

POVERELLO NEWS



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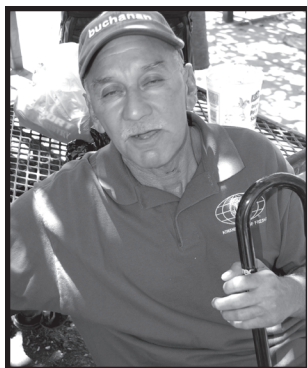




There was an old radio show called *The Passing Parade* that ran from 1937 to 1951. The series centered on true but weird past events, and distinctive or bizarre people throughout history. Seems to me that *The Poverello Parade* would be an apt description of the various people and situations that file by me as I sit at my observation post in the Pov dining room.

For example, there's a fellow I call Yukon Jack. He's a former prospector, which is why I gave him the nickname. He's somewhere close to my age (in other words, OLD), and he maintains an aura of mystery about himself. He says his prospecting was interrupted by being imprisoned under false pretenses for nineteen years. Although he doesn't go into detail, he claims it was all political. After his release, he was hit by a car while riding his bike, which further delayed his return to gold mining.

Yukon is a quiet guy who more or less keeps to himself. Now, in his senior years, he wants to try prospecting again. He says he had a deal lined up with a landowner who agreed to let him prospect on his property for a ten percent cut, but somehow the deal folded. Undaunted, he has put



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together a proposal for an “investment opportunity” to finance a venture on the Rogue River in Oregon.

What I like about him is his crusty uniqueness, the inscrutability surrounding him, and his undaunted spirit. Like so many other people I’ve met at Poverello House, God probably broke the mold after He made Yukon Jack.

As I was doing my *maître d’* duty recently, I was introduced to a family that was struggling through a tragedy. The husband and father had died in the hospital, and the bills started piling up. The mom made the decision to pay rent and forgo the utilities in order to keep their residence, but now the power company was close to cutting off their gas and electricity. After having Poverello staff screen them, I decided to help them out. When I told them I was going to pay part of their PG & E bill, you could see the relief in their faces. Then, their twenty-something son, who looked pretty tough, stunned me with a request. On the verge of tears, he said to me, “Dude, can I give you a hug?”



Papa Mike’s Café, our chef Tito’s brainchild of having a very nice, restaurant-quality meal once a month, has had an impact on at least one person. I came over one night to observe the meal. A woman started crying halfway through, and another woman brought her over to me. Through her tears, she said, “I just wanted to thank you. I’m so happy about the way you treated me tonight.”

Apparently, the good café dinner and the polite Pov residents touched her heart. After becoming homeless, she wasn’t used to being treated like a lady. That night, she slept at Naomi’s House, and her roommate told me that she was still crying the next morning.

Meeting a character like Yukon Jack, getting a hug from a grateful young man who calls me “Dude,” or being thanked by a tearful woman aren’t assets that I can put in the bank. However, they are the kinds of treasures that I bank in my heart, and they make me awfully grateful for this place called Poverello House.

Mike

Health and the Homeless

It is impossible to truly understand homelessness apart from health issues. Both physical and mental health crises play major roles in who becomes homeless, as well as the longevity and attendant misery of one's homeless condition.

One thing that many can't understand is that homelessness does not occur in a vacuum. There are reasons that each and every person at Poverello House is here. Most of the stories involve slow descents into poverty and chaos; others happen more rapidly.

It is popularly believed that economic distress forces people onto the streets. Although poverty is almost always a corollary of homelessness, it is not a sufficient causal explanation; if it was, then homelessness would disappear in a booming economy. For many, economic privation and consequent homelessness are the *end result* of complexities that often involve health-related issues.

Many people have pre-existing health setbacks before they end up on the streets, such as schizophrenia, emphysema, or epilepsy, and, in fact, those pre-existing conditions, especially mental illness, are major contributors to homelessness. Other health troubles might actually be a result of a homeless or addictive life, such as diabetes (common in alcoholics), pneumonia (from exposure to ill people on the streets, exacerbated by harsh winters), severe infections (from injuries left unattended), scabies (common among the homeless), psychosis (from organic brain disorders caused by substance abuse and stress exacerbating existing psychological troubles) or tuberculosis (from close-range exposure to persons with active TB). Whether the issues involve physical or mental health, these problems are dangerous to individuals and those around them. Two recent examples illustrate this.

A woman we'll call Jane is known to be mentally ill. She shows all the signs: unkempt personal appearance, bizarre behavior, and speaking to unseen people in her hallucinations. Although most of the



mentally ill people at Poverello are harmless, one day Jane did something that was horribly alarming. A family had come in to eat at lunchtime. Jane walked up to their table, snatched their infant out of its baby seat, and walked rapidly out.

Fortunately, our security team saw what happened and stopped her. The child was returned, the police were called, and Jane was taken in for an involuntary 72-hour observation. Of course, after the observation, she was returned to the streets, no better for her stay.

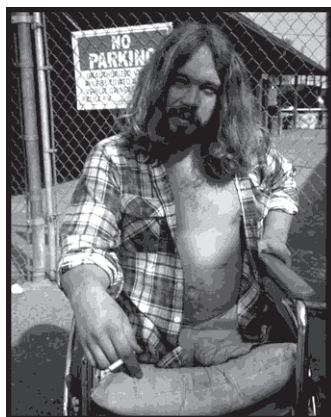
Jose (not his real name) had a young dog, Ginger, to keep him company. He twisted his ankle fairly severely and went to the emergency room. He asked us to keep his dog while he was gone.

Once he was at the hospital, the doctors observed necrosis in his toes. The man is a diabetic, and had neglected himself severely, resulting in the deterioration of the tissue in his extremities. The toes had to be amputated. Jose called us and begged us to continue watching his dog during his prolonged stay.

Unfortunately, because the tissue death continued to progress, unabated by the attempts to save his limb, it later required the amputation of his foot, and finally his leg.

His diabetes was exacerbated by the unhygienic conditions on the streets, poor diet, possibly by ingestion of alcohol, and inattention to his worsening condition. This is not an atypical situation; we've seen it repeated many times over.

The Holy Cross Clinic is a god-send for people such as Jose and Jane. The clinic can monitor medications, treat problems before they become serious, and refer people to specialists to address their specific problems. Health care issues for the homeless are complex and often difficult to treat, but the Clinic is well-suited for this unique kind of care, because they are not only skilled and well-supplied, but also they are right here, easily accessible and free to those who cannot afford to pay. The Clinic and its dedicated staff and volunteers are conspicuous blessings for which we are constantly grateful.



Priceless Letters

One of the biggest rewards we get at Poverello House is the letters people send us. We receive notes from donors, volunteers, and people we have helped in some way. All are touching, some amusing, but all are appreciated.

Charlie is a Vietnam vet who was in our rehab program over a decade ago. He got sober in the program, became involved in A.A., and has remained alcohol-free ever since. He is now a long-haul truck driver, and periodically sends us missives and postcards from various exotic (and not so exotic) places during his travels. He has a great sense of humor, and it's always wonderful to hear, yet again, that he's still sober, still working, and continuing to post his hilariously sardonic observations about life.



Donors often send us thanks for the work we do, which seems ironic, because it's their contributions that make the work possible. Nevertheless, it is gratifying to hear from them, because it lets us know that they are not just writing a check and forgetting, but that they care deeply about the poor and homeless. Here's an example:

Dear Mike,

Just wanted to thank you for all you do for all the homeless people of Fresno. Please don't ever give up on them. Even when things seem hopeless. Our family is blessed because we have each other; our home & food to eat. We help when we can. Our city is blessed to have you & all those workers at the Poverello House. May God bless you & keep you healthy & strong.

The following letter made a few of us choke up:

Dear Poverello House,

I hope that this small amount can help you continue to help the homeless/less fortunate in our community. At one time, several years ago, I was homeless too for a year. But with God's help I made it back on my feet. My heart will ALWAYS go out to those less fortunate because I have been there. May you continue this great service.

And there's this one, humble and poignant:

I think it is very nice of you to send me a letter of thanks every mo. But it is not necessary. Save the paper & stamps for someone else.

Poverello helped me out 40 yrs. ago BIG time.

Then there are the periodic letters from a woman who goes by the moniker, "Sexy." She's one of our favorite correspondents. Here's a sample of one of her letters:

Hello its me Sexy. Hi How are yall doing? Well me I'm OK ... Hi to yall and all the homeless people there I have not 4got about yall because yall have not forgot about every body else... Me and my family and God love yall! ...BLESS YALL! LOVE YALL! THANK YALL! AMEN!

Letters such these make even the worst day here a little more like heaven. Many thanks to all of you who take the time to write to us. It's a greater blessing than you can ever imagine.

February Wish List

Coffee * Coffee creamer * Winter clothing * Copy paper

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 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.



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