

GUEST COLUMN

Mitch Henck: Holiday meal leads to fight against hunger

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It was a knock at the door. A 9-year-old Wayne Bisek was enduring another Christmas Eve without joy.

His was very much a dysfunctional family in Arcadia, a Trempealeau County community about 170 miles northwest of Madison. He writes in his autobiography: "The two most consistent activities in our 'home' were arguing and yelling."

Wayne and his four siblings, born of three different fathers, remember not talking to their friends about the holidays because they were so miserable. Then on Christmas Eve night in 1963, grocery store owner "Booby" Kostner brought two bags of groceries. "He reached out his arms and gave me the bags of meat, ice cream and fruit. 'Merry Christmas, Wayne, and merry Christmas, Mrs. Bisek,' was all he said as he turned and left."

It touched Bisek's soul.

Thirty-two years later, after much therapy and spiritual help, Bisek and his wife, Vickie Carroll, and some friends founded Buckets for Hunger. The charity raises money to provide food for the hungry.

In 1995, Bisek approached Badgers basketball star Tracy Webster. He and current Badgers assistant Howard Moore and three of their buddies played a celebrity basketball game at Oregon High School against Oregon alumni players. They raised about \$3,000 the first year.

By last Wednesday night's trivia contest fundraiser at the Concourse Hotel, Buckets for Hunger has raised more than \$2 million to provide food for the hungry in several states. Buckets for Hunger grew to include celebrities such as Packers greats Bart Starr and Jerry Kramer.

On Wednesday night, the celebrity on hand was Packers defensive legend Dave Robinson. He has been at Bisek's side for many years. Robinson says he remembers a man dressed as Santa Claus bringing Christmas goodies to his door when he was a 9-year-old boy in New Jersey.

A major reason why Bisek has been able to lure sports legends such as Paul Hornung, Gale Sayers, Kareem Abdul Jabbar, Johnny Unitas and Paul Molitor to help with Buckets over the years is he employs no paid staff. One-hundred percent of the money goes to food for the hungry.

Over the years, Buckets for Hunger has saved the day for countless food pantries that otherwise would have run out of food. Bisek says pantries are often run by volunteers who don't know how to go through the hoops necessary to get help from the government.

When Bisek and Robinson came on my radio show last week, their boyhood stories touched a listener so much he pledged \$500. I've watched Bisek break down in tears when he recalls the knock at the door on that Christmas Eve in '63.

Now the owner of a successful financial adviser business, Bisek and his wife have raised two sons, AJ and Cole, and daughter, Melanie. As it says on the outside cover of his book, Bisek has fought off the demons of his love-deprived childhood with anger management courses and psychiatric therapy. He has a deep religious faith and was able to forgive his parents long ago. He says they were not at fault because they were abused far more severely by their own parents.

Having interviewed Bisek and Robinson, and witnessed the kindness of those touched by the cause, I can firmly recommend Bisek's book on his amazing journey. It is appropriately titled: "A knock at the door."

*Mitch is a Madison, Wisconsin based commentator, broadcaster and standup comic.
The Mitch Henck Show is broadcast live 8-11a.m. Monday-Friday at www.mitchhenck.com.
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