



Caption

## The View From Right Field

by Rick Ohler

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*(The world's best hometown newspaper)*

### “The Secret Sharer”

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An unnamed, generous, longtime town resident has sworn me to secrecy, and I won't betray that confidence. In fact, I'll go so far as to eliminate gender-specific pronouns, so I don't give away whether it was a he or she I was talking to. I do, however, have permission to tell the story. I'm talking, of course, about the red hearts that are sprouting up on lawns all over the village, replacing—at least in some cases, thank goodness—those signs with names on them.

It began with a phone call from the anonymous organizer of this wonderful campaign to plant one thousand red hearts all over the village as a symbol of caring for each other. Here's the gist of the story.

“We took a driving trip through New England not long ago and we went through a tiny little town. It was very rural; the main street couldn't have been any larger than, say, Holland. To tell you the truth I don't remember the name of it. I might not have even seen a sign telling me the name. Afterward, my traveling companion and I weren't sure if it was Vermont or Connecticut, somewhere near the border between the two.

“We couldn't help but notice that all over this town, practically every store had a red heart in the window or in front of the building. Then in the countryside outside the town we saw hearts on mailboxes, in windows, on lawns. Just plain hearts, no words, no backgrounds, no embellishment. Some of the hearts had been professionally cut into perfect shapes, but it was obvious that little kids had made some of the hearts. Some were wooden, some on sign board, some painted. I have no idea what it was all about. We were on our way to our hotel for the night, so we didn't stop there, never spoke

with anyone from the place; we were simply passing through. But hearts are a universal symbol, so obviously the residents of the small town were unified in their thoughts of caring for, who knows? Someone? Something? Perhaps just for each other. Whatever the reason, the sight of all those hearts gave me a peaceful, wonderful feeling.

“I thought to myself that I really had to bring this idea to East Aurora. The year 2020 hasn’t been very good to any of us. How about some simple red hearts as a message that East Aurora is a great place where people care about each other?”

Back in East Aurora, the New England traveler contracted with a local business owner who agreed to make one thousand red hearts and supply the wire frames for lawn placement. Recently, The Aurora Theatre and the Boys and Girls Club of East Aurora agreed to help distribute the signs. Contact either one to learn how to get your red heart.

When you pick up your heart or agree to have one placed in your yard when a volunteer stops by, there are a few things the anonymous benefactor hopes you will keep in mind.

“I hope everyone will understand that these red hearts are a simple expression of kindness and caring for each other. They are free; no money need change hands. They are not connected to any political party or candidate, any organization or religion; they suggest no agenda. They aren’t part of any fundraising effort. All they say is, ‘Small town, big heart.’ Or whatever you would like them to say. I would love it if they could go on lawns that have no other signs already on them, although I have no control over that.” A member of the organizer’s team called just as I was finishing this story to suggest that the young artists work their magic on the hearts.

Our anonymous townie also thinks this might be kind of fun if nobody knows who is responsible, and those that do know keep the secret. Everyone who lives in a small town loves some good gossip, especially when we’re guessing about someone who’s a hero, not a villain.

This feel good story was really buoying my spirits. And then. And then. The inevitable. Facebook, once again, showed its ugly side. Amongst the cheers in posts about the red hearts was this. “Well, the timing of this is very suspicious, coming so close after an election...” read one comment (since removed although by poster or host, I don’t know). Or, “Do we really think that displaying a heart makes up for the divisive language of the recent months?” And this gem, “If the outlook was looking different, there would be riots instead of heart signs. [You know which] party only knows how to be loving when they are winning or they are all spiteful ppl [sic].” I guess it’s true: no good deed goes unpunished. To that we might as well add: no good deed can be seen as anything but political. Thankfully, posts of that defeatist, vitriolic nature were quickly drowned out by those embracing the heart campaign.

The naysayers did point to the reality of the damage done to all of us since, well, since, pick a starting date for when we Americans became a divided, entrenched, dogmatically schismatized (RIP Snake—you'd have loved that one) society. 2016? 2008? 1992? 1968? 1861? 1800? 1776? We've always been at odds with each other; the difference is that social (shouldn't it be anti-social?) media acts like a magnifying glass between bright sunlight and a piece of paper. Is 2020 worse than past years? It feels like it now, like trying to weld titanium and steel, each possessing such metallurgically dissimilar properties that no amount of heat will convince them to fuse.

Please don't confuse this as a holier than thou pointing of fingers; I've championed my opinions, crafted my arguments as ardently as anyone. I've lost some folks along the way because we couldn't, or wouldn't, fill the chasm between us. My usual good nature has abandoned me on occasion, to be replaced by a nasty Right Fielder I hardly recognize. I'm sorry for that. It hurts that a few of my longstanding friendships have suffered when the national political rhetoric—so much of it specious—has intruded upon the enjoyment of our small town lives and the important good work we do here.

But our local heart donor has a point—small town, big heart. I took the opportunity to look back over my *Advertiser* articles since I enlisted as a regular contributor two and a half years ago. I counted somewhere north of 350 of the—columns, high school sports articles, features about local heroes, small businesses, schools both public and private, non-profits and more. Boiled down to their essence, they put local people being good to each other and demonstrating the importance of community in the *Advertiser* spotlight. And never have I asked that fateful question that these days seems to mark us indelibly: Are you red or blue? I'd like to think I never will.

I asked the benefactor what he or she hoped for in undertaking the heart project. "I hope for a village full of red hearts, each meaning that someone cares. I don't even need to know what that person or family cares about, as long as they care about something. If all one thousand hearts are distributed, I would be ecstatic. If I have to order more, that would make me even happier. And if East Aurorans are moved to craft their own hearts, so much the better." Get yours today, before they're all gone.

