

Ileto family remembers Joseph Ileto, slain 15 years ago

By Grace Wong, *The Inland Valley Daily Bulletin*, August 9, 2014

1) With Mickey Mouse statues, Disney-inspired paintings and even a clock with mouse ears, the Ileto home could easily be the happiest home on earth. But it's been a tough journey for the family to get to this point.

2) "It's just as hard today to go over what happened because it's just as if it happened a week ago or yesterday," said Ismael Ileto, 51, of Chino Hills.

3) Joseph Ileto, Ismael's older brother, died Aug. 10, 1999 after being shot by Buford O. Furrow Jr., who had opened fire on five people at the Jewish Community Center in Granada Hills before encountering Ileto, who was working as a mail carrier in Chatsworth.

4) Ileto, a Filipino-American, was the only one who died but the three children, a teenage camp counselor and receptionist at the Jewish community center suffered mild to serious injuries from the shooting.



Photo: the last picture taken of Joseph at his nephew Kyle's birth at St. Jude in Fullerton, CA.

5) Fifteen years ago, Ismael Ileto was at his job as a U.S. Postal Service delivery man when he got a page from his wife, Deena Ileto, reading "911."

6) "My first thought was that something was wrong with the baby, who was only 5 weeks old," Ismael said. "So I called home and that's when she told me 'Joe got shot. He's dead.' And I'm like, 'What?' And she had to repeat it."

7) When Ismael got home, investigators were already at their house, asking about Joseph's relationships with other people, but Deena Ileto said that "kuya" — Tagalog for "oldest brother" — had no known enemies and always tried to help people around him.

8) It wasn't until later that the family found out Joseph Ileto wasn't even supposed to be working the day he was killed. He was taking over the shift of a coworker who had called in sick.

9) After the inspector left, Ismael drove to Monterey Park, where his mother lived. When she heard the news, she couldn't even cry.

10) "I was in shock," said Lilian Ileto, 78, Joseph and Ismael's mother. "I didn't know my own feelings. We were all in disbelief and I couldn't imagine what happened. I remember thinking 'Oh God, He took my son. Why?' "

11) It wasn't until the family was preparing for Joseph's funeral that they found out the killer was the same person. who was involved in the Jewish Community Center shootings.



Photo: the Iletos family, seated, from left: nephew Kyle, sisters Carmina and Raquel, sister-in-law Deena and mom Lilian. Standing behind the family are, from left, Chris Komai of the Japanese American National Museum, the Hon. Judy Chu, L.A. Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa and Ismael Iletos at the APALC Commemoration Event for Joseph Iletos in August 2005.

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE ASIAN PACIFIC AMERICAN LEGAL CENTER OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

12) Since then, the Iletos family has been active in speaking out against hate crimes, especially those against Asian-Americans.

13) "We had started going to different press conferences and stuff to talk about him, but even at that point, he was still pretty much forgotten or overlooked, and it's given us that impression that it's because as an Asian-American it doesn't place as much importance as if it were someone from a different community," Deena Iletos said.

14) That has only increased the family's resolve to speak out.

15) "We've have multiple instances where he wasn't even mentioned at all," Deena Iletos said. "We were enraged because this is our brother who was shot and killed! So that's why we try to speak out and talk about it all the time. How many more Asian-Americans need to die? And it doesn't matter if you're Asian or Hispanic or black, it was a slap in the face for all races because the reason he was killed was because he was mistaken for an Asian or Hispanic federal worker."

"You shouldn't be embarrassed, you should be *enraged*."

- Ismael Iletos

16) The Iletos have spoken at conferences, schools, community centers and hope to dispel the notion that Asian-Americans are not subject to race-related crimes.

17) "Because of what we did we got hate mail, death threats and we even had to move from the other house to this house," Deena said.

18) Joseph has been honored posthumously by the U.S. Postal Service, which named the post office in Chino Hills after him. The family has also set up a fellowship in his honor through the Asian Pacific American Legal Center to educate and legislate against hate crimes.

19) "What we've noticed, especially for the Asian-Americans who are born here, is that they say that they are Americans and that hate crimes don't pertain to them," Ismael said. "But we have to remind them, 'Yeah, you're Asian-American, but to any non-Asian American, you're still an immigrant that came over.' Just because you don't hear about it happening doesn't mean that it is not occurring."

20) The Iletos said they never thought they would be as active as they are today, because they operated under the impression that a hate crime would never happen to them.

21) "Don't wait until something happens to your loved ones," Ismael said. "That's what we did. We stayed out of trouble and we just depended on other people. But it's a lot harder to stand behind a podium to share the story about losing a loved one. Be outspoken about it and speak up

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