we could see they were carrying food. Apples, oranges, grapefruit, squash, onions, leafy greens. Also bread: unpackaged round brown cobs and long white baguettes.

Etta Crowley, one of the hippie-ish young people, said she and her friends get grocers and bakers to donate perishable food and then they give it away in the park. They devised the system where people circle past the boxes so everyone gets equal

access. They’ve been doing it for about a year, four times per week.

She said, “It’s such a simple idea really, giving hungry people food.”

Meanwhile, online I ran into the story of Brenden Foster, an 11-year-old in Seattle, dying of leukemia. His face moon-round and puffy from medicine and his little eyes barely open because of exhaustion, he told an interviewer, “I was getting back from one of my clinic appointments and I saw [all these] homeless people. And I thought, I should just get them something.”

Brenden was too sick even to choose a few things at the store for his local food bank, but word got out, and when Brenden died three weeks ago he had lived long enough to see reports of his wish being fulfilled all over the U.S.

Homeless people were fed, food banks were stocked, and with each meal, on each napkin, each paper bag, each cardboard box, came the words, written by volunteers: “love, Brenden.”

Little Brenden and the hippie girl prove that the heart is more important than the wallet when it comes to charity. Most of us have more money than they do

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but somehow we do much less.
Maybe it would help to focus
more on the hungry people
under our noses and less on
things like \$55 strawberries.

*BARB GUY is a regular contributor to
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