



December 2008 (559) 498-6988
www.poverellohouse.org



Poverello News



Last year, I was having a hard time getting into the Christmas spirit. My diabetes was getting worse, my old body ached in the cold more than usual, and I was very grouchy and feeling sorry for myself.

The Amici Del Poverello Guild had their annual parties for poor children and for men in the Poverello drug rehabilitation program, and I grudgingly went to both because I was supposed to take pictures. At the Resident Program party, something happened that helped change my perspective, and maybe even shooed the Grinch away from me.

As I was mingling with people and taking photos, I came upon three young men sitting at a table. It took a moment for me to recognize them. They were former Poverello program residents, clean and sober, coming back to celebrate Christmas with Poverello, where they got started on a new life.

Their stories were very different. One of them came to us from Southern California. He had grown up in a well-to-do family, but drugs had destroyed the family's trust. After he enrolled in the program, he walked away. A couple of months later, he came back, but this time we kicked him out for violating rules. He could have done what most do in that situation: he could have gone back to using drugs. Instead, he started going to A.A. and N.A. meetings, got a job with a relative, and has managed to abstain from drugs for several years now.

The second man started using drugs early in life, probably in response to the pain of growing up in a dysfunctional family. He be-

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came a drug dealer at a young age. He was very bright, fondly remembered by his teachers in school. Brought to Poverello via the legal system, he was smart enough to see that drugs were going to get him nowhere, and struggled valiantly to stay away from the street scene. He graduated the program, and stayed clean for a long time after. However, he eventually succumbed to the lure of meth, but loved his life of sobriety too much to continue with the drug. He came back to N.A. and started all over again. His sincerity and hard work paid off.

The third man was very troublesome for much of his time in the program. Another referral from jail, he had shattered his marriage with drugs and unfaithfulness. The first couple of months he was here, he was spacey and full of self-pity. He was an educated professional man who had fallen as far as one can fall. Now, he was stripped of his career, his wife, and his family by his addiction and consequent bad choices. On more than one occasion, he came close to getting kicked out of our program for stupid infractions of the rules. Then, almost overnight, something clicked. He began taking responsibility for his problems, taking the program more seriously, and started helping others. The transformation was remarkable.

So here they sat, three very different men with diverse backgrounds, united in two things. First, they had hit bottom and ended up at Poverello, the home of desperate cases and last chances. Second, all three of them, in their own unique ways, found answers to their addictions.

As I was talking to them, a Christmas image came into my mind: I was being visited by the Three Wise Men. Wise, because so many of their brothers in the program had chosen to return to the madness of addiction, while they instead chose the simpler, but much more difficult path of responsibility. Wise, because in the midst of agony and failure,



they had cried out in despair, and accepted help when it was offered. And finally, wise, because, like the other Wise Men who found what they sought in a lowly place, these men discovered what they were looking for in a humble place called Poverello House. It reminded me that Christmas is full of good surprises.

Mike

Hardship & Christmas Miracles

We'd have to search back through many decades to find a worse time in our country's history. The economy is in shambles, with no one seeming to know what to do about it; belligerent nations are on the rise, threatening to use resource leverage, open warfare, and even terrorism to achieve their goals; we are exhausted following a bitter election that exacerbated the wounds of a deeply-divided country; and the dismal prospect of a great nation seemingly in decline is a depressing image that a lot of us find inescapable. For many this Christmas, seasonal joy will be tainted with a desperate feeling that the world we have known is falling apart.

Experiencing a bleak Christmas is a common occurrence of people ending up at Poverello House; however, the current big political and cultural events don't necessarily affect the outlook of the homeless and poor, primarily because their day-to-day existence is already so grim. In much the same way as economically shell-shocked people this year mourn the passing of better days, the homeless mourn the passing of their former lives, which can seldom be regained.

Evan (not his real name) was one such person. Christmas of 2005 found him someplace he didn't want to be: in the Poverello House Resident Program. His work and family life had come unraveled due to his and his wife's addictions. By nature a kind and hardworking man, methamphetamine dependence had turned him into a raging, abusive spouse. He was incarcerated as a result of his violent actions. He lost everything, including his six children, all of whom he dearly loved. He had run out of hope until Jimmie, our Program Director, came to the county jail and interviewed him for our program.

Evan was released into the custody of Poverello House. His probation required him to complete the Resident Program. That first Christmas at Poverello, nothing looked very promising in his life.

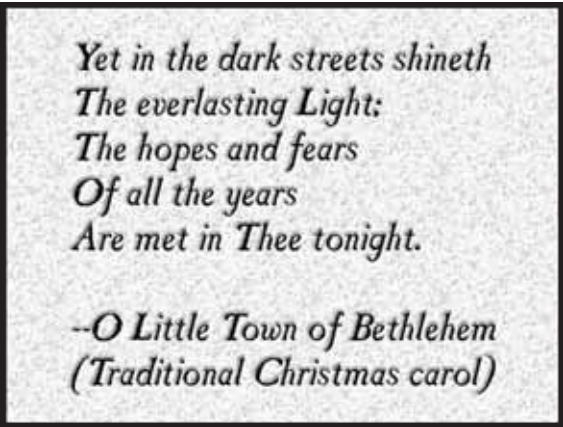
However, along the way, something changed inside of him. He began to really want sobriety and the benefits that come from living without drugs. He was determined to finish what he started at Poverello, and he followed through on that determination. He then chose to move into the transitional phase of our program, a phase designed to be a step toward a better future. He was observed to have

talent in our kitchen and a knack for leadership, and he began to formulate a dream of attending a culinary institute. As Evan grew emotionally stronger, he reconnected with his children and began spending time with them. Eventually, Poverello helped him begin a local program in chef training.

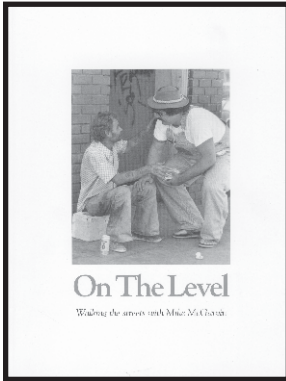
Now, three years later, Evan is working toward completion of his schooling and has found some part-time work as a chef. In fact, he has developed a growing reputation as a chef with great ability, and has even prepared a meal for a celebrity fundraiser. He is beginning to be in demand in his profession, a situation that would have been unimaginable to him in 2005, when he felt like a complete failure.

This Christmas will be perhaps the best yet for him. As we all know, Christmas is very special when there is family harmony, and his family relationships are better than ever. Evan's parents now have custody of his children, and he is able to see them weekly. He has come to know them better, and a great deal of hurt has been healed by his efforts. Evan has achieved over three years of continuous sobriety; is on his way to certification as a chef; and is working in a field that promises to provide a good living, respect from others, and an outlet for his creativity.

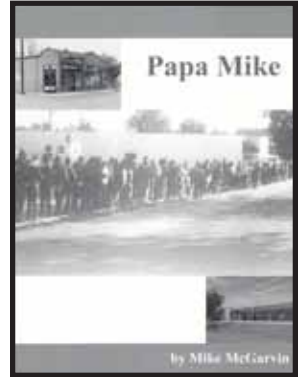
As many of us sadly contemplate our diminished 401K plans, the threat of unemployment, international unrest, or other hardships of a worsening world situation, perhaps we shouldn't let such thoughts dampen the holiday spirit. After all, if Evan's life can turn around so dramatically, then anything might happen during the magical and mystical season we call Christmas. The holiday began over 2,000 years ago with a miracle in a tiny stable. For those with the eyes to see, yuletide miracles still occur, and that fact should encourage us in hard times.



A Double Anniversary



This year marks two anniversaries at Poverello House. It is the fifteenth anniversary of the publishing of Mike McGarvin's photographic book, *On the Level*, and the fifth anniversary of his autobiography, *Papa Mike*. *On the Level* offers Mike's expressive portraits of Fresno's homeless



souls, and *Papa Mike* tells the story of Mike's tumultuous life and the founding of Poverello House. Both books would make excellent, thoughtful Christmas gifts. The cost of each book is \$20.00, all of which will go toward feeding and helping the hungry and poor at Poverello House. To order, call (559) 498-6988, or fill out and mail the form below with your check, money order, or credit card information.

Please send me ____ copy(ies) of Mike McGarvin's book, *On the Level* (\$20 per copy).

Please send me ____ copy(ies) of Mike McGarvin's book, *Papa Mike* (\$20 per copy).

METHOD OF PAYMENT:

- Check/Money Order enclosed (Make checks payable to Poverello House)
 Credit Card

TYPE OF CARD (VISA, MASTERCARD)

ACCOUNT NUMBER / EXPIRATION DATE

CARDHOLDER SIGNATURE

CARDHOLDER TELEPHONE #

Send to Poverello House, P.O. Box 12225, Fresno, CA 93777-2225

She's Tops With Us, Too

Doreen Eley, Poverello's Administrative Director, was honored last October by being named one of the Top Ten Professional Women of the Year for 2008, sponsored by the Marjoree Mason Center. The award honors women who have made substantial contributions to their professions and their communities.

Prior to coming on at Poverello House, Doreen worked with abused women through a program at Majoree Mason Center, and was also the first director of Naomi's House. She has also been a vocal representative for Poverello House in the Continuum of Care, a coalition addressing the homeless problem in our community. With a degree in social work and a background in business administration, Doreen has shown herself to be a professional with great compassion and insight. We congratulate her on receiving this very notable award.



Toys, Food, Etc.

Christmas is coming, so if you can donate new or gently-used toys, as well as items shown in our Wish List below, we would be most grateful. Even more grateful will be the impoverished families who receive your gifts. Merry Christmas!

Wish List

Turkeys * Hams * Sweet potatoes * Pies
Toys (new or gently used)
Warm gloves, socks, knit caps, scarves & jackets

Remember, we now take credit card donations. Please see the enclosed envelope for instructions.

To donate online, visit our website at www.poverellohouse.org

Poverello House

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Who Are We? A nonprofit, nondenominational organization that believes in the dignity of every human being. Our mission is to enrich the lives and spirits of all who pass our way, to feed the hungry, offer focused rehabilitation programs, temporary shelter, medical, dental and other basic services to the poor, the homeless, and the disadvantaged unconditionally, without regard to race, color, religion, national origin, age, sex or disability, through Providential and community support. We have been operating since 1973 and are governed by a Board of Directors, consisting of local volunteer business men and women.

Future Goals? To provide additional facilities for increased services.

How Are We Funded? Primarily through private donations from individuals, churches, businesses, and community organizations; and through United Way. Rules for acceptance and participation in the programs of Poverello House are the same for everyone, without regard to race, color, national origin, age, sex or disability.



United Way of Fresno County
United Way Organization