



Interview with Guro Jason Cruz of the Legacy Martial Arts Studio

By Chrissy Ellin

Legacy Martial Arts Studio is located in the beautiful city of Claremont, CA. Their humble beginnings started from backyards, parks, and in various alleys. Then Legacy Martial Arts Studio was born. January 2010 marks its first anniversary. It was a busy year for everyone; the school has hosted seminars from many different styles and systems. On its Grand Opening, living legend, Grandmaster Richard Bustillo conducted a 2-day seminar, packed with information from Bruce Lee's Jeet Kune Do, Muay Thai, BJJ, and Cacoy Doce Pares. Throughout the year, Legacy has hosted Guro Felix Valencia, Grandmaster Narrie Babao of Babao Arnis, Grandmaster Felix Roiles of Pakamut, Grandmaster Atillo of Balintawak, and Jeremy Lynch of Jeet Kune Do.

Below is an interview with Guro Jason Cruz where he expresses what his Legacy and studio is all about.

Ellin: *It's officially been 1 year since you opened, how does it feel?*

Guro Cruz: It feels great that we were able to survive the 1st year, thanks to our loyal group. The martial arts, isn't a way to wealth for me. It's a way of life that is simple, and rewarding in many ways via health, relationships, discovering more about myself, and expressing myself. Just like an artist with a canvas, I express through the martial arts. I have learned much since opening an official school.

Ellin: *What have you learned?*

Guro Cruz: I have learned that no matter how knowledgeable and competent you are in whatever your craft is. What matters is how well I can transfer the knowledge from person to person effectively. To be an effective instructor is what's most important. When I watch other instructors such as Sifu Richard Bustillo, Sifu Tackett, Sifu Jeremy Lynch, Guro Dan Inosanto, or Guro Valencia teach, my attention is more on how



Guro Jason receiving the IMB emblem on the Grand Opening and Seminar of Legacy with Sifu / Grandmaster Richard Bustillo

articulate their words are and the manner in which they are expressing the art. I learn much more from that than practicing the technique.

Ellin: *When did you start training in martial arts?*

Guro Cruz: My parents say since I could walk, I would imitate martial movements from watching my father and Bruce Lee movies. I literally learned the nunchuks / tabak tayok from slow mo-

tion on a beta tape watching Bruce Lee and Guro Dan Inosanto go at it in the movie "Game of Death." I memorized it, as it goes with all



Jason practicing in the backyard



Young Jason Cruz - Shortest and Smallest of the group at this time he was Assistant Instructor



Teaching trapping to Leo and David at Claremont Memorial Park

the Bruce Lee movies. I know the dialogues by heart.

Ellin: *Why did you open Legacy Martial Arts Studio?*

Guro Cruz: I've taught a small group in my backyard for a few years now. My cousin Chris and I would teach on the driveway or backyard to keep the arts alive. With the downfall of the economy, I lost my business and home. I then had a calling to simplify my life and pursue a passion. My wife and I decided to open Legacy Martial Arts Studio. I dedicated my life to the arts and now teach full-time, and it's not work when I go to teach, I love it. As long as there is willingness to learn, I will be there to do what I love. When I'm not teaching, I continue my own studies in various martial arts while balancing being a father and a husband.

Ellin: *Why did you choose Claremont?*

Guro Cruz: Well, first I was looking to open in West Covina or Rancho Cucamonga. I then discovered there were other Filipino martial arts schools in the area. And out of respect, I didn't open Legacy Martial Arts Studio there. I also sought advice from my elders in Filipino Martial Arts, and they were happy I

didn't do that. Filipino martial arts schools are rare as it is, and it's a small world. I want to support my fellow people and respect them in any way possible. Claremont was ideal since I had already been teaching at Claremont Memorial Park every Saturday morning, which I still do once a month to pay homage to our humble beginnings. I also live in Claremont within walking distance of the school. You can probably catch me jogging or biking to class or walking back home reading a book.

Ellin: *You recently moved to a new location, how do you like it?*

Guro Cruz: I miss the old school, because my family lived there as well. We lived above a Mediterranean Restaurant in a 2-story live/work loft. It was really neat to

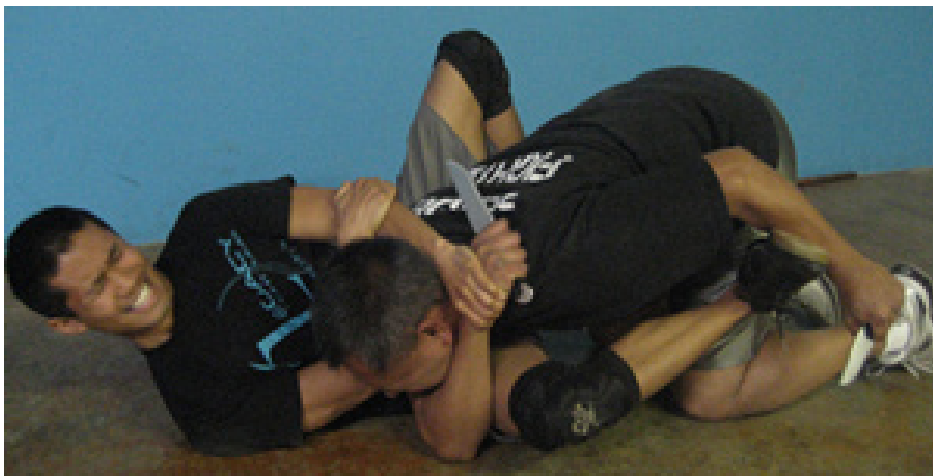
live like that. There would be Jazz Bands, Drum Circles, Guitarist, Belly Dancers just steps away. The convenience was the best part, as all I had to do was go downstairs and teach class. But I'm ready for the new school. This time we acquired an industrial location which is a bit larger. So now we have more room to train. I am always thankful and tell my students to be thankful that we have a place to train. We are fortunate.

Ellin: *What is Submission Kali? Are you creating another system like everyone else?*

Guro Cruz: Submission Kali is my brain-child. It's just a name of the compilation of martial arts we are studying, training, and continuing to expand and evolve. It originated because the grappling



First School located in 100 year old building that was restored. Claremont Packing House



Jason Cruz defending against a double bladed attack with a choke and foot check against Rollie Balao

in Filipino martial arts was so quick. The blade ended any chance of grappling for 20 minutes. When on the ground a Kali fighter would simply take an edged weapon out of the boot or opponent's hip to finish and it's over. We may not have an edged weapon near us at all times and we can't deny the effectiveness of BJJ or Submission Fighting, so we implement that factor in our training with weapons. We train weapon to weapon, grappling, weapon to weaponless, weapon to unknown weapon, no weapon grappling. Nonetheless it's just a name describing what we do. We just produced our first DVDs that show what we teach in our classes. I hope to spread the word of Filipino martial arts to other Filipinos and non-Filipinos, as even in today's day and age, many are unaware of the rich history and effectiveness of the arts from the motherland.

Ellin: *You started a Blog this year, what's your Blog about?*

Guro Cruz: It's a true account of my day to day life; showcasing the true life of a full-time martial artist. I post everything: class video, what I do when I'm not in class teaching, what I'm currently researching, The Legacy Diet, my exercises, my training. At Legacy our Kali isn't merely a martial art,

it's a way of life. It entails Mental, Physical, The Legacy Diet, Martial Arts, and Life Lessons. We have our physical martial art, which for most people enables them to strengthen their mental martial art--such as getting out of bed, working out, cleaning the garage, controlling your temper, etc. Go to www.legacylifeblog.com for more information.

Ellin: *Are you still training? What styles? Future training?*

Guro Cruz: I'm always training. Currently I train with various Filipino martial arts Masters and Jeet Kune Do with WNG out in Redlands. In the future, I plan to attend more morning classes at IMB academy in Torrance with Sifu Richard Bustillo. I would also like to attend regular classes at Inosanto Academy of Martial Arts, and attain a black belt in BJJ as well.

Ellin: *You are a young instructor, who do you go to for guidance?*

Guro Cruz: I try to model off the successful and legendary artists of

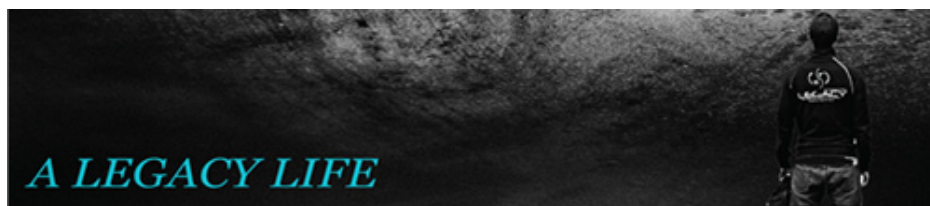
our time. I go to my father for advice daily. He seems to be right almost all the time. My Wife always has our best interest in mind, so I go to her quite often as well. Also Sifu Richard Bustillo is a guiding light and influence to many around the world. His Aloha spirit always seems to make time for people. The people at IMB are the best.

Ellin: *How do you feel about the politics and pride in Filipino martial arts and other martial arts?*

Guro Cruz: I feel it's great to have pride in your group, style, or team; just like sports. I try to steer away from politics. However when I opened this school, I soon discovered that it is inevitable. Although you purposely avoid it, you are the subject of conversations in positive and negative ways. It seems people know all about you. Even though they haven't been to your school or met you, they are already judging you. You can't control other people. Legacy to me is a house for all martial arts. We don't think anyone style is better than the other. At Legacy we respect everyone's truths or paths, and students are encouraged to do the same. I just continue on my path and take the high road.

Ellin: *What styles have you studied?*

Guro Cruz: My Lolo was a boxer, judoka, and knew a double stick



www.legacylifeblog.com



Lolo Ising

style of Arnis, which had no name. Back then I didn't know what value it really had. He demonstrated and taught me different moves, which I used in my school yard days against people who would pick on me. I still teach those same moves today in my classes. My father taught me all of my fundamentals of punching, blocking, parrying, footwork, balance, and power. Even until this day, he will coach me on strategy. I remember he would be doing yard work while I would be practicing my martial arts in the backyard, and my mother cooking sinigang for dinner. He would give me compliments which motivated me to pursue my potential. I would ask him, "Dad do you think I can be fast just like Bruce Lee?" He would say, "Of course you have the potential; you just have to work at it." I was blessed with my father's ability to watch someone and imitate that move in an instant. It's like photographic memory however with the physical body. I use it with martial arts and dancing. Bruce Lee is a cha cha champion. There's a story my father told me once when he attended his first Aikido class. In a one 2-hour session, he had memorized and learned the curriculum of students that have been attending classes for more than 1 year. They even gave him a nickname

for how fast he learned. I believe my daughter inherited it as well, because she can count in 6 languages. I am amazed.



Jason's Uncle, Ray Cruz 6th degree

- Training with the Cruz/Daof Family Art. From Lolo I learned simple direct techniques along with projectiles. My Lolo passed away without me learning more about the history and art. It was a learning lesson in my life. Treasure your current instructors and respect them. I still train with my father every time there's an opportunity.
- Shotokan - Sensei Lester Patilla, Allen Hiroshi, Nick Regalado of Ray Dalke's group. 8 years training. Back then it took awhile. Nowadays I hear it's much faster.
- Kenpo - Mr. Robert Sotomayor. He is very good at sparring. I learned moves from him that I still use today. I remember the school had a list of techniques for each belt, and I could learn each belt's list in one night. Ask him.
- Grandmaster Dong Meyong Pangamot- My teenage years to adulthood with Grandmaster Dong Meyong Pangamot (His Family art of Empty Hand and Weapons). His Art is from Leyte, Philippines where he currently resides. I also had my



first encounter with Doce Pares training with Dong Meyong. I told him I wanted to be just as good as him. He told me, "I will teach you to be better than me." I keep that with me, and pass that same philosophy to my students. Training here changed everything for me on how I looked at martial arts.

- PKADO- Pangamot, Kali, Arnis, Dumog, Olis i- Manoy's backyard training
- Muay Thai - Kru Joe: He also attended Kali

PKADO Grandmaster Dong Meyong of Leyte, Philippines



Jason's Father, A Young Eddie Cruz putting his opponent on his toes with an uppercut

class; however, he was an avid Muay Thai player. He taught me how to generate power with the kicks, since I had a smaller frame than my classmates.

- Valencia Lameco Eskrima - Guro Felix Valencia “Punong Guro Edgar Sulite’s Brawler”
- Jeet Kune Do - Currently training with WNG Tim Tackett, Jeremy Lynch JKD
- Jiujitsu/ Submission Fighting - My cousin Jeff Gadigan.
- And many other martial arts seminar.



Guro Felix Valencia



Training at WNG Group



Guro Jeff Gadigan Jason’s Cousin
doing focus mitt drills

Ellin: *What was the backyard training like?*

Guro Cruz: Hardest most realistic training I have experienced with pain. There were cinder blocks, balance beams, rope training, dirt, power poles, and homemade equipment that hit’s you back. There was a full on stick and blade obstacle course. We would have to climb ropes and trees.

My instructor at the time would have us kick tree trucks with the rough bark. Sparring would be done with no padding, on the dirt. I remember always getting sand In my eyes and still having to defend myself. He would randomly throw us a clipboard, writing pen, towel, belt, stapler, chair, anything for us to improvise and use during our fighting. I try keeping the same backyard quality of teaching at Legacy.

Ellin: *Was your family strict on your continuing martial arts training, since it runs in your family?*

Guro Cruz: There was a time when I didn’t want to attend classes because I wanted to hang out with friends. During my childhood, I was enrolled in so many activities, such as swimming, karate, acting class, boy scouts, dance, drums, guitar, and piano. I really didn’t realize how lucky I was to be learning all these activities until I was older. I have so much to fall back on.

My parents led me in the right direction teaching me to continue my activities, despite obstacles, which is a great attribute they instilled in me.

Ellin: *Why did you choose to primarily teach the Filipino martial arts?*

Guro Cruz: My personal opinion

is that it’s the quickest to be the most lethal. The beauty and effectiveness of the Filipino martial arts and related arts is a challenge and an endless abyss.

Ellin: *Who or what are your biggest influences?*

Guro Cruz: My Father and Mother, Lolo, Bruce Lee, Grandmaster/Sifu Richard Bustillo, Guro Dan Inosanto, Grandmaster Dong Meyong Pangamot, my Uncle Sonny and Uncle Ray, who are both martial artists as well, and Martin Luther King Jr.

Ellin: *What is your favorite martial art?*

Guro Cruz: Well, I would have to say my favorite martial art is martial arts. I don’t have a favorite style per se. I am really influenced by Bruce Lee’s teachings. There is an interview of him on the Pierre Berton Show, where he explains he doesn’t believe in styles anymore or Japanese Way, Chinese Way etc., as humans we only have 2 arms and 2 legs.

To me although there are various

styles in the world as there are colors of skin, we are all humans, so martial arts as a whole is my passion.

Ellin: *What style do you think is the best?*

Guro Cruz: Everyone has something to offer. It's not the style or training method of a specific group, it's the user. No style or system has it all.

Ellin: *How do you feel about competition and tournaments?*

Guro Cruz: I think it's great. At Legacy we don't push competition on anyone. When there is a student that wishes to compete that's totally up to him, and then we train him for it.

Ellin: *On your core training nights, do you guys really go all out?*

Guro Cruz: In class with my core group and with various camps, I go all out with whom I trust. There is a fine line between really fighting and not. For those people that understand this, I train with them. I know when I am about to break someone's arm, and my victim knows it too, so they should tap. If he doesn't tap, I may break his



Chris Cruz (Jason's Cousin) teaching on the driveway with Original Students Leo Cabugos and David Elgarico

arm, if he doesn't respect the move. Because if I let him go, he may injure me, same goes for me. I don't mind tapping. I don't like to work out and practice where I am put in that position. I would just feel so bad, if I had to break someone's arm. There have been broken hands, teeth, muscle tears, and various other injuries; however, nothing too serious at Legacy. What good is it if I get injured in class? I try to stay injury free, in case I would ever need to defend my family.

Ellin: *What do you feel about other Filipino martial arts styles?*

Guro Cruz: I am in awe of the vast amount of knowledge and styles of Filipino martial arts and

to other forms of martial arts of the world. Every time I see something I like, I can't wait to research it and learn whether it's Filipino martial arts or not.

It's funny to me sometimes when people get into the lineage / styles and are all about who they learned from. I learn moves from my 3-year old daughter. She is so unpredictable and non telegraphic. There are uncountable unknown Filipino martial arts that remain in secret.

I could be standing in line at a grocery store, and the person behind me could be a bona-fide Kali practitioner that has used his skills in actual combat. I would never know who he was. He probably didn't have a name for his style or even names for his moves. It's so mysterious and has a certain mystique to it.

Ellin: *How do you best describe your teaching style and what makes your school different?*

Guro Cruz: I travel hours to learn more martial arts to bring back to the school. I host and invite different styles, because most students don't have the luxury of driving hours to learn from different instructors. When I teach, I show all options that were exposed to me. Even though they may not work for me, they may work for someone else. My teaching style to me is Fast, Quick, Straight to the Point, Physical, Mental, and most of all its FUN.

We laugh all the time in class and, at the same time, we are sweating and pushing our bodies to the limit. My goal is to make people believe in themselves and see results in their confidence, health, eating habits, self esteem, martial skill, relationships, work, and attitude. Martial arts is a channel to



Jason warming up the class in the new Legacy Martial Arts Studio location



achieve all that and more. I want everyone to be better than me and go beyond for the next generation. At Legacy there are students that are better than me at different areas of martial arts. I learn from my students as well. Sometimes when I see a student that does something a little different and I like it, we add it to the teaching. For example it's like my father and mother taught majority of what I know in life however, I taught them how to use a DVD player. We promote emptying your cup, not to have an EGO as it hinders the learning.

Ellin: *From what your students say your workouts are pretty intense?*

Guro Cruz: I stress that no matter how good you are, if you are tired, your skills can't be used. I heavily participate during the class. In my core group, students see me bleed, sweat, struggle, get hit, get injured, push the limit, lose and win with them. I am a guiding light, not at all a person to hold in high regard. We are the same I tell my group. I have noticed that from majority of the original Bruce Lee students I have seen, they are all in pretty good physical shape unless they have an illness. I once went to a

morning class at IMB Academy and the warm up had us doing sit ups. For every person there is a 20-count rep. There had to be about 10-12 people there. I witnessed Sifu Richard Bustillo in his sixties participating in the sit ups and counting with us. I was like-Wow. I want to be like that. I want to be a physically and mentally fit instructor.

Ellin: *How do you rank your students? I don't see any belts?*

Guro Cruz: We have levels that certify you know the material. However it has no bearing on ability. Have you ever met someone that is very knowledgeable; however, he's not so good at applying techniques? On the other hand, there are practitioners that are excellent in fighting and actually applying the techniques, and yet can't teach. I believe we need both in this world. That knowledgeable person may influence or teach someone that has better attributes than them, which may occur in giving birth to a great martial artist or champion fighter.

Also we have an unorganized progression. It's so loosely organized, yet it's organized. It's

mainly based on "The Kali Flow". If the practitioner is able to flow through the different ranges seamlessly, it's a good sign. I prefer the Flow versus the technique Memorization.

Sometimes the first-time student will be learning the same lesson as the advanced. We attempt to make the teaching and learning applicable to all levels at the same time, giving a personal prescription for each student. The Kali Warrior Kids class has a belting system.

Ellin: *Tell me about your Kali Warrior's program for Kids?*

Guro Cruz: It's awesome. It was my first time teaching Kali to kids. It's an ongoing effort not to show them dangerous moves at their age. All I have to say is these kids are good. I mean really good. They are way better than my generation.

Ellin: *Who and What kind of people attend Legacy?*

Guro Cruz: People from all walks of life are attending our school; doctors, professors, teachers, businessmen, electricians, pilots, young, old, contractors, experienced martial artists, etc. Our



Madison, Malee, Saif, Dylan, Mikey

Adult group is the largest. Some have 20-30 plus experience in martial arts and put their beginner's cap on to learn our art. To me that is the most admirable thing for someone of so much experience to do. I consider it a complement that some Legacy students have more martial arts experience in years than I and; are attending my class. Also beginners get to train with people that have been training for years as well.

Ellin: *What are your activities or hobbies besides teaching and learning martial arts?*

Guro Cruz: Most important to me is my family. I love to spend time with them and create good memories. That's the good thing about being a full-time martial artist. I am there at breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Every day I can take my daughter to school and pick her up. If she has activities, I can usually attend them with no problem. On my spare time, I play Ukulele which I can just spend hours on. I also play the drums, piano, and guitar once in awhile. I devote time to researching about nature, food, and the earth. I am an Eco-conscious person.

Ellin: *Who would you like to thank?*

Guro Cruz: Thank all the Filipino martial arts practitioners around the world for keeping the arts alive.

To Lolo - *Thank you for teaching me more than martial arts.*

To Grandmaster Richard Bustillo - *Thank you for your wisdom and continuing support in my endeavors.*

To Grandmaster Dong Meyong - *Thank you for introducing to me a whole new way of martial arts training.*

To my Pangamot Cousins - *Jay, Joe, Rick Rogers, Igor, Junni, Chris Cruz, and Jeff Gadigan.*

To Grandmaster Narrie Babao - *Thank you and your family for being so supportive of our school and driving from a far distance to teach us your style. I hope you return again.*

To Guro Felix Valencia - *Thank you for all your teachings and bruises.*

To Lester Patilla - *Thank you for your training and support.*

To Robert Sotomayor - *I learned so much sparring from you. Thanks for the angles.*

To Nick Regalado - *You always treated me with kindness and welcomed me into class for over 5 years.*



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