

In a Town Called Laredo

By Snake Blocker

“Survival is the fundamental of life. Killing is easy. Keeping bullies off the street is hard....Staying alive is hard.” These are the words from a man now 75 years old. He was a former gang leader and later became a cop for 20 plus years in Texas. He stands 5’ 4” yet he is bigger than life. His name is Jose Luis Munoz, AKA “Gorrupo.” Jose “Gorrupo” Munoz was the guest speaker at the Guide Danse de Rue Savate Seminar in Laredo, Texas hosted by Professor Paul Buitron III.

Gorrupo used to be the leader of a gang out of Laredo, Texas. This gang ruled an area near the local Christian School. They didn’t know what the word “Christian” meant back then, so they called themselves “The Christian Gang.” He laughs about it now. Mr. Munoz says, “The gangs back then were very different from the gangs today. **Today the gangs have no respect, no pride, and no honor.**” Most of the original gangsters (OG) followed a strict set of rules. Mr. Munoz talks about the rules and the way of life for a gangster in his time. “We always dressed sharp. We would never wear baggy clothes or have our hair unkempt. We had pride in the way we looked and the way we represented our gang. Our outfits were always pressed and our hair was always combed. Most gangsters carried knives. It was rare to see a gang member walking around with a gun. We had Rumble Rules. The gangs that were to participate in the rumble would pick a neutral location and we would all agree on the style of fighting allowed. Sometime it was a fair empty-hand fight and sometimes we allowed knife fighting (with specific rules). Rule #1-#4: You can torture the other gang member, but you can’t kill him. No cutting the face. Use ¼ inch – ½ inch of the knife blade and slash up. No cutting the ears. Never cut the belly...an open stomach is too messy. Go for the chest. Rule #5: Never touch a man on the ground. No kicking or attacking if the opponent falls, allow him to get up and continue. No kicking in the balls. No women may attend a rumble. One thing our gang would do is remove our shirts or jackets and wrap it around our left forearm and hand to protect from knife attacks. We would use our left arm for blocking and our right hand for slashing. If anyone broke any of the rules both gangs would go after that person.”

Laredo, Texas, being a border town, will always have its share of trouble. Even back then trouble was always around the corner. Gang members would always pack one or more weapons as a means of survival. Jose Munoz talks about his preparations. Still today he carries a hidden knife under his hat and his pockets carry his other weapons of choice. “When we got a new knife or made a new shank, we would spend days practicing with it. We wanted to familiarize ourselves with our new weapon. You never wanted to show up for a rumble with a weapon you were not familiar with. We would take toilet paper (which was a lot rougher back then) and shove it up our noses and let it hang out 2-

3 inches. Then we would shove it around our teeth and gums. This would offer us some protection from hits. It was sort of like a modern day mouth piece, and if the nose got broken or bleed it would control the bleeding. **We were scared, like anyone else would be, but that was our way of life. We did it to gain respect, and we did it to survive.”**

Today’s gangs are nothing more than a bunch of drug addicts and abused children that have no moral compass. If you joined a gang in the 40s, 50s, and 60s you still had as much rules as being in school or at home. Jose L. Munoz speaks more about the Christian Gang rules. “We would fight a rival gang, knock him down then help him back up after the rumble was over. If it was a clean fair fight, we would shake hands and be friends for life. There was no such thing as “drive-by shootings.” We settled our arguments with a shank, a knife, or a clean-cut fight. No females were allowed to join a gang. The females that join today’s gangs have to do horrible things just to join. Things like having sex or giving “blow jobs” to all the male members. There is no Respect in that. The Christian Gang was a family. We wore dark pants, red suspenders, clean shirts with cufflinks, and a lapel. This identified us as The Christian Gang. We took allot of pride in our appearance. We also wore a hat that carried a shank or a small knife tapped inside. Our gang would go to dances and we would always watch out for each other. If another person bumped me, it was no problem. It could have been an accident. If that person bumped me twice, I knew he was asking for trouble. If anyone in our gang was threatened, he would take his hat off and fold the rim down all around and put it back on. This gesture would let the rest of the gang know that something was going down. We never fought indoors, that was too dangerous for everyone, and too many innocent people might get hurt. We always took it outside. We would have our ladies carry our main knives in case the cops searched us. But if our ladies weren’t around or if they were in the restroom, then we would use the spare knife or shank in our hats. If matters got serious, we knew to point the shank or knife into their chest to puncture the lungs or heart. This was in case it was a life or death situation.”

Because gangs were usually formed by the neighborhood kids, they would control certain areas. Most gangs were small in years past. There was no internet to recruit gang members and because of all the rules, not anyone could join. Today, some gangs boost several thousand members from coast to coast. It’s easy to join a gang today. You don’t need to have pride, honor, respect, or morals. Jose Munoz talks more about his gang. “We had maybe 12-15 members in our gang. But that was all we needed. I might fight another gang member and if it was a draw, we would shake hands in front of both our gangs and everything was settled. No hard feelings and no plans of revenge. Some of the popular knives among gang members were called the Carpet Hook knife. This knife was a nasty one. It was used for opening up someone’s gut. This was more of a dirty way of knife fighting. Our gang stayed away from this knife. My favorite knives were the puncture knives. I carried the Ranger brand knife. This was your basic pocket knife with double blades that folds out from each end. If you held it the right way, you could use one blade for slashing and the other blade pointing away from your wrist. The blade

along the wrist would protect you from another person trying to grab your wrist. If they grab your wrist while you were slashing at them, they would cut up their hand in the process. These were also popular working knives, so if the cops searched us, we would say it's only used at work for skinning. If a gang member used the full blade length to fight with, everyone would join in to beat him up from both sides. Zoot Suits were also very popular among gangsters. I remember in San Francisco, California during World War II, when the military and the Hispanic gangsters started a Riot. The media coined it, "The Zoot Suit Riot."

Jose's nickname, "Gorrupo" was given to him by his gang because of a chicken incident that happened. Often the gang would steal chickens and meet by the river and have a little cook out. One day, Jose stole a chicken, but the gang didn't meet him so he took it home to his mother. She was very excited, because only the upper class could afford fried chickens back then. Jose says, "We were so poor, I didn't even have mash potatoes until I joined the service." When his mother was about to clean the chicken, she called Jose over and yelled at him because the chicken was infested with these tiny mites called, "gorrupos." The gang got a good laugh out of the story and it was his name ever since then.

Gorrupo remembers a fight that happened at a party. "At one particular dance that we attended, we saw two guys that dressed in our gang colors, red suspenders and all. We exchanged words and before you knew it we met them outside and showed them a thing or two. Another time, I opened up one guy that cut my right elbow. He was an independent. He belonged to no gang, so he had no rules, and no respect. Since he followed no rules and wasn't a gang member, I opened him up with a slash to the belly." Mr. Munoz has many memories of times like that. He was only 12 years old when he drifted to the dark side. He and his gang would steal small things like oranges and chickens from the neighbors and get into fights on occasion. But nothing compared to the criminal gangsters of today. He said, "All the gang members respected each other, and they all had similar rules of engagement. No face cuts with the knife and other such rules. We all took pride in what we did. We never did an overhand strike or sucker punch. We would start with the hands low to the side. I told my members that if you permit your anger to control you, it will f- - - you up! I told them to always practice their instinct and always look at the eyes. The eyes will give a person away. We liked to poke under the armpits and try to stomp the opponent's thumb. The worse thing you can do is to feel sorry for defending yourself. Don't feel sorry. Make them feel sorry so they don't mess with you again. Remember, there is allot of ways to skin a cat. Dog tail hair was in and the excitement was always there. I got sliced and I sliced. I got beat up and beat up others. Today, I'm not proud of it, but we did what we felt was necessary at the time. Our territory was between Park and Santa Maria Street. We controlled this area. This was our turf. I would always make sure that if someone attacked me, they would never forget me. I would make them remember me."

Jose "Gorrupo" Munoz was in the Korean War by the time he was 17 years old. He was stationed in Japan at the time. He witness enemy combat first hand. He said, "Allot of

hand-to-hand combat was going on. I had a fixed blade that I took with me in the war. In 1950, I was rifle whipped, beaten up, and left for dead. Then I put the knife in his low back and pushed the blade up into his organs so he wouldn't make a sound. I also got a knife cut across my chest. I bleed for awhile. I remember feeling the pain. It was one of the worst pains I've ever felt in my life. It hurts like crazy and it's hard to hide the pain and fight back the tears. In 1962, Mr. Munoz became the 1st self defense instructor for the Laredo Police Force. Then he became a Detective. Between all his adventures he was shot twice and beat up more times than he can remember. Today at 75 years old, Jose still is in contact with four of his original members. He is older and wiser. And oh, by the way...he now believes in attacking the balls.

(Note: Article was done in 2005 by Snake Blocker. R.I.P. Jose "Gorrupo" Munoz. Jose passed away 21 October 2007. "We'll all miss you.")