

Two-year-old boy missing from rural home

**October 30, 1981
Rancho California
1981-036**

By Kevin Walker

A child is lost. Even at 11:00 p.m. it stirs something inside. I guess it is knowing that it is cold, and dark out, and that it is for a two year old.

The team was activated, and rolled to the Elsinore Sheriff's office. After a short wait there, a deputy led us to Rancho California, and then out into the maze of dirt roads and citrus groves that make up the rural area of Rancho California. Upon arriving at the mobile home where young Frank (Frankie) Shaffer lived, Walt Walker and Larry Roland spoke with the parents. They learned that Frankie was last seen sitting on the steps eating a burrito, and when his mom stepped back out to see how he was doing, he and his dogs (Lady, Happy and Freckles) were gone. The border patrol was called in, but found nothing in the orange grove that is next to the mobile home. Frankie was only wearing blue jeans, t-shirt and tennis shoes, and it was now quite cool out.

After giving the info to the members, everyone broke up into teams of two and headed off to the North of the home to search while the sheriff's explorers searched the nearby orange grove one more time. My teammate Jim Garvey and I walked out about two miles to where a stream runs the majority of the year. It was the type that erodes the banks severely during heavy rains, just right for a little one to fall off of. As we slowly searched along the bank we could hear the eerie sound of a coyote pack howling somewhere out in the darkness. One could not help but think about the recent incident in the San Fernando Valley, when a coyote attacked and killed a young child.

Normally teams stop in the early morning hours for a couple hours of sleep. But not in this case. Everyone continued on through to first light. At about 6:00 a.m. the teams returned to report what they had found. Larry Roland and Craig Beasley reported that they saw one print next to a dirt road approximately one mile north of Frankie's home. After eating a quick sandwich that the sheriff brought for the troops. We headed back over to where the print was found. There, we split up and wandered around through the waist high grass and weeds. But nothing was found. It was now about 9:00. Teams were assigned to work the general area where the print was found. Joe Erickson and I jumped in and rode with Craig Beasley in his Baja Bug. We were assigned to go out into the hills and cover as much ground as possible. Having the Bug really helped in this case as we would drive from one area to another and then search on foot and then move on. By 10:00 we were not alone. Friends neighbors and concerned residents had

joined in on the search. Sierra Madre, China Lake and San Diego had been activated and were rolling. At 11:15 we were called back to base.

The Hemet team had just arrived and was going to join us in a line search (tree to tree) of the orange grove, as no clues had been found to the North. Just as we were preparing to start, a local real estate agent drove up with young Frankie. He was in good shape considering he had been out all night. The man spotted Frankie sitting on a little knoll overlooking a dirt road. After asking Frankie what happened, it was learned that after wandering off with his dogs, and walking around for some time, he just cuddled up with the dogs and slept through the night.

Including RMRU, Hemet, and Citizen volunteers, 62 people participated in the search for 2 year old Frank Shaffer. It was a really good feeling to see all those people working for a common cause. And it was even a better feeling to see Frankie reunited with his parents. That's just what it is all about.

RMRU is a volunteer search and rescue team that covers Riverside County and assists other teams with search and rescue efforts in other counties. Each member purchases their own equipment and takes time off work, without compensation, to participate in search and rescue missions. Team equipment is purchased from contributions from the community. We are a non-profit organization and are funded by [donations](#) from people like you.