



Poverello News

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THE VIRTUES OF A CANDY BAR

Reflections about the Poverello House,
from Papa Mike McGarvin's column, July 1993 *Poverello News*

As I make my daily rounds at the Pov, I sometimes carry candy in my pockets. In the old days, candy and cigarettes used to be good bargaining chips to use on drunks who were getting too feisty. Nowadays, most of the candy goes to the kids.

The streets have changed. Every day, we see more and more families. Some of the parents are addicts; others are just poor. But what about the kids? What hope do they have when mom and dad are unable to give them what they need materially or emotionally? What kind of life can it be for a child when he has to live on the mean streets each and every day?

I'll tell you what happens to them. They grow up to be men and women who hate themselves so much that they try to destroy themselves with alcohol, dope and promiscuity. Then they have kids of their own and continue the cycle—unless something intervenes to alter the cycle.

A candy bar doesn't accomplish much except to bring a brief smile into a drab existence. A meal doesn't solve the hunger problem in Fresno. Listening to an addict's pain doesn't erase 40 years of misery. But day by day, little by little, Poverello House brings balm to the souls of the children and adults who call the streets their homes. We believe that love is patient, undramatic, and persevering. In the eternal scheme of things, a candy bar means a lot.



WAYS YOU CAN HELP THIS MONTH

- Attend "View to the Soul: A Tribute to Papa Mike" at Jeffrey Scott Agency on July 5th from 5:30 pm to 9 pm
- Donate t-shirts, baseball caps, disposable razors, canned vegetables, milk, breakfast cereal
- Return the enclosed envelope with your generous monetary donation
- Consider the Poverello House in your estate plan

A TOUGH ACT TO FOLLOW

“To Mike McGarvin, who has helped so many people rise above themselves”
—Dedication at the beginning of *Stranger in the Mirror* by Robert V. Levine

What does it mean, practically speaking, to raise someone up, or to help people rise above themselves? Most of us can think of someone significant in our lives that, in one of our darker moments, saw something in us that we ourselves could not see. That important person might have been a parent, relative, friend, teacher, coach, or even a stranger. Perhaps that person gave us financial help when things were bottoming out; or perhaps a kind word of encouragement, a hug, or a sense of silent, unconditional acceptance of us, which brought us out of the depressive morass in which we languished; or maybe that person had the courage to tell us a hard truth about ourselves that broke through the denial that was destroying us.

It is not an exaggeration to say that for *countless* people from every walk of life—homeless addicts, prostitutes, impoverished families, friends, Poverello volunteers and staff, visitors, or even our newsletter readers—that vital, significant person was Papa Mike McGarvin. When no one else seemed to care, Mike took it upon himself to hand out sandwiches and water to homeless people in Chinatown, and spent endless hours listening to their travails. People who worked at Poverello House over the years can point to times when Mike came by their desks to tell a joke, drop off a little gift, or in some other way let them know that their efforts, and they themselves, were valued and appreciated. So many of those who heard him speak or who read his columns were inspired to take action and go beyond themselves to help someone else.

So how do you fill the void when someone of such great consequence dies? Is it even possible? Here at Poverello House, we have been attempting to answer that question.

When Papa Mike started his mission, he did it all: he prepared the meals and handed them out, he walked the streets talking to and building relationships with wary homeless people, he transported the sick and injured to hospitals and clinics, he gave out clothes and other necessities. The basic building blocks for today’s Poverello House were all there back in 1973. Thanks to thousands of donors and volunteers, Poverello House has simply multiplied what Mike was already doing in the beginning.

The organization has long been identified with Papa Mike, both in the eyes of the homeless and the public. Mike’s seemingly bottomless wellspring of love and humor in response to sorrow, loss, and desperation on the streets helped people emotionally connect with Poverello House. Our aspiration is that Poverello House, the organization, will continue to reflect Papa Mike McGarvin, the founder, each and every day. We will always remember and cherish him, but we honor him by emulating him in all that we do.



FROM THE DESK OF CEO CRUZ AVILA

Since Poverello House started all the way back in 1973, we have offered help to the poor and homeless in our city. Papa Mike, on foot and from his car, would pass out sandwiches and water to the people living in the streets, but he would also talk with them and try to assist them in any way he could. Today Poverello House still carries on the tradition of bringing love, comfort, and tangible assistance to the very poorest people in our community.

When I started as CEO of Poverello House, I made a commitment to experience street outreach so I could have a better understanding of our homeless population. I also wanted to understand what an outreach worker must do to successfully aid a person in transitioning out of homelessness. The times that I went out on the streets with the teams had a profound effect on me as CEO of the Poverello House. In my early days at Poverello, Sergeant Dewey with Fresno Police Department's Homeless Task Force took me on ride-alongs as they located, contacted and helped homeless people. Working with Sergeant Dewey, I saw the shockingly unsanitary and unsafe living conditions in homeless encampments. The eyes of the homeless people we met displayed mistrust and fear, but also traces of hope, as I talked to them about our services. Although I do not do street contacts on a daily basis, Poverello House is part of the HERO Team that does outreach to Fresno's homeless population. The HERO team is made up of several agencies such as Poverello House, Westcare, Turning Point and EOC, and is funded by the City of Fresno. This team goes out seven days a week and provides intensive case management to those they encounter. Their main purpose is to assist chronically homeless people by helping them attain their basic documentation, such as identification cards, and link them to housing programs.

Homeless people often feel forgotten and marginalized. During the times I have done outreach, I came to see that all of them have their own unique stories, their own private hopes and dreams. It's important for us all to remember that a homeless person is someone's mother, father, daughter or son. Just as Papa Mike used to do, we listen to their stories and accept that they, too, are children of God. The staff and I here at Poverello House are dedicated to imparting hope to the homeless by providing them with the physical, emotional and spiritual resources they need to thrive in their community and in society at large.



Supporters of *View to the Soul:*
A Tribute to Papa Mike

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