

FRIDAY, JANUARY 7, 2005

We are a giving nation

I have to admit that prior to the disaster that occurred in South Asia, I had never heard of the word "tsunami" nor had I envisioned that an earthquake could produce such a monstrous tidal wave that, with one swoosh, could crash onto shore and wipe out thousands of people. The video footage on television resembled a Steven Spielberg disaster movie, most assuredly



*As I
see it*

Peg DeMarco

one with an "R" rating for violence, death and destruction. But this was real, taking place halfway around the world, and no matter how much we wanted to turn off the news and shrink into our own private worlds, we, as Americans, immediately decided that we had to come to the aid of our fellow man. The tremendous amount of compassion overflowing from Americans coast to coast in offering to help the victims of this natural disaster is a reflection of who we are as a nation. While Bin Laden continues to threaten to squash us and our allies, and Al-Qaida videos continue to show its militants lining up captured Iraqi security officers and executing them in the street, we've learned to put these acts of tyranny and murder on hold and instead concentrate on what we can do for the homeless, sick and subjugated. Chastised for originally not giving enough or giving what the U.S. was prepared to give in a quick enough manner, the last news report I heard was that President Bush had pledged \$350 million dollars in aid to the tsunami victims. The Bush critics have finally calmed down and thank goodness. However, it makes one wonder how much each of those critics have dug into their own pockets to contribute to aid. The phrase "talk is cheap" comes to mind as I put to rest those ridiculous critics and concentrate on what's really important — other acts of kindness reported on by the media.

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I heard that unusual amounts of cash were received, such as \$103, \$47, or \$6.50, and that the volunteers in charge of collections were puzzled until they finally figured out that some donations were made by school children who decided to take a hammer to their piggybanks. At this Sunday's mass, a special collection was taken up for the tsunami victims and I dare say that as far as I could tell by those who sat around me, dressed casually in everyday clothes and not a mink in sight, no pocket or wallet was left unturned.

Let's face it — we're a giving nation no matter how much each of us has in his or her bank account. Bill Gates gives millions, the typical American company gives thousands, the all American family gives hundreds and the small American child gives dollars, quarters, pennies. Why do we give so much? Do we feel guilty because we have so much while others struggle with nothing? Perhaps. Or perhaps we just want to share what we have with the rest of the world because living unto one's self without a sense of compassion makes for a very dismal existence.

There are so many programs, especially around Christmas, that take center stage — the Salvation Army, Toys for Tots, shoes for the needy, coats for children, food to feed the hungry, a warm blanket for the homeless and an extra bone for a stray dog. Should tragedy befall a family in our community, we're quick to respond because "do unto others" is something we were taught as children and it never seemed to leave us no matter how cynical we may have become with the passage of time.

But sometimes we, as Americans, don't receive any sort of accolade, a plain old fashioned thank you, for an unselfish act, and if we do get a thank you, we turn away shyly and say, "Ah, shucks. It was nothing." Well, it is something and if no one else says it to you this year, let me take this occasion to say it — thank you for opening your hearts to those less fortunate than you.

And if you don't believe that Americans are generous to a fault, think about this. For the two principal military hospitals treating American troops wounded in Iraq and Afghanistan, there has been too much of a good thing this holiday season. So many gifts for injured troops and their families have poured into Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington and the National Naval Medical Center in nearby Bethesda, MD, that they have run out of space and are asking well-wishes to give elsewhere or postpone contributions until March! Isn't that amazing on our part?

No amount of distorted rhetoric from Bin Laden or murderous acts of Al-Qaida can overshadow what a great nation we are. Instead, they continue to fuel the flame of compassion that every one of us has tucked away in our hearts.

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