

# Guardian Angels

Curtis BELOW  
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I'M NOT a particularly religious man, but I saw angels recently. Guardian Angels.

The sight of their signature red berets and jackets in my Grand Lake neighborhood, though hardly an act of divine intervention, reminded me of how interconnected our communities really are.

As recently reported in the Oakland Tribune, several of the "nicer" (my word, not the Tribune's) neighborhoods in Oakland have recently experienced an increase in crime, particularly the Grand Lake and Montclair neighborhoods.

This led several of businesses in the Grand Lake neighborhood to invite the Guardian Angels to help with security in their shopping district.

Why the increase in crime? The explanation presented to residents of the Grand Lake neighborhood by the Oakland Police Department was that while an increased police presence in East Oakland has been effective in lowering crime rates there, it appears that those committing the crimes have, in a startling example of social evolution, migrated to where the police are not found, namely Grand Lake and Montclair.

Call it my inner conservative, but upon reading these stories, I admittedly first found my mind cluttered with selfish thoughts: "I hope no one steals my car. When my wife comes home late and has to park on the street, will she be safe walking home? I wonder how rusty my old martial arts training really is?"

After a quick realization that six months of martial arts classes in which I broke my own collarbone doesn't exactly constitute self-defense training, I transitioned to a different school of thought, my inner liberal: "What am I doing here fretting a couple of robberies? That's what happens in urban cities. I should just suck it up and deal with it, happy to know that the residents of East Oakland are getting a well-deserved break."

Finally, it dawned upon me that this relocation of criminal activity was a perfect example of how the problems of one community really are the problems of another, even if we do not realize it on the surface.

Let's just take a look at this particular example.

Crime is a problem in East Oakland (and obviously in other Oakland neighborhoods, too). It's a high-profile story on the local television news or in this very newspaper nearly every day. If you are a resident of East Oakland, you worry about crime.

Now, I must admit living in the Grand Lake neighborhood, I don't worry about crime on a daily basis, and I bet neither do many of my neighbors. I'm being honest here, but in my neighborhood I'm much more likely to worry about the availability of parking or the fact that Arizmendi is closed on Sundays than crime.

Well, I'm wrong to think this way, and this has been a great reminder. Crime is a problem for all Oaklanders, regardless of the neighborhood in which it occurs.

We should care about crime because even this little whiff of it in our "nicer" neighborhoods has had a chilling effect. Imagine what a crippling effect it can have when it is more pervasive and violent. No one should have to live like that.

However, it shouldn't take the presence of angels to remind us that the challenges facing other neighborhoods matter to us all.

Curtis Below has lived Oakland's Lake Merritt district for the past four years.

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