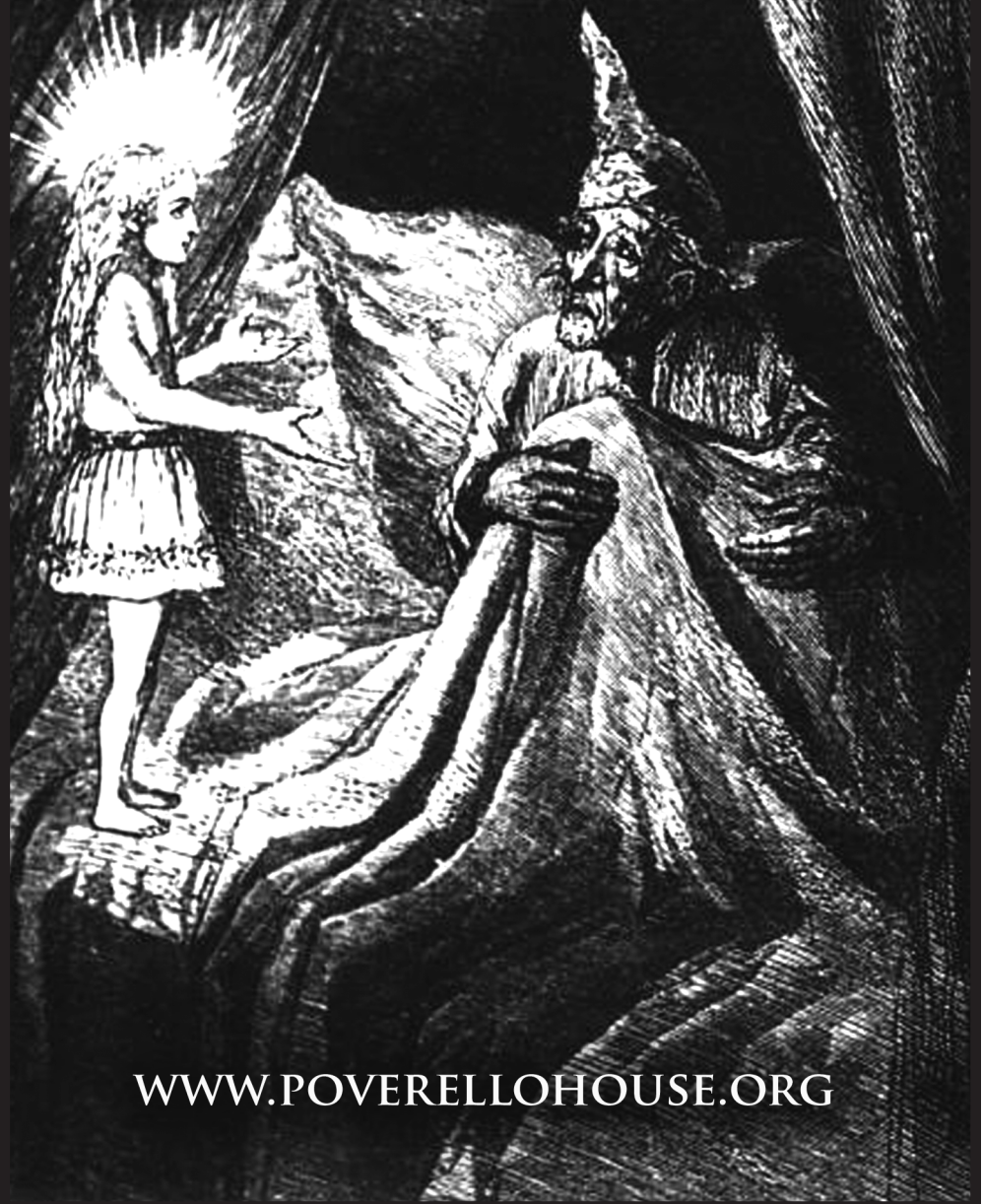


POVERELLO NEWS

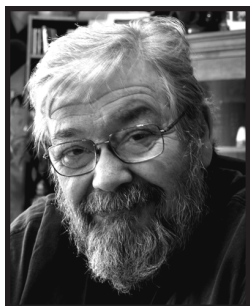
DECEMBER 2016



(559) 498-6988



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Each year in December, I try to think of a story that is Christmas themed. With my health problems, my involvement at Poverello has lessened, so fewer of those little Christmas tales have come my way.

So, as all old men do, I find myself thinking more about the past than the present. Being dry on ideas, I opened up my photo book, *On the Level*, and started looking for some inspiration. I found it on page 145. There it was—a ghost of Christmas past.

The title of the picture in the book is “Lonesome Boy.” This is what I said about it back in 1993, when the book was published: “Here we see a little boy after receiving a present at the Poverello House Christmas party. His four-year-old friend wasn’t with him because the friend was accidentally shot and killed by his mother’s drug-dealing boyfriend.”

Knowing how shaky my memory is today, I’m glad that St. Agnes published the book for us. I might have remembered the picture, but I doubt I would have recalled the story behind the photograph.

Those kind of stories—they are so tragic, and there are so many of them. The pathway to Poverello House is one strewn with the debris of violence, tragedy and deep, soul-burning sadness.

The eyes of this little boy capture so much of that sadness. I look at the picture, and he is frozen in time; I can’t imagine him looking any differently than he did in the photo. In reality, it’s been

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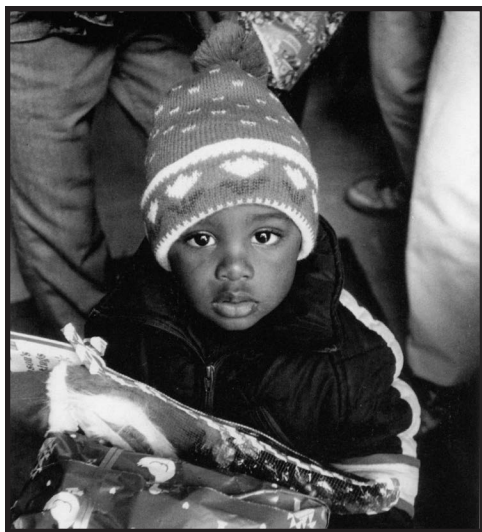
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around three decades since I took that photograph, and if he is still alive, he would probably be in his mid-thirties. Did he make it? Has his adult life been as tragic as his childhood? Has he carved out a decent life, or was he beaten down before he started?

Around here, there are countless Ghosts of Christmas Past, but unlike the one that Scrooge encountered, they are images of people

who briefly came here, whom I photographed, and who passed on into obscurity. Sometimes those ghosts haunt me, as does this image of a little boy who lost his friend at Christmastime.



I'd like to believe that all these Poverello ghosts were positively affected by their brief association with us. I tend to be an optimist, but that better part of my nature is often at war with forty-three years of bitter

experience. The odds were long ago stacked against that little boy.

However, Christmas is about defying the odds. It's about a King being born, not in regal splendor, but amidst the stink and dirty destitution of a stable, his bed a food trough for oxen and sheep. His impoverished birth was the unlikely beginning of a prophecy fulfillment: "The people who walk in darkness shall see a great light; they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined." I dare to still hope that this is what matters at Christmas.

Someday, when I meet the Lord face to face, maybe He'll tell me what happened to all those Poverello people who haunt my Christmases. In the meantime, I have to be content to live by faith, a faith that assures me that our efforts at Christmas are worthwhile and bring joy to otherwise joyless people.

Nike

Memories of Christmas Missteps

As Mike McGarvin stated in his column, sometimes remembering the past is a way of gaining perspective about the present. Here at Poverello House, we certainly have a storehouse of memories, particularly with regard to Christmas. Some of those memories are what you'd expect: feel-good stories about how our Christmas Day meals touched the hearts of so many poor people, the smiling faces of homeless children as Santa handed them presents, the immense generosity of volunteers and donors during the holidays, or the many last-minute "miracle" contributions that made everything come together when resources were thin.

However, there are also some less-than-cheerful memories of Christmas at Poverello. There is something about Christmas that brings out the best, but also the worst, in people. Witness the escalating suicide rate during the Christmas season, or the holiday shopping melees wherein people are injured while struggling to grab something on sale.

Poverello also has tales of how Christmas seemed to bring out the dark side in some folks. Here are but a few stories of Christmas gone awry.

These days, we serve just two meals on Christmas Day, a breakfast and a lunch/dinner meal. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, however, we had three meals. The big meal of the day was lunch. That was the meal attracted the most volunteers and news media, and that generated the largest lines of hungry people. Dinner was more subdued, with few volunteers, and many fewer homeless people in line.

One Christmas about two decades ago, we were serving dinner, and our volunteer Santa was stationed at the exit door, handing out toys. The lunch meal had sapped everyone's energy, and our security staff probably had let their guard down. A large group of teenagers showed up. They burst into the dining room, ran directly to our Santa, knocked him down, and grabbed all the gifts they could fit in their hands. They then fled, adolescent grinchers who ruined Christmas for several children, and certainly for one battered Santa Claus.

A few years before this incident, we were holding one of the first Amici Del Poverello Christmas parties. Parents and children gathered in a line that stretched up the street and around the block.

Inexperienced with crowds of families this large, we were completely unprepared when we started the party. A group of people rushed the door, vying for better positions in



line, which prompted others to do likewise. It was a nightmare scenario, and one girl was almost crushed until a staff member grabbed her and pulled her into the building away from the press of bodies. It took a bullhorn and repeated threats of closing down the party, but we finally recovered control.

Another time, a group of volunteers was making Christmas tamales to serve at a holiday meal. Included in the group were two community service workers. These are people who have committed misdemeanors, and the court has sentenced them to work a certain number of hours at Poverello in lieu of going to jail. Apparently, this man and woman resented having to do anything at all to atone for their offenses. When nobody was looking, they inserted catsup and mustard packets into several tamales, apparently out of spite. When their perfidy was discovered, and when we figured out who had done it, we sent the court a less-than-laudatory report. They never returned after the incident.

At Christmastime, we like to think the best of people, but human nature is such that good is often in conflict with the bad. Here at the Pov, we have to remain vigilant, because we never know when someone will make that choice to give in to his darker nature. We are able to provide a happy, memory-filled Christmas for the poor only because we take a number of precautions to ensure that nothing

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negative mars the celebration. Those precautions have been born of experiences such as the ones described above, and it's safe to say that we have learned from each of these situations, and made changes to prevent them from being repeated. Volunteers often are astounded at how efficiently our operation runs during the holidays, but what they don't know is that four decades of correcting mistakes tends to smooth out a lot of rough edges. There's an old saying we like: "In God's economy, nothing is wasted." As long as we can learn, grow and improve from things that go wrong, a negative experience in the past can be used to help us have a great Christmas in the present.

Donations Needed

Christmas at Poverello House is a wonderful day for homeless and volunteers alike. It's a big production, and in order to pull it off, we need some specific donations.

We still need turkeys! Other food items include seasonal pies, dinner rolls, coffee, sugar and coffee creamer.

We also want to collect as many toys as possible for children. Please make sure that they are new and in original packages (if applicable). These can include stuffed animals, balls, games, action toys, or dolls. If you wrap the toys, please indicate on the package whether it should be given to a boy or a girl, and the approximate age category that would be appropriate (i.e., Boy, ages 6-10).

We also need many donations of warm gloves, scarves, and knit caps. These will be given out to men and women who live on the streets. In general during the winter, we can use as many coats, sweaters and warm socks as possible.

You don't have to be here to participate in Poverello Christmas festivities. Your monetary gift or donation of any of the above-mentioned items will allow you to be a very big part of making a homeless person's Christmas special and memorable. Please visit our website at www.poverellohouse.org for more information or to make a donation. Just click the "Donate Now" button to be directed how to make a secure online contribution.

McGarvin Books

Everyone knows a person who has everything, or doesn't want anything. Such a person might like something really different for Christmas this season, such as one of Mike McGarvin's books.

Every year between November and December, we offer *On the Level*, a collection of Mike's street photos, and *Papa Mike*, his autobiographical history of Poverello House. If you would like either book, give us a call at (559) 498-6988, or fill out the form below and send it with a check, money order, or credit card information. The books are available for \$20 each. Send to:

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

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 #

December Wish List

TURKEYS!!! * Coffee * Dinner rolls * Pumpkin, apple & pecan pies * #10 cans of green beans * New toys

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

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

Poverello House

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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.