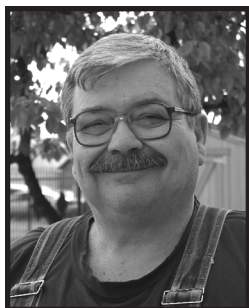


POVERELLO NEWS



JANUARY 2016
(559) 498-6988

www.poverellohouse.org



There's a guy on the streets named Geno. Rumor has it that he used to be a successful lawyer; I don't know if that's true, but if it is, it adds elements of intrigue and tragedy to his situation.

Geno is mentally ill, most likely schizophrenic. He doesn't just talk to people nobody else can see, he *screams* at them at the top of his lungs. This is fairly upsetting to

Mary and me, because he sleeps against the wall that separates our house from the street, and we often are awakened by him in the dead of night. It also angers homeless people trying to sleep near him. Sometimes about 3:00 a.m. we're jolted awake by his unearthly screeching, followed by other homeless people yelling at him to "SHUT THE (expletive deleted) UP!!"

With Geno, though, there's an interesting twist to his madness. There are many church groups that come down to the area to serve food to homeless people and pray with them. I've seen them with Geno on more than one occasion. He'll rant and shriek, but then will calm down and let these church folks lay hands on him and pray. They pray that the demons torturing him will leave, and it always seems to work. Then comes the angle: Geno will seemingly be in his right mind, and tell them he needs a tent, or a sleeping bag, or something else, and they will go out and buy the item for him.

Geno has lost many such items, because when he screams at night, the homeless retaliate for being awakened; and I can't say as I

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

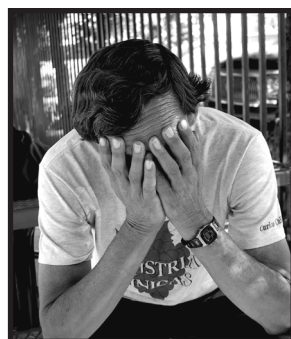
Jeff Negrete, President
John Frye Jr., 1st V.P.
A. Thomas Ferdinand, Jr., 2nd V.P.
Robin Duke, Secretary
Patrick Bradley, Treasurer
Hank Bennett
Paula Capozzi
Tom Cleary
Sister Mary Clennon
James Connelly
Mark Delton
Jim Devaney
Charles Farnsworth

Jim Kinter
Robert Levine
Dennis Major
Carol Maul
Joel Murillo
Tim O'Neil
Ann Owen
John Pardini
Melvin Renge
Mayo P. Ryan
Victor Salazar
Rob Veneski

LIFETIME MEMBERS
Lynn Baker
Elizabeth Fillpot
Anthony Folcarelli
John "Nip" Gallagher
Linda Moradian
Tim Nibler
Sister Ruth Marie Nickerson, CSCD
D. Harvey Oh
Mayo Ryan
Robert H. Scribner
Marvin Smith
Jane Worsley

blame them entirely because when he wakes me up, I'm a little irritable myself. People have burned his tent, thrown water on him and soaked his sleeping bag, or done similar things, and he ends up needing the stuff all over again. So when the church groups come down, he allows himself to have his demons cast out and gets another goodie from them.

It's a fascinating phenomenon. I don't want to say that the church people's beliefs about casting out demons is erroneous, because he obviously calms down when they do it. Maybe there is some spiritual power from the hand of God that is easing his torment, but the fact that he seems to have the presence of mind to pull off a typical street con job makes me wonder.



This question goes to the heart of how we view and treat the poor in our country. In simple terms, there are two extreme, opposite schools of thought. The first is what I'll call the "bootstraps" belief. In this world view, even though poor or homeless people may have had a rough upbringing and are living in terrible environments, the responsibility for their poverty ultimately lies within themselves. They have to make the choice to pull themselves up by their own bootstraps.

The second is diametrically opposed to the first. In this school of thought, the poor are purely victims of circumstances beyond their control, and the responsibility for their betterment lies outside of themselves. They are not, under any circumstances, to be held accountable for their fates, and we need to spend whatever it takes to lift them up and alter their environment.

Of course, beliefs about poverty are not always this polarized; most people's beliefs fall somewhere on a continuum between these two extremes. However, I think it's safe to say that both extremes make the mistake of ignoring reality. In the first, which could be called the extremely conservative view, there is no allowance for the very real fact that toxic environments and horrific experiences can negatively impact a person's free will. The second school, the

(Continued on next page)

(Continued from previous page)

extremely liberal view, denies the poor person any responsibility or free will at all, thus robbing him of the dignity of being a human and making him a simple pawn of his circumstances.

When we see someone like Geno, we see that things are a little more complicated than either school would be comfortable admitting.

It's obvious that Geno is not faking his condition. It's pitiable; his demons, or his fractured mind, torment him incessantly. And yet, he is capable of becoming rational when he needs something; he can "turn off" the ravings, at least for awhile.

What does it all mean? The best I can figure is that both extreme views have some truth to them. Outside forces, such as poverty, mental illness, and abuse, can definitely lessen a person's ability to function. However, as the story about Geno shows, even within those limitations, there often remains the ability to choose a different way of behaving.

What are the implications for helping homeless people? I'm not really sure, but I think I've said this before: we should approach what we do with open hearts but wise caution, and develop a little humility. In truth, poverty is a mystery, and as with all mysteries, God has the ultimate answers. As St. Paul advises, on this earth "we see in a mirror dimly," so let's not tire in doing good; but let's also have a healthy skepticism about our theories of human nature.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mike". The letters are stylized and slanted to the right.

Priorities and Recovery

A complicated issue that often emerges while treating addicts in our residential drug rehabilitation program is family responsibilities. Many of the men have wives or girlfriends as well as children. While they are going through our six month program, with some spending up to a year or more here, their families are usually struggling financially and emotionally as dad tries to reclaim his life. This puts added stress on our residents, and some succumb to the pressure and leave the program early. An early departure usually

doesn't bode well for continued sobriety, especially if the man is court-ordered here.

Family issues are just one factor out of many that can sway a man whose sobriety hangs in the balance. To be clear, when we say his sobriety hangs in the balance, we are saying that his life hangs in the balance, because to use drugs again is to invite the likelihood of death.

One man's situation is illustrative of this. A fellow we'll call Jaime had been in the program for awhile, when his wife, who was also an addict, relapsed. This resulted in her losing custody of their little girl. Jaime was faced with a dilemma: sit by powerlessly and watch as his daughter was thrown into the foster care system, or take action toward resolving the situation. Obviously, resolution would be difficult, as he was court-ordered into our program and had to finish it or go to jail.

Many men in his situation would simply despair, surrender to the emotional distress, and ultimately use drugs again. That's common, because addicts, until they obtain sustained sobriety and develop coping strategies, have only one way of dealing with stress, and that is to obliterate it with drugs. However, with the little sobriety that Jaime had, he realized that he had to be strong for his daughter and do everything in his power to take care of her.

He consulted with Poverello staff, who began making inquiries. As it turned out, WestCare, a drug rehab facility, has a family program for addicted parents and their children. In the end, Jaime was able to obtain custody of his daughter and transfer to WestCare, where they were given housing and child care while he finished his alternative sentencing.

This was a near-miraculous solution to a seemingly impossible problem, but the credit goes to Pov staff for their behind the scenes work in facilitating this transfer, and ultimately to Jaime, for making a commitment to both his sobriety and his daughter.

A useful model to understand addiction is an old-fashioned scale, like the one held up by the statue of Justice. When an addict is actively using, or even in his first, difficult weeks of sobriety, the reasons to continue taking drugs far outweigh the reasons to quit. As he gains sobriety and thus sanity, the scale evens out. If he sticks

(Continued on next page)

(Continued from previous page)

with it long enough, the scale tilts towards the many reasons to stay clean and sober: renewed hope, growing employability, a second chance with his family, and a new sense of self-worth. Jaime apparently stayed sober long enough to tip the scales, and it will make all the difference in the world to him and his daughter in the future.

The Importance of History

A lot of people are familiar with our logo, because it is emblazoned on our trucks and visible in all of our public relations publications, but perhaps not as many people know about its history. The Poverello cross was created early on by a man named Mike Lorenz. Mike Lorenz was a Jesuit volunteer who helped serve sandwiches with us and wanted to do something more. Mike was creative, and we needed a logo for our burgeoning ministry, so he came up with the design that became known as the Poverello cross.

The unique shape of the cross is based on a picture of St. Francis with his arms outstretched, his monk's habit in silhouette. It is symbolic of the Franciscan influence at Poverello House. The multicolored panes are reminiscent of the stained glass of churches, without whose help we never would have survived, and the small cross in the middle is an acknowledgment our Christian underpinnings.

Mike Lorenz's dad, Walter Lorenz, was also talented, and lent his skill to making wooden Poverello crosses, which we would give to volunteers and donors. The wood for those crosses also has a history. Mike McGarvin's Franciscan friend, Brother Kurt, salvaged some 100-year-old pews from St. Boniface in San Francisco. They were thrown out in a remodeling project, and Brother Kurt couldn't bear to see them cast aside. He gave some to Papa Mike, who brought them down to Fresno. Some of the best of them are still used in Poverello's dining room. The ones that were beyond repair were given to Walter, who used the wood to fashion the original Poverello crosses.

Later, Mike McGarvin's foreman at The Fresno Bee took the design in a new direction. Wally Meeks was very talented with

stained glass. For years, he created beautiful stained glass hangings featuring the Poverello cross, using every imaginable color of glass. There are many fortunate volunteers and friends of Poverello who possess these incredible pieces of art.

The Poverello cross has had many incarnations over the years, appearing on tee shirts, hats, jackets, and even a few limited edition drinking steins and a “one-off” cookie cutter! You might also have noticed that the cross appears on the cover of every edition of the Poverello News.

The author Michael Crichton said, “If you don’t know history, then... you are a leaf that doesn’t know it is part of a tree.”

One of the reasons we remind ourselves of Poverello’s history is the tendency of organizations to forget their roots, and in doing so, lose their way. We want to always remember that we are a leaf from the Franciscan tree. At Poverello, our past informs our present and our future plans, and the Poverello cross is a symbolic reminder of that past.



Thanks for Your Help!

Another year, and another great holiday season behind us. The board and staff of Poverello House would like to extend our sincerest thanks to all of you who made it possible with your volunteer labor and your generous donations. The homeless had a wonderfully memorable Thanksgiving and Christmas only because of you, and we are so very grateful for your contributions.

January Wish List

Jackets/sweatshirts * Knit caps * Gloves

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

412 F Street
P.O. Box 12225
Fresno, CA 93777-2225
(559) 498-6988

NON PROFIT
ORGANIZATION
U.S. POSTAGE PAID
FRESNO, CA 93706
PERMIT #2440

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.