

Survivors mark 10th anniversary of Granada Hills shooting

By Ann M. Simmons, *The Los Angeles Times*, August 11, 2009

1) Not a day goes by that Mindy Finkelstein doesn't pause and remember the terrifying morning 10 years ago when a self-professed white supremacist went on a calculated rampage against Jews and ethnic minorities, killing a man and wounding others.

2) "Every day, it crosses my mind," said Finkelstein, 26, who was shot in the right calf and thigh while working as a camp counselor at the North Valley Jewish Community Center day camp in Granada Hills.

3) But speaking today, 10 years after the incident, Finkelstein said she wants this anniversary to be different.

4) "The anniversaries in the past have always been a little sad," she said. "I used to think negatively. But I'm using this anniversary as more of a hopeful one."

5) It is a sentiment shared by other survivors, relatives and community members impacted by the actions of Buford O. Furrow Jr.

6) Furrow sprayed the lobby of the Jewish Center with bullets, striking Isabelle Shalometh, 68, a grandmother and receptionist at the facility. The rounds also hit Benjamin Kadish, 5; Joshua Stepakoff and James Zidell, both 6; and Finkelstein, who was a 16-year-old high school senior at the time. All survived.

7) Furrow then stole a vehicle at gunpoint and drove to Chatsworth, where he fatally shot Joseph Ileteo, 39, a Filipino American immigrant and postal worker who was substituting on a mail delivery route. Furrow was sentenced to life in prison.

8) Finkelstein and Stepakoff have joined to help push for tighter gun control and stricter legislation against hate crimes, working with groups such as Women Against Gun Violence and the Brady

Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence. "It's gotten to a point, where we can turn (our experience) around to help other people," said Stepakoff, now a high school junior.

9) Ileteo's younger brother Ismael, 46, said he doesn't want his brother to be remembered "just as a hate-crime victim. He and other family members have been participating in forums and training workshops and speaking about the need to inspire others to work against prejudice and violence.

10) "They need to get involved in addressing the hate-crime issue and not just sit back and wait until it affects them personally," said Ileteo, 46.

11) That message is also being echoed by Jewish communities throughout the Los Angeles area.

12) On Monday, about two dozen people gathered under blue canopies on a dirt lot in Santa Clarita, the site of the future Southern California Center for Jewish Living. They embraced, spoke and sang traditional Jewish prayers of thanks, healing and peace as they recalled the day of the shootings.

13) "I was always taught to remember, so we are not condemned to repeat our mistakes," said Joshua Frazin, whose 4-year-old daughter was at the Jewish center's preschool when Furrow went on his rampage. She wasn't hurt.

14) Jerry Wayne, who is expected to direct the new Jewish center, said the tragedy had helped draw the community closer. The North Valley center closed about seven years ago due to lack of financial support, Wayne said.

15) Rabbi Mark Blazer of Santa Clarita's Temple Beth Ami presided over Monday's commemoration, and underscored the community's commitment to building the new center.

16) "Today's event is also a celebration of the future, to recognize what we have to learn from this experience," Blazer said.