

Heart Attack Grill

John Alleman, the fifty-two year old unofficial spokesman for the restaurant Heart Attack Grill, died of a heart attack in February 2013. A regular of the restaurant since it opened in October 2011, he genuinely enjoyed the food and advocated for the restaurant even though he was never on the payroll. Alleman reportedly ate at the restaurant nearly every day, despite owner

"Doctor Jon" Basso's warnings that Triple Bypass Burgers really weren't everyday food. In fact, in February 2012, a man in his forties went into cardiac arrest while trying to finish a Triple Bypass Burger, and was wheeled out to an ambulance.¹

The Heart Attack Grill's slogan is "a burger to die for." It gives free meals to people who weigh more than 350 pounds, and has a warning sign that reads "Caution: This establishment is bad for your health," according to the Associated Press (AP).

Basso is cited as saying that Alleman's death was a wake-up call of sorts, but said that it would not stop him from selling the calorie-laden burgers. One advantage of his establishment, according to Basso, is that people can feel comfortable at the grill and not worry about being judged because of their unhealthy menu choices. For his part, Basso argues that people are free to buy or not buy the food. In an interview with reporter Betty Liu, he stated "The end result of our eating habits is all around us. It's an obesity epidemic that is killing the world. Do I want others to die at my restaurant? No. Actually I want to wake up one morning and open the door and have no one ever come in again, because maybe the world would have learned the truth. Now, I make good money joking about how bad my food is. But at least I'm honest."

After the first incident, the AP reports, officials for the Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine, a Washington DC based group, sent a letter to the Heart Attack Grill's owner asking him to "declare moral bankruptcy" and close the restaurant. Advocates of the Heart Attack Grill's right to operate and sell whatever food they like disagree, citing Basso's honesty about how bad the food is for one's health, the clearly labeled caloric content of the food posted where it is easy to see, and warning signs at the entrance of the restaurant.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Should Basso continue to operate the Heart Attack Grill despite the deaths?
2. Do people have the right to eat whatever food they want, even if it kills them?
3. Does Basso have an obligation to close the restaurant in light of his statement concerning the obesity epidemic?

¹ <http://sanfrancisco.grubstreet.com/2013/02/heart-attack-grill-vegas-spokesman-alleman-dies.html>