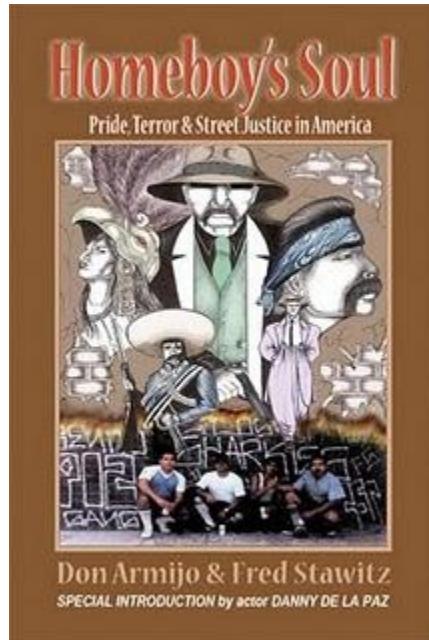


INTERESTING ARTICLES, LINKS AND OTHER MEDIA

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***Homeboy's Soul* by Don Armijo and Fred Stawitz**



The complete title of this recently published autobiography is *Homeboy's Soul: Pride, Terror and Street Justice in America*. As mentioned by Don Armijo and co-writer Fred Stawitz in this book, greedy record company executives and marketing moguls have encouraged young people to identify with the gangster image so it seems essential to make comprehensible the broad scope of this lifestyle, as this book accomplishes.

Don wrote in the book, "God granted me the opportunity to discover for myself that I could control the direction of my life by controlling the choices I made." Don is a former gang *matón* (killer) who now dedicates his life to expanding other people's awareness of life's possibilities. It is unmistakable that Don Armijo's intention in chronicling his life without glamorization is to help others in similar circumstances to reflect about their

predicament. Until page 260, the book recounts the activities and feelings of a gang member who then suddenly finds himself confronted by a message of God's Love.

While growing up in eastern Los Angeles County, Don found himself attracted to "the excitement and sense of power that came with being a *cholo*" in a violent street gang, Pomona's *Los Sharkies Calle Doce* (The Sharkies Twelfth Street). An instance where the involvement of a Superconsciousness in his life was apparent occurred when he tried to sleep after participating in his first *movida* (drive-by hit): "... every time I closed my eyes, I could see those *balazos* [flying bullets] puncturing that *ranfla* [car]. I wondered if we had killed anyone. As hard as I tried to think of something else, anything else, that movie played over and over in my head."

The disingenuous behavior shown by some of Don's homeboys was an indication that his beliefs about mutual esteem among gang members were illusions. After Don dropped out of high school, he served three years in the army.

It was interesting how the drill sergeants were teaching us to be killing machines. They weren't that different from the *veteranos* [older men] who taught homeboys how to pull the trigger in the *barrio* [ghetto], but this time it was in service to America. Go figure!

Don's jobs and a brief marriage never were as important to him as his perceived identity as one of the homeboys of *Calle Doce* motivated by the unifying hatred of *juras* (police). Don would eventually understand that the "violence, threats, and intimidation to try and prove how tough we were" posed only a dead-end solution to lacking "the discipline and motivation to acquire an education, or the other tools necessary to make a successful contribution to the world . . ."

It seemed that Don's likely future was to become a *soldado* (soldier) for the local mafia when there came a potential turning point for his life. When his girlfriend brought him to meet her father during an evening church sermon, the preacher's message of love "was like nothing I had ever experienced before . . . it was God's love embracing the depths of my unworthy soul." When the preacher called out, "Is there anyone here who wants to change?", Don went toward the pulpit. "It felt like a host of angels had surrounded me . . ." He described conflicting emotions and the abrupt self-realization

that his was a tortured soul. Talking to the pastor, he felt an unfamiliar sense of peace.

Don joined the church program helping young men to get away from the gang scene. The pastor told him that "just because we had made some wrong choices in the past, we didn't need to continue making those choices." Tragically, after a couple weeks Don left the program and eventually learned the hard way that his church awakening had only been a first step.

... I'd hoped that now that I'd found the Lord, life would be a bed of roses. I didn't realize that I had only planted the seeds. Without the care and nourishment provided by a commitment to a new way of life, the roses would never bloom.

Don resumed his participation in maintaining the reputation of his gang. He shot dead a rival gang member and was soon apprehended by *juras*. Don accepted a deal with the D.A. to serve twelve years for manslaughter. A decade later, he emerged from incarceration a very different man.

One of the events that resulted in his expanded awareness of God was an instance of psychic phenomena that he experienced his first night in his prison cell. "Lights were out and everything was quiet. *Mi mente* [my mind] hovered in that zone between sleep and awake. I looked around and couldn't believe what I saw." A homeboy whom Don knew to be miles away was standing at the end of his bunk. Don again glimpsed a pivotal moment of his life and he knew this was a "message of hope" from God.

During my term of incarceration, I had the opportunity for some deep soul searching, which solidified my relationship with God, not as a means of escape from my responsibility for the wrongs I suffered upon others, but rather as a guide for the new direction that my life was headed. God's love brought me a greater understanding of myself and how my decisions can impact the lives of others for the good if I so decide.

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