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Chief John Rutledge, and their grievance was aired. Rutledge assured the parents that he would seriously look into the matter.

After more investigation by the parents, it was established that The Sanchez Brothers was just a group of their kids who hung out at Charlie's (a recreation and vendor parlor) to shoot pool, and none were Hispanic.

In Rutledge's investigation, inaccurate information about The Sanchez Brothers being a gang or even being attached to any unlawful activities promoted by the Crips or the Latino, as officer Verne Hoyer stated to Bob Keefer, was untrue.

Outside the group of Black parents, other pressures began to mount. Letters to the editors were received, questioning the articles and Keefer's resources' statements.

"I was really shook up," said Irwin H. Noparstak, a white psychiatrist, who had lived in Eugene for the past 17 years.

On April 30, 1987, his following letter to the editor appeared in the RG:

"Racist News"

"I grew up in an all-white neighborhood in Chicago in the 1940's. There were no Latino peoples around. It was very clear that any Black woman seen on the streets was a domestic going to work for the day. And any Black man was dangerous and didn't belong. It was very clear—to our ethnocentric perspective.

It took me years to break down that mentality, and I question the job I have done. Last Sunday (April 12), you printed an inflammatory article about "gangs" in Eugene. That's all it took for me. The next day each Black male I saw was a gang member, dangerous, to be avoided, and probably to be reported. My wonderful white security in Eugene was being threatened.

And then I heard some critical news. People who knew exactly whom the article was written about informed me there were no Black or Latino gangs. Information taken out of context and totally distorted led to reporting what is blatantly racist "news." The Register-Guard reported it. I bought it.

How many others have bought it? It was easy for me to resurrect my prejudices. Am I the only one?

I thought my security was shaken. In reality, it hasn't been, but now the security of young Black and Latino people in this community has been lessened. What hostility and suspicion will they and their families get? The Register-Guard has done a serious disservice to all of us, and I am looking forward to seeing it corrected.

After a series of meetings and minority parents contacting other parents, tension grew. "The other concern I had," stated one parent, "was that if these gangs were trying to settle in our community, how would I combat them when they made an effort to recruit my sons?"

Other questions arrived. If the Crip story was not true, how could a small group of concerned parents approach such a large newspaper industry and demand a retraction? What effect was the Crip article having on each and every police officer on the Eugene police force to make them overly cautious in their dealing with minority youths? How much damage had the article caused, and had the editors for the Register-Guard been aware of the problems Keefer's story was doing?

Such fears were brought to the attention of a small grass-roots organization in Eugene called Clergy and Laity Concerned (CALC). It is a multi-racial and interfaith organization, with a very small staff, which tries to deal with human rights, racial justice, and economic justice. Its motto reads: "We put special emphasis on reaching out to the children and youth."

Under the guidance of Marion Malcolm, a staff person of CALC, a meeting was arranged with the editors and the reporter, and the following Black parents attended: Carla Gray, Jan Oliver, Ed Coleman, Larry Carter, and a couple who wish to remain unidentified.

"It was clear by now," says Noparstak, "that the Register-Guard had realized it had made a boo-boo. But if they were really concerned, they would have done something about it."

Noparstak stated further, "What the Guard was trying to formulate was what to do about Keefer's article, if the reporting was unaccountable. If the article was a mistake, it was a serious mistake."

Noparstak added, "The current thinking was on what to do. To print a

retraction might entail printing a lot of the article, and those people who wanted to get all stirred up will only get stirred up and get polarized. It is very hard for Black adults to get employment in this city. Do you know how rough this is going to make it for the Black youths in schools and the community?"

During the two-hour meeting, which was off limits to any other newspapers, a reasonable understanding was met between the editors and the parents. Doug Bates, the Guard's managing editor, was the first to concede great harm had been caused.

Bates also persuaded the group to work with the Guard in hopefully working out a solution which might be best for the community at large. It was promised that he and his city editor, Kevin Miller, would deal with the situation from there and head on.

In an exclusive interview, Miller admitted he should have been more attentive. "Bells should have gone off," said Miller. "It was a real unsettling thing for me personally."

Miller admitted in his newspaper background he had not dealt much with Blacks or minorities' issues. "Being from Montana, living and working in Corvallis and Eugene, I've just never been in touch with many Black people to know and understand their fears and frustrations," said Miller, "and it won't happen again to me (mistake) for a long time. The most important thing you learn in life is when you make a mistake."

In another brief, but positive, exclusive interview, Tim McCarthy, Community Affairs Director for the Eugene Police Department, defended neither Hoyer's or Keefer's action for creating the suggestion that any of the youth in the city may have membership of ties with any criminal gangs from Southern California.

"Words are one thing when it comes to our youths," says McCarthy. "Their actions are another. I know there is a lesson to be learned here, by all involved."

But it was Bates' interview which might set the precedence for other newspapers to follow when a journalist's article has brought damage to its community. Don't be afraid to admit failure or mistake and take the responsibility for it. A newspaper with such influence as the Register-Guard has taken an historical step due to Doug Bates' editorial, because community conscience is the real life of any newspaper. (Read Doug Bates' editorial in this issue of the Observer.)

The Register-Guard has a staff of fifty-four reporters; all are white.

"We have assigned one reporter to do an in-depth, comprehensive look at the racial climate in this community," says Bates. "There has been enough racial complaint to warrant this action."

"Now it becomes the matter of wait and see," says Jan Oliver and Carla Woods.

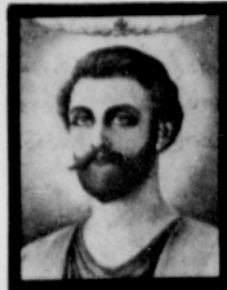
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