



IN MEMORIAM: SERGEANT JOSEPH A. GUZMAN

Sergeant Joseph A. Guzman

Born: April 19, 1945

Entered Department: 1973

Died: August 1, 1998 after 29 years
of service with the county

“**T**he people of Los Angeles County and our entire state owe you a great debt of gratitude for your courage in putting your life on the line each time you were on duty to help ensure that they were safe and secure at home, work and play,” Governor Pete Wilson wrote to Sergeant Guzman upon his retirement with the Los Angeles Sheriff’s Department.

Sergeant Guzman died of cancer at home surrounded by his greatest pride in life – his family – wife Mary Lou and his three children: Michele, Joe Jr., and Cathy. He not only cared greatly for his family, but he cared for others. His life was full of selfless service beginning at church as an altar boy for approximately 12 years, at school where he was an exceptional athlete and elected political officer, and in the Air Force where he served on two tours of duty in the Vietnam War.

Upon his honorable discharge from the military, Guzman began working for the county in the Marshall’s Office and County Clerk’s Office. A short time later, he joined the Sheriff’s Department as a deputy in 1973 and was promoted to a sergeant in 1987, retiring with 25 years of service in the Sheriff’s Department where he was committed to preserving tranquillity in communities throughout the United States by suppressing gang activity.

While at the Sheriff’s Department, Guzman distinguished himself for his knowledge in the area of gangs. His knowledge of gangs became widespread, and he was soon invited to lecture on the subject by law enforcement agencies throughout the United States. Guzman also lectured for the military and FBI at their training facility in Quantico, Va. His vast knowledge of gangs, gang history and gang activity enabled him to develop training modules that are used to this day by the military, other law enforcement agencies, and several Latin American countries.

Too ill to attend his own retirement function on July 31, 1998, Guzman’s son accepted several awards on his

behalf from the East Los Angeles Substation, National Latino Peace Officers Association, Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Homicide Bureau, POPA Federal Credit Union and the Los Angeles County Professional Peace Officers Association. Most notably, Guzman was honored with the rarely bestowed Medal of Excellence/Exemplary Service Award, personally given by Sheriff Sherman Block for his 25 years of diligent service to the citizens of Los Angeles County and the Sheriff’s Department.

In addition, a special scholarship has been set up in his name through the California Gang Investigators Association that will be awarded to select law enforcement officers for gang investigation training purposes.

“Because of the efforts of dedicated individuals who, like you, place the safety and well-being of others above their own, our nation is a better place in which to live. On behalf of all who have benefited from your service, I thank you for a job well done.” – President Clinton.

Guzman will be sorely missed by his family, friends and colleagues. ■

Tribute to Sergeant Joseph A. Guzman

By Sergeant Ron Stallworth

Sergeant Guzman left this world on August 1, 1998, but his legacy to law enforcement, especially in the area of street gangs, remains.

I first met Joe in March 1992 when he came to Salt Lake City to speak at the 2nd Annual Gang Conference. His warmth and friendliness to us "novices" was most impressive. He went out of his way to support what we were trying to do in Salt Lake City without appearing to be condescending to our inexperience. He made us feel as if we were his equals.

I personally am indebted to Joe because he was very giving of his time in terms of allowing me to "pick" his brain for any wisdom he could impart to me as to how I could improve my base of knowledge on the subject and ultimately become a better gang investigator in the process. His support and encouragement were always there; and whenever I needed guidance and direction, Joe was available with a friendly word of advice.

This was especially true when I found myself so immersed in studying the culture of street gangs, in particular through the music, that I felt consumed by the topic to the exclusion of other outside interests. I questioned Joe about this, if he had ever been so consumed and, if so, how he overcame it. The advice he gave me was so profoundly simple that I have never forgotten it: He said that it was easy to get so caught up in the topic of street gangs that everything else in your life gets put on hold because dedication toward making a meaningful difference in the lives of young people can become as addictive as drugs.

He complimented me on my dedication but made it perfectly clear that there was more to life than the study of street gangs. He suggested I spend more time with my family because the gang issue would always be there. He urged me to develop other outside interests as a part of my daily routine. He told me he loved to read; and when I acknowledged the same love, he strongly suggested that I immerse myself in books that had nothing to do with gangs or any topic related to them. In that way, he said, I would remain fresh as to my perspective on the subject and feel rejuvenated when it was time to specifically devote myself to it. This is good advice not only for those in law enforcement but also for everyone involved in the effort to help our youth.

Sergeant Joseph Guzman was a professional colleague who I am proud to say was also my mentor. More importantly, though, he was my friend. He was a special person who made those around him better. In my opinion, Joe was a giant in the law enforcement profession – a "good cop." He will be sorely missed by me and all that were fortunate to have known him. Vaya con Dios, mi amigo!