



## MY BEST SHOT

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### CARMEL VALLEY HATE CRIMES: IT DIDN'T HAPPEN HERE

Carmel Valley is an unlikely place for an ethnic cleansing raid. Yet, reading the daily papers and listening to the on-air media, this is what we are supposed to think. We are led to believe that the most visible hate crime in recent memory took place in Carmel Valley. It did not.

In fact, the brutal racist attack on migrant workers occurred north of McGonigle Canyon, several miles from Carmel Valley on undeveloped farmland near Evergreen Nursery. The police have arrested seven teens from Rancho Penasquitos.

The arrest in Rancho Penasquitos has not changed anyone's reporting, and in fact the erroneous labeling is escalating. On Monday, one week after the arrest, KPBS advertised an upcoming *These Days* show as a discussion about the "Carmel Valley Hate Crime."

That editors at San Diego's largest daily newspapers and on-air news shows haven't figured out that thousands of acres separate Carmel Valley and Rancho Penasquitos is a mystery only a Metro editor can explain. Carmel Valley is almost twenty years old, yet our geographically-challenged city newspaper still delivers a North County edition into Del Mar and Carmel Valley as if Vista and Fallbrook were right next door.

But, what was once an irritation is now a source of palpable injury. Media tagging has deep impacts on a community's spirit—ask the residents of Rancho Santa Fe who hunkered down during international coverage of a space-based cult mass suicide several years ago.

The powerful negative images that are continuing to be displayed about Carmel Valley hate crimes are bound to effect people who are deciding on new homes, places to locate their businesses or schools for their kids. Like the news about the sad events in Rancho Santa Fe, there's a reeking smugness about bad things happening in affluent communities wafting out of such reporting.

The media fact-lapse regarding Carmel Valley had effects that spread beyond simply Carmel Valley adult sensibilities. During the week long investigation following the attack, our Torrey Pines High School students who live in Solana Beach, Del Mar, Rancho Santa Fe as well as Carmel Valley, lived with the between-the-lines implication that the attackers attended their school.

This is not to suggest that Carmel Valley is free from the marks of youth perpetrated racism. The Jewish Academy, soon to grace the gateway to Carmel Valley, was covered with swastikas in May, and many years ago when I wrote a column for a community newspaper here, we were tackling an elementary school-aged tagging crew.

But, for those of us who have lived in Carmel Valley from the early days, we also remember when our elementary school parents and teachers fed, clothed, and educated the hundreds of migrant children who lived in make-shift camps nestled in the canyons between Carmel Valley and Rancho Penasquitos. This was the atmosphere that most of our High School students grew up in—hardly an incubator for hate crimes against migrant workers.

By 1992, the largest migrant camp, in McGonigle Canyon, had swollen into a ramshackle small town of clap-trap shacks with no plumbing and open fires, a serious problem for Rancho Penasquitos residents because of health and fire hazards. The city of San Diego shut it down soon after the election that year, relocating thousands of legal residents to safe homes.

And so we thought migrant camps were history and the tensions between Rancho Penasquitos neighbors and migrant workers had disappeared with a decent dose of good public policy. Now we know that small camps still exist, this time with the tacit approval of agricultural employers—Not a good thing—but hardly a cause of racial violence.

Anyone who spends time in Rancho Penasquitos knows that it is a remarkably diverse and contented family community. This is a place that does not deserve the stigma, now enjoyed by Carmel Valley, that will come from what is sure to consume several weeks of media attention and analysis.

The young hooded bandits who senselessly beat-up four hispanic elder men, like other juveniles who commit hate crimes, are not products of their community, but of dysfunctional families, likely peppered with heavy doses of drugs and alcohol, issues best left to mental health professionals and the justice system to sort through.

For people in Carmel Valley, it is an unbelievable experience waking up to the morning news and discovering that we live in a hotbed of hate crimes. But we know why. It didn't happen here.