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Guest column: Lessons learned from Cincinnati's 'Hat Man'

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Lisa DesatnikCommunity Press guest columnist

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Cincinnati lost a piece of its heart last month.

Avtar Gill died quietly in the motel room he has called home for many years. About 50 people attended a beautiful memorial today at Findlay Market in his honor, and images taken of him through the years are surfacing all over the internet including a new Facebook page with hundreds of likes already.

In the final years of his life, he gave smiles to countless faces. His impact touched thousands. Avtar, in case you haven't heard, is the "Cincinnati Hat Man." If you have attended any large public gatherings downtown, you

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have more than likely seen him. Dressed in casual slacks and mostly colorful t-shirts, he was always adorned with his signature ball cap attached to a piece of poster board decorated in bright colors with positive messages. Among them – “Mother’s Day: Be proud to be a mother.” “Rejoice. World Choir Games comes to town. Wow!”

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I remember seeing him at events. I remember uplifting billboards. He was hard to miss. I never said hello. I never asked him his name or why he made it his life mission to hand out joy. I never told him he brightened my day. I never said thank you. Sadly, only now in the wake of his absence, am I learning about the man whose messages of hope and inspiration touched our hearts in meaningful ways.

How many of you can say the same? Why is it that so often we wait until a person is gone to memorialize their gifts? Please don't get me wrong. I think it is wonderful to see and read the outpouring of emotions of people who were touched by Avtar. I have no doubt that Avtar is smiling looking down upon this city right now. I only wish that he could have seen this outpouring of admiration while he was still with us.

In our busy lives, it is so easy for us to go about our routines without taking the time to let others know of their value. Or we put off saying things thinking we can say them later. It isn't because we don't care or that others don't matter. For whatever reason, we just don't say what is in our heart.

Life can be short. None of us know what is in store for our tomorrow. Caring and being there for each other is what makes our time here so special. We need to practice voicing our appreciation.

There is a lesson to be learned from the passing of Avtar Gill ... aka the “Cincinnati Hat Man.”

In his honor and memory, let's rejoice in life and in each other. Today, tomorrow, next week and all year, make a point to let others know they are important. Let's celebrate and cherish gifts in the here and now.

Lisa Desatnik is a public relations consultant and Dillonvale resident.

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