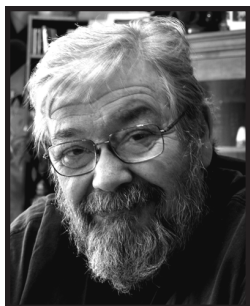


# POVERELLO NEWS



JULY 2016 (559) 498-6988  
WWW.POVERELLOHOUSE.ORG



I'm discovering that when you get old, strange things happen. For instance, I've spent a good portion of my life walking around on two feet. I mastered this skill at the age of about one and a half, and seem to have had a handle on it ever since...until the past year.

These days, I fall—a lot. I was going out to lunch a couple of months ago with a skinny friend, and as we entered the restaurant, I started tilting forward. He grabbed my shirt, which did no good whatsoever, and I catapulted ahead with him in tow. I was on my way to face-planting on the edge of a table, but fortunately, I was able to grab the table, which slid up against a solid pillar and stopped. That day I proved to myself that I'm not the fleet-footed lad I used to be, and also that skinny friends are fairly useless when it comes to providing ballast.

One of my more recent belly flops was, embarrassingly, in the Poverello parking lot. However, this time, martial arts training saved the day. As I saw the asphalt racing up to hit my face, I instinctively tucked into a judo roll. Those years in the dojo paid off, and I managed to escape with merely a scrape on my arm.

In my autobiography, *Papa Mike*, I have a whole chapter devoted to my days as a *judoka* (for those unfamiliar with that term, it basically means “judo dude”). Martial arts were a huge part of my life at one time for a number of reasons. First, it gave me a physical outlet when I was trying to stop using drugs and straighten

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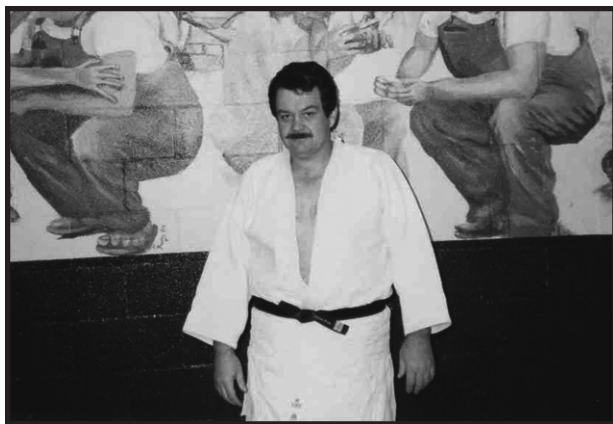
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out my life. Second, it kept my mind occupied, because a judo match is not only a physical challenge, it also involves strategy, like a chess game. Finally, it gave me some self-protection skills that, when used correctly, subdued attackers without causing significant bodily damage to them. (Note that I said, "...when used correctly." I had a few instances when I kind of went overboard.)

In the early days of Poverello House, those judo skills came in very handy. However, as the organization has grown in staff positions, and as



I have grown in girth, fighting arts have become less a part of my life. If I recall correctly, the last time I used judo on the streets was about eighteen years ago.

Back in those days, there was a mentally disabled man who frequented Poverello. To protect his identity, I'll just call him Large Lars. His disability was genetic, most likely as a result of being the offspring of an incestuous relationship. Even though he caused problems almost every time he was here, we kept letting him back in because his life was so pitiable. He was big, strong, and prone to vandalism and violence.

One time, I was out front, talking to people in the food line, when he bulled his way past and tried to jump the line. Our security staff told him to go to the back of the line. He didn't take kindly to the suggestion, and appealed to me. I agreed with our security, and then turned to walk away. Large Lars snapped, and launched himself onto my back, choking me.

Now, the Irishman and the Franciscan have always been at war within me, and in situations like this, the Irishman usually wins.

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Without thinking, I went into judo autopilot and performed an *ippon seoi nage* (shoulder throw) on him. He hurtled into a nearby fence, completely surprised. He never tried anything like that again. In spite of his mental incapacity, he thereafter remembered that it hurt to grab Papa Mike.

Like many Franciscans, Father Simon was more or less a pacifist. However, he was also a pragmatist, and thus one time when several young men tried to mug him, he resisted strongly with boxing skills he'd learned as a youth. He also had no problem with using me as a "bouncer for Jesus" to restore order when things got messy around the Poverello.

Personally, I like resolving things with kindness. I can't count the number of times that I've brought peace to a volatile situation by joking, giving someone a "happy dollar," or offering a chocolate chip cookie. However, I'm not so much of an idealist as to believe that kindness and cookies are going to always solve every problem. There is a place for violence. Hopefully, it is controlled violence, but in order to protect others (i.e., other homeless clients) and myself, I've often had to kick things up a notch or two beyond the chocolate chip cookie.

I often wish I'd continued in judo, but cancer and a young family pretty much closed that chapter of my life. Quite honestly, though, had I not had those skills, that fledgling mission called Poverello House might not have survived the first couple of years. I've always said that the only requirement to use our services is to behave like gentlemen and ladies. Judo helped me control the situation when people behaved in extremely ungentlemanly and unladylike fashion, with no one getting seriously hurt.

So when I look back, I really think that God led me into judo, both for my own sake and for the sake of the future Fresno Poverello. I certainly couldn't have seen it at the time, but then, I think we seldom see what God is doing in our lives while it's going on. We just have to live by faith and trust, taking the next indicated step, and hope to one day understand what it's all about.

*Mike*

# The Missing Piece, Part One

For several decades now, the *Poverello News* has told you about life on the street. We've done our utmost to present as true a picture as possible. In many cases, we've confessed our frustrations and sometimes our failures when it comes to helping chronically homeless people change their situations. In most cases, we've admitted that the best we can do is often not enough.

This somewhat fatalistic approach to homelessness has been changing since early in 2015. During that time, Poverello House has been working hand-in-hand with community partners to comprehensively address the chronic and complicated nature of homelessness in Fresno.

This new approach is called MAP Point at Pov. The acronym stands for "Multi-Agency Access Program." To understand what MAP Point at Pov is, we need to look briefly at its history.

In 2013, Poverello hired a new Executive Director, Cruz Avila. Bright and energetic, Cruz listened and learned quickly, and while showing great reverence for Poverello's current services and longtime traditions, he started moving the organization toward new frontiers. One thing he did was plug into an existing group called "Community Conversations."

In 2011, some community leaders came together to address mental health issues in Fresno. These leaders represented a wide array of agencies that intersected with mentally ill patients, indigent patients in particular. This group was called "Community Conversations."

For years, there have been gatherings that have met, discussed issues related to the dearth of coordinated services in Fresno, and gone on to have little impact. Many providers were familiar with the term, "the Fresno shuffle," referring to the disconnected and lack of efficacious services to the poor, the mentally ill, and the homeless. Community Conversations was different, in that there seemed to be a new determination to change the chaotic social, medical and mental health service landscape. Cruz sensed the potential in this group, and his involvement eventually led to MAP Point at Pov.

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Another essential person who was a catalyst for MAP point was Lynne Ashbeck. As the leader of the Hospital Council and the Community Conversations group, Lynne strongly recommended that MAP Point be located at Poverello. She reasoned that because of Poverello's location and the nature of its services, it was a natural starting point for this program. Through her support and advocacy, MAP Point at Pov became a reality.

Poverello House had long been a part of the Fresno Madera Continuum of Care, a consortium of organizations working together to address homelessness in our area. Through funding accessed through the Continuum of Care, MAP Point at Pov was born. The focus of MAP Point at Pov is really twofold: to viably connect the persistently homeless to a network of services that will break the cycle of homelessness, and to arrest the downward spiral of the newly homeless before they become street-hardened and themselves chronic. MAP Point at Pov is a link from the street to needed services and programs, and it is a link that simply didn't exist before.

Since it's opening on February 17, 2015, MAP Point at Pov has served over 3,300 homeless individuals. That amounts to between forty to fifty people per day. When it began, there was no real protocol used for assessment. That changed quickly, particularly when Poverello's Director of Program Development, Sara Mirhadi, assessed what was going on and hired Robert Huerta as the case manager for MAP Point.

Robert had gone through our Residential Drug Rehabilitation Program and graduated, but very much wanted to stay connected with Poverello House. Thus, after graduation, he volunteered here for almost two years. He has a talent for relating to people, because he is open, friendly, and is never at a loss for words. Poverello House saw that gift and started sending him out to various social service fairs to supervise our information booth. His tasks included educating people about Poverello, distributing information and recruiting volunteers. He was so adept at doing this that he was soon the "go-to" guy for public information. As a former consumer of Poverello services, he has an authenticity that attracts people.

Sara rightly saw these people skills and figured that because Robert already knew many of the homeless down here, he might be a good fit for MAP Point. It was a great decision. He proved to not only have people skills, but also organizational talents as well. Robert helped develop some of the primary assessment tools used by the program. The success of any endeavor depends on the the right people being involved, and as we will see in our next issue, the complex tapestry of MAP Point at Pov works precisely because of those dedicated to its success.

*Next month: Part 2 of the MAP Point at Pov story.*

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## Run for Meals Update

We're very excited to announce that our fourth annual Run for Meals, held last May, was another great success! Thanks to our sponsors, volunteers and many, many participants, \$41,000 was raised in *just one day* to help Poverello's mission to the poor.

Without all of you, this small miracle would not have happened. Thank you once again, and we should add kudos to the staff of Poverello House, many of whom work extremely hard to make sure this yearly event runs smoothly and is fun for everyone involved.



## *July Wish List*

Men's shorts \* Toilet paper \* Canned vegetables

*To donate online, visit our website at [www.poverellohouse.org](http://www.poverellohouse.org)*

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

# Poverello House

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## FORWARDING SERVICE REQUESTED

**Who Are We?** A nonprofit, nondenominational organization.

**Our Mission:** Believing in the dignity of every person, at Poverello House we work to enrich the lives and spirits of all who pass our way by stewarding the resources made available to us through Providential and community support.

**Governance:** We have been operating since 1973 and are governed by a Board of Directors, consisting of local volunteer 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. 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.