

on the STREET

INTERVIEW WITH DETECTIVE LARRY RAEI

Sacramento Sheriff's Department Gang Unit

by Deputy Nancy Henrickson

During my ten years as a law enforcement officer I have worked for Yolo County and Sacramento County, in the jail, on the SWAT team and in the Narcotics Task Force. I spent five years in the Broderick and Bryte Hispanic communities as a patrolman. I'm primarily concentrating now on Hispanic and Filipino gangs. I also investigate Skinheads and various other white power groups.

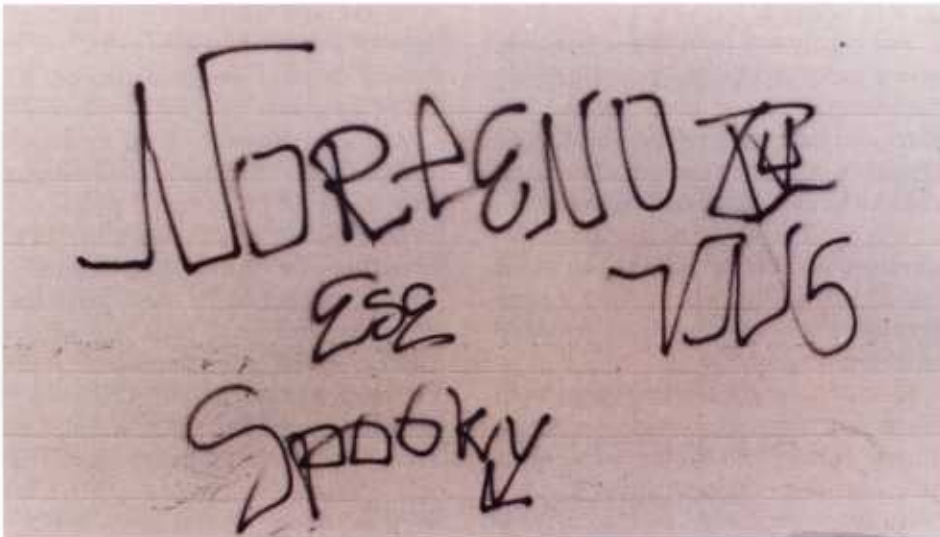
A history of the Hispanic gangs indicates that they started many years ago. The intent of these gangs was more social than criminal. They were just groups of guys all living in the same neighborhood claiming a certain area as their "turf." Originally the two main gangs here in Sacramento were the Gonzales and Peralez families. The Gonzales family, known on the street as "G-Force," is now comprised of many members in their early and late thirties.

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Vario Centro Sacra, an Hispanic youth gang ranging from central Sacramento to south Sacramento.





The VNS in the lower right corner means Varrio North Sacto. Norteno X4 indicates it is a northern Hispanic youth gang. The X represents the roman numeral 10. The name "Spooky" is probably the moniker of the person who wrote this graffiti.



"Puro" is Spanish for "pure." The BFB means Barrio Franklin Boys, a South Sacto Hispanic youth gang. The word Barrio is the true spelling for the Spanish word for neighborhood but has been changed to Varrio by many groups. The meaning of the graffiti is "Pure Barrio Franklin Boys."

They've been in and out of prison several times. G-Force rivals are the Peralez family, or "Specter," as they call themselves. These two gangs have been involved in drive-by shootings within just the last six months.

Another older gang is Varrio Centro. They claim Zapata Park and the central area of Sacramento as their turf. Varrio Diamonds was named after Diamond Lumber, a significant landmark in that locality. Varrio Centro Sacra is a newer offshoot of Varrio Centro which is comprised of southern Mexicans who claim 47th Street as their territory.

The division between northern and southern gangs is very pronounced in California, primarily due to the prison system. The two predominant gangs in the system are the Nuestra Familia and the Mexican Mafia. Nuestra Familia, also known as La Familia or The Structure, is a northern gang. Its southern counterpart is the Mexican Mafia, often called EME by its members. The Nuestra Familia were dressed in red while in prison; Mexican Mafia members wore blue. This color system had nothing to do with the later use of these particular colors by black street gangs. Nuestra Familia members claimed the number 14, N being the fourteenth letter of the alphabet, while the Mexican Mafia claimed 13 for M. The geographical dividing line between the northern and southern gangs has generally been considered to be in the Fresno area.

Until the present we have not seen much activity from the southern gangs here in Sacramento. However, with all the parolees out on the streets, and the kids imitating them and flying their blue rags, we are beginning to see an increase in southern gang activity. This of course means more street violence as these rival factions clash. Some Hispanic gangs are now aligning with various black gangs, usually from the same neighborhood. Varrio Diamonds is affiliating with the Flat Dog Crips to gain more neighborhood protection, just as Varrio Gardens is doing with the 29th Street Crips.

There are also females in these gangs sworn in as 100% gang members. They are asked to carry the guns, run narcotics, procure weapons and commit many of the crimes. They even participate in jumpin' new members. "Jumping" refers to the initiation ceremonies where new members have to fight with three or four older members to get into the gang. The new guy has to fight until he is beaten down to the ground and can't get up. Usually a prospective member is allowed to "kick it" with the gang for a while before his or her initiation. This means the new guy is allowed to drink beer and party with the gang until they feel comfortable and trust him. Some prospective gang members are forced to have sex with other members. Some females have to fight it out with other females who are already in the gang. Every gang is a little different but they all have an initiation process.

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As mentioned before, the gangs were loose neighborhood groups emphasizing social contact, but that has changed somewhat. Local Hispanic gangs here are not usually involved in heavy narcotics traffic, although marijuana and alcohol is usually around. What has really kept them cohesive now as in the past is that they hang around together to "protect" their neighborhoods. They're very much into the machismo philosophy. They have armed themselves with deadly weapons and are into violence — a lot of violence.

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The higher echelons of the Hispanic prison gangs are involved with narcotic trafficking. They've been around for years and have the connections in Old Mexico where they can get cheap narcotics. The hardcore prison parolees are heavily into heroin use but not the street level youths here in Sacramento. It's a good bet that they will get into it later because it's a way for them to make money very quickly.

Most of these local street gangs have pretty much stuck to their own neighborhoods. Lately, however, we've seen gang graffiti appearing in areas that are miles from the gang's traditional turf. We've received calls from as far away as South Lake Tahoe advising us of the appearance of graffiti from gangs here in

Sacramento. Just as black street gangs have brought their sets into the Sacramento area from Los Angeles, we are seeing Hispanic gangs moving out into other areas and claiming new territory.

A typical Hispanic gang member is easy to spot. He'll have close-cropped hair, loose or baggy khaki pants and a Pendleton or flannel shirt, no jacket even though it's only 20 degrees outside. They're beginning to move away from the basic attire and many are wearing Raiders sports jackets and other sports clothing. Raiders gear has become increasingly popular due to the tough-guy image the Raiders portray in football, and because their colors — black and grey or silver — are considered intimidating.

Some gang members still wear the old Derby jackets, black or dark blue with

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their family name printed on the back of the jacket. Some members wear their monikers on their jackets or sweatshirts, and either 13 or 14 depending on whether they're north or south.

Actually, Hispanic gangs introduced the use of monikers, or street names, and the black gangs adopted the practice. "Snoopy," "Sad Eyes," "Pelon," "Flaco," "Sleepy," "Oso": these monikers usually based on personal characteristics follow the members through life. They appear on clothing, hats, even painted on their cars. All gang members are very proud of their monikers.

The recent upsurge in gang members wearing legitimate sports apparel has caused numerous thefts of personal attire. Sometimes kids who aren't gang members but whose parents have spent \$110 on a new down Raiders jacket find themselves "jacked" by gang members or rival gangs, and their jackets, hats or expensive tennis shoes are stolen right off their bodies. This is generally pretty expensive clothing and some gangs will steal from other kids to get it.

Street crime starts for some youths as early as 10 years of age. We've arrested kids only 13 years old with loaded .357 Magnums in their possession, and six to eight inch daggers on them. And they're ready to use these weapons if they're challenged. You're talking about a young group of kids not afraid of doing something violent to prove their manhood. They're really involved in the machismo

thing. To "make their bones" (to be accepted into the gang) they have to go out and get into a fight, whether it's helping the homeboys in their neighborhood or getting into a confrontation with a rival gang. Most of these confrontations revolve around someone "disrespecting" their school, their neighborhood or their girlfriend. These kids feel they have to prove that someone just can't walk up and disrespect them in any way.

The parents of many gang members are usually hard-working, stable people. Many are farm workers, many are blue collar workers who have held steady jobs with employers such as Campbell's Soup, the Army Depot and Proctor and Gamble. They've lived in the same house for twenty or thirty years but they don't have enough money to move out of deteriorating neighborhoods. Therefore, several generations of kids have grown up together, attended the same schools and churches. This tends to insulate them from other people and other ways of life. They pretty much stick close to their neighborhoods for most activities. Cultural factors, such as language and Hispanic customs, also contribute to that neighborhood interaction.

As time passes, we are going to have a problem containing the growth here in Sacramento, not just of the Hispanic gangs but of all the ethnic gangs. Some kids see these activities as just something

cool to do until they get too far into it and realize it's more than just wearing the clothes and associating with tough guys. But kids who stick around long enough with other gang members will invariably become involved in some kind of criminal activity: burglary, robbery, vandalism, narcotics dealing or use of narcotics. Many of the young girls will become victims of sexual assault.

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For a small percentage of parents it is difficult to realize their kids are getting involved in this stuff. After all, they're stable state or county workers, have middle or upper middle class incomes and values, and they live in better than average communities and homes. They see their kids dressing in what they think is a pretty nice style, because they know how much they paid to buy the clothes. They're certainly not cheap. Some of these kids are going to Jesuit High School and other private or religious schools. The parents, when they find out that their child is involved in a gang, are just totally surprised. They can't believe it. We've had kids that were arrested for attempted murder that were members of the church choir.

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