

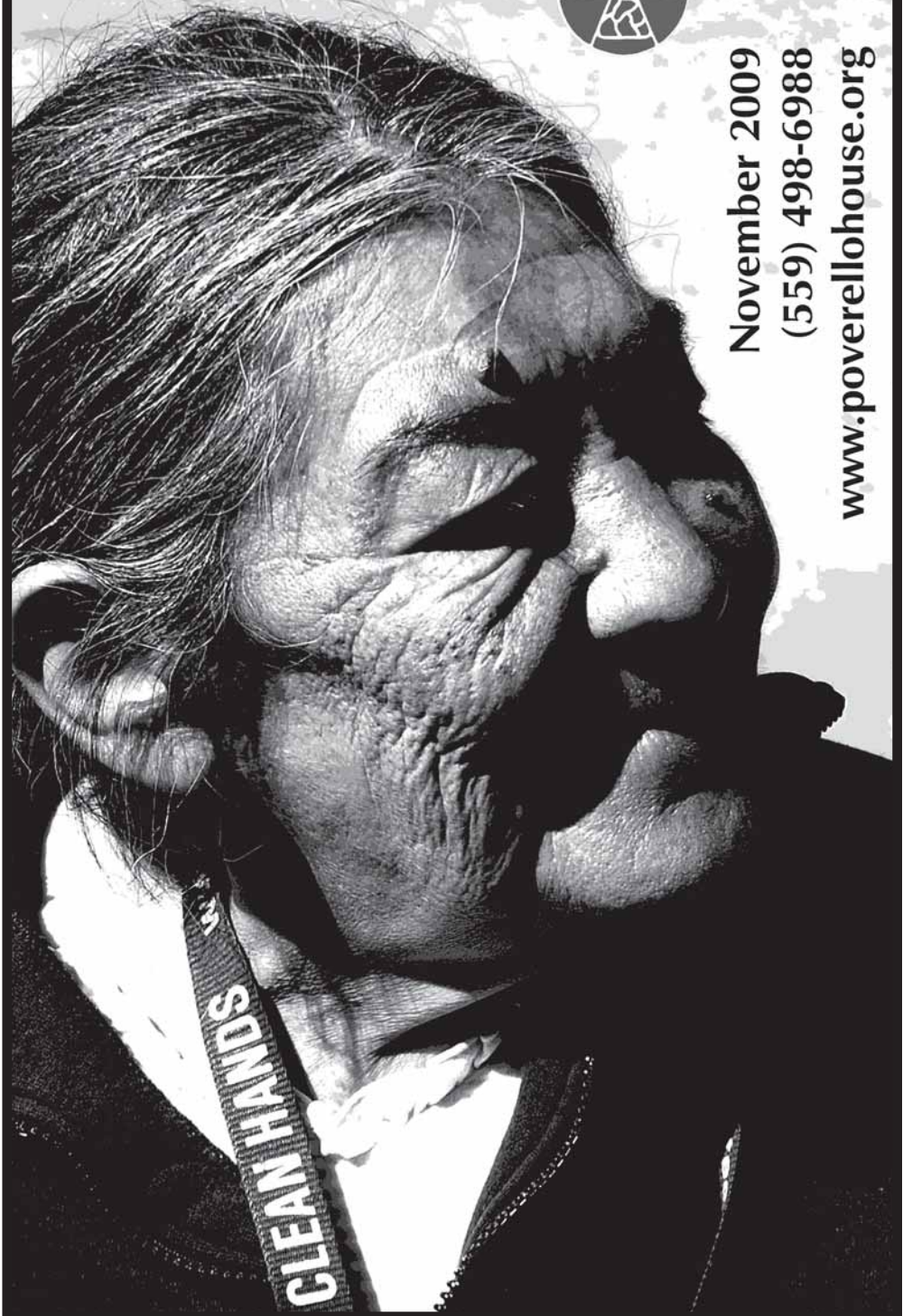
Poverello News



November 2009

(559) 498-6988

www.poverellohouse.org





It's a strange thing to know someone for ten years, but never actually meet him. That describes my friendship with a young man, up until last summer.

One Christmas season ten years ago, I received a letter from a six-year old child whose name was Campbell. It was charming. The boy wrote as if he knew me, and told me all about the things in his life that interested him. Accompanying the letter was some money he had earned to help the homeless. I sent a letter to thank him.

The next year, he sent another little missive with yet another donation. Again, the tone was familiar and conversational, as if we had been best pals for decades. I shared these letters with the Poverello staff, who were as delighted as I was.

The letters came every year about the same time, with one exception. One Christmas rolled by a few years ago with no letter from Campbell. I was disappointed, and, to tell the truth, a little depressed. I figured he had grown tired of Poverello House, and had moved on to new things. However, much to my relief, the letter came in January. He apologized, and said his life had been so busy that he was a little late.

And busy he was. Each year, he would describe the joys and anxieties of entering a new grade in school. I learned about his martial arts lessons, his school wrestling, and the academic subjects that excited or bored him the most. Each letter was a glimpse into the life of a thoughtful, engaging, and very involved youngster. Every letter also

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contained a school picture of him, so I could see him grow from a cute little boy into a handsome teenager.

In the decade that passed, Campbell talked about visiting Poverello, but never seemed to get the time. Then, one day in August, I got



a surprising call: he and his grandfather were going to come down and see the Pov.

After all this time, I thought I knew what to expect. I was a little shocked to meet the face in the pictures attached to a body that was as tall as me. At sixteen years old, Campbell was well over six feet tall. He towered over his grandpa.

I gave them both a tour, which they seemed to enjoy. When we paused at the POW/MIA table in our dayroom, the grandfather got a little emotional. It turns out that he had spent many years in the military and had fought in World War II.

Sometimes, working at Poverello and living down here is a little like being in a bubble. Most of what I see is negative, and I don't get away enough to see much else. I meet many young people on the streets, most of whom are going nowhere in life, and who are pretty well ruined before they turn twenty. It's easy to lose hope.

Now and then, however, a vibrant, compassionate young person like Campbell crosses my path, and I start to think more positively. If there's someone like Campbell, who, since the age of six, has thought about the poor and done what he could to help, then maybe, just maybe, there are a lot more like him. What a blessing it was to finally meet him face to face, and to see the good work that God has started in him. Maybe there's hope for we humans, after all, if somehow we can help produce a few more Campbells.

Mike

Angels in the Clinic

He was a humble, soft-spoken man who had been on the streets for a long time. “Marcel” (not his real name) came to Poverello House often to eat, but rarely used our other services. He showed up in the Holy Cross Clinic one day, complaining of itching. CeCe Lomeli-Perez, the nurse practitioner in the clinic, examined him, and discovered that his whole body was infested with lice and scabies. She got him cleaned up, treated him for the parasites, and earned his eternal gratitude for not only taking care of the problem, but showering him with expert care, kindness, and acceptance.

CeCe called in some of her chips and got a free haircut for him. It was then that his nightmare, and CeCe’s herculean efforts, began.

Marcel had long hair and a bushy beard, but when the beard was shaved off, a huge tumor was revealed on his neck. When CeCe saw it, she knew that it was serious.

Largely through her efforts and networking, the clinic hosts a wide variety of medical personnel who volunteer their services. One of these was an oncologist, and CeCe wasted no time getting Marcel in for an appointment with him. As she suspected, the news was not good.

Marcel had throat cancer that had spread, resulting in the neck tumor, and it very soon would also engulf his tongue. Additionally, he had an advanced case of hepatitis C, with an enlarged and inflamed liver.

It wasn’t long before he was unable to speak. He could no longer swallow without great difficulty. He communicated with CeCe by writing notes.

She did all she could for him. She spoke to our cooks, and at every breakfast, lunch and dinner, they would put his meals in a food processor and blend them into a semi-liquid form that he could swallow.

As the cancer and hepatitis progressed, CeCe continued seeing Marcel. At last, she knew that there was no turning back the disease; he was dying. She gently but honestly apprised him of his situation, as she continued to give him pain relievers for the horrible physical anguish he was stoically enduring. Another doctor in the clinic sadly confirmed what she had told him.

Marcel wasn't ready to accept that his cancer was terminal. Homeless and destitute, as well as alone in the world, he worried about what would happen to his scanty belongings. He had a couple of bags of clothes and personal items, and a bicycle he had won in a contest, which was especially precious to him. After many conversations with CeCe, he acknowledged the reality of his situation, and, much to her surprise, he decided to leave all of his belongings to her. At that point, she knew that he had broken through the denial and was ready to meet his fate.

However, now that he was too weak to be on the streets, CeCe faced the problem of where to put him for end-of-life care. She contacted hospice, but no bed was available. Through some hard-nosed advocacy and networking, she cajoled a hospital to take him in.

When CeCe visited the hospital, it was obvious that they were taking extraordinary measures to keep him alive. It was something that he didn't want, and she had to talk to the hospital ethics committee to explain that he was in immense pain, his soul was worn out, and he simply wanted to "go home." After much discussion, the hospital relented and listened to her.

CeCe was there when they removed the tube. Two minutes later, she held his hand and quietly told him, "Don't worry anymore, Marcel, you're going home," and he peacefully died.

He is buried in an unmarked pauper's grave, but CeCe wants to get a stone marker engraved for him. She just hasn't had the emotional energy to pursue it yet, because she's still grieving for him. Caring for Marcel was immensely draining, but she says she'd do it again in a heartbeat.

If anyone wonders what makes Holy Cross Clinic so special, this story says it all.

Turkey Time

As is usually the case this time of the year, we have a pressing need for turkeys. The good news is that grocers will be having some great deals on the big birds, so if you'd like to help us out, you can probably do so at a reasonable price! Call us at 498-6988 for more information on donation drop-offs.

Back to Basics

In the middle ages in Europe, roads were plagued with highway-men and cutthroats. Travel was often an economic necessity, but dangerous in the extreme. Violence was never far away, and perilous roads were just one of many reasons that medieval life was, in the words of Thomas Hobbes, "...solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short."

Monasteries became refuges for weary, worried travelers, or anyone else in need. They were also spiritual oases and centers of poverty relief.

Interestingly, the San Francisco Poverello Coffeehouse had a very similar function. Father Simon opened it as a refuge from the chaos of the Tenderloin District. People came there to feel safe, accepted, and welcome. Father Simon's spiritual commitment and sacrificial love pervaded the atmosphere.

Poverello House in Fresno is, of course, modeled after the original in San Francisco. Mike McGarvin was deeply influenced by Father Simon's ministry, and he really didn't know any other way to help people. After feeding and meeting people on the streets of Fresno, he was able to obtain a building, and that early Poverello very much resembled its San Francisco namesake.

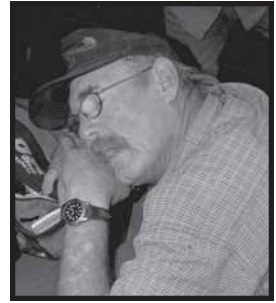
As we've grown, we've added services, personnel, and property. The humble little haven of old is no more, and in many ways, is no longer a copy of its San Francisco namesake.

However, one thing has remained the same. One of our main functions is still that of a refuge. Originally, when we obtained this building (actually the third Fresno Poverello House), the street outside was still wild and untamed. Fights, muggings, knifings and every conceivable kind of mayhem took place sometimes mere inches from our front doors. Inside, things were much calmer and more easily controlled, so that street people felt safe within the walls; but if you stepped out the door, it was a different story.

That changed when the City of Fresno turned over the block to us in the 1990s, and we were able to fence off the street to traffic. That expanded our domain, and allowed us to increase services while simultaneously creating a much larger sanctuary from street life.

Hobbes' famous dictum about the shortness and brutishness of life could have been describing the street experiences of the homeless in

Fresno. On the other side of the Poverello gates, life is precarious. Inside, however, people know that they can count on protection when they enter. They even feel safe enough to take catnaps, resting in the assurance that they won't be disturbed .



Thus it is that our day shelter now extends well beyond our Dayroom. We have picnic tables, shaded by trees and patio umbrellas outside, so that the homeless can relax and enjoy a beautiful day without concern for their well-being. Inside, it is air conditioned in the summer and heated in the winter, with books, television, writing paper and pens, playing cards, and table games all available.



A good example of the benefits of this service is in Maria's story. A harmless older lady, Maria always graciously thanks us for the meals we provide, and spends her days sitting outside on the same bench. She usually brings her little dog for companionship. Elderly and fragile, she is grateful for a place where she can come and be safe during

the daylight hours.

Perhaps some of the hardest things about homelessness are having nowhere to go, feeling shunned and unwanted, and the sense that danger is ever present. Our day shelter solves these problems.

A good idea will last throughout the ages. Poverello is privileged to continue, on the dangerous streets of Fresno, a tradition that medieval monasteries began so long ago.

Wish List

TURKEYS!!!! AND MORE TURKEYS!!!!
Canned yams * Pumpkin, pecan & apple pies
Dinner rolls * Canned canberry sauce

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
Member Organization