

FMA

Informative

Propagating the Filipino Martial Arts and the Culture of the Philippines

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Villabrille-Largusa Kali System

*The Villabrille-Largusa Kali System is the Filipino Martial Art
Founded by the late Great Grandmaster Floro Villabrille and late Grandmaster Ben Largusa.*



Grandmaster Floro Villabrille
(1912 - 1992)



Grandmaster Ben Largusa
(1926 - 2010)

Grandmaster Floro Villabrille: *The Founder and Grand Old Man of Kali*

Grandmaster Ben Largusa: *FMA Legend and Kali Grandmaster*



Visit the official website of the Villabrille-Largusa Kali System and the Kali Association of America
www.villabrillelargsusakali.com

Each issue features practitioners of martial arts and other internal arts, other features include historical, theoretical and technical articles; reflections, Filipino martial arts, healing arts, the culture of the Philippines and other related subjects.

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The FMA Informative is proud to bring some information on Grandmaster Floro Villabrille and Grandmaster Ben Largusa, legends as practitioners of the Filipino martial arts and founders in establishing the Kali Association of America.

The FMA Informative was very lucky in having Ms Zena Sultana Babao write the contents of this issue. With that said first the FMA Informative would like to tell you about the author of this issue.



Zena Sultana Babao has two passions in life: writing and speaking. Assertive, outspoken and dynamic - she is not afraid to write or talk about controversial issues others would not dare touch. Though she takes no flak from anyone, she is compassionate and caring, and champions the poor and the downtrodden.

She has been a writer and speaker even before coming to the United States. While still in the Philippines, she was a reporter for the Naga Times in her hometown in the Bicol Region; a correspondent with the Philippine News Service; and a talk show host of the award-winning commentary program "The Four Invisibles" over Station DZDR in Naga City.

Her hard-hitting no-nonsense brand of journalism did not sit well with the national government at that time, so she had to leave the Philippines for America, the land of the free, where she is continuing her writing and speaking career.

Currently, she writes the weekly column "Light & Shadows" for the Asian Journal, an award-winning newspaper in San Diego (www.asianjournalusa.com); writes feature articles for the Elvis International Magazine (www.ElvisTheMagazine.com), an internationally-acclaimed magazine officially licensed by the Elvis Presley Enterprises; as well as two other international magazines: the Lady Luck Music (www.ladyluckmusic.com), in Montreal, Quebec, Canada and the ETA Zone (www.etazone.com) here in the USA.

Zena is hard at work with the first of three books which she hopes will come out next year.

On the speaking side, she is a member of two Toastmasters clubs with Toastmasters International (TI), the foremost educational organization in the world that trains people in leadership and public speaking. She has been awarded the title of Distinguished Toastmaster (DTM), the highest educational achievement awarded to Toastmaster members.



So with this said lets take a trip down the lane of history and learn about Grandmaster Floro Villabrille and Grandmaster Ben Largusa, both have passed away, but have left so much for others to learn.

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If any FMA martial arts group or martial artist from any FMA martial arts style would wish for Zena Sultana Babao to write about them/him/her, you could contact her by Email: zenasultana@hotmail.com, or by Facebook, or by calling her on her cell number: (619) 316-5742.



Grandmaster Floro Villabrille

The Founder and Grand Old Man of KALI

Kali was a closely guarded secret that was passed on from teacher to student and from father to son. Only the students deemed loyal were taught the art and it was never taught to non-Filipinos. Today the art is practiced by thousands around the world. The perpetuation of this treasured part of the Philippine heritage is continuing.

Kali is being taught all over by designated Kali guros (instructors) in Hawaii, the mainland U.S., and in some countries as well.

The Grand Old Man's Last Challenge

The Champion stick-fighter lunged at his young challenger with a fake jab. The challenger blinked his eye, and quick as lightning, the champion's stick hit him on the mouth. It was no surprise to the champion how his wooden garrote easily found its mark. After all, he is a veteran of numerous stick-fighting death matches in the past.

They continued circling each other. Another fake jab ... another blink from the young man ... and this time he got a bloody nose. Cheers from the crowd rose up as blood covered the lower half of the challenger's face. The betting multiplied in favor of the champion. The champion realized that the young man's purpose for fighting him was to be in the same ring with him, plus the thousand-to-one chance of claiming his title.

As the challenger tried to regain his composure, the older man noticed the young man's

shaking legs. So instead of blocking, the champion lowered his stick and just let the blows swish by.

Looking at them, the crowd thought of a charging but ineffective bull against a graceful and skilled matador. The young man thought he had seen an opening, his sure entrance to fame. Through the deafening roar of the crowd, the young man felt a sickening thud to his ear. He was down! Like in a bullfight, there was a dramatic pause before *the coup de grace*.

The crowd waited for the killing blow. Silence on the part of the crowd. Hesitation on the part of the champion! But the killing blow never came. Feeling sympathy for his young opponent, the champion decided to spare his life. There were many of those who died by his hands in so many fights-to-the-death matches which were legal during that time.

People all over Hawaii adulated the older man's name - Floro Villabrille, Undefeated Champion. This title remained unchanged, for after that last challenge in 1948, stick fights-to-the-death was permanently banned in Hawaii. The subsequent stick fights were for martial arts purposes only.

Birth and Early Years

Born February 18, 1912 in Daan-Bantayan, Cebu (Philippines), Floro Villabrille started learning his fighting skills at an early age. He studied and mastered Cebuano Eskrima from his uncles, and also learned Kung-Fu from his grandfather, the Hon. Mr. Yap

from Macau. At 17, he had several brushes with death on his way to becoming the "Eskrima Champion of Cebu."

He searched the nearby islands for more knowledge of the fighting arts. He found what he was looking for in Gandara, Samar - something he would never forget as long as he lived.

On the way to Gandara, he and his training partner, Felicimo Dizon, were stopped by the local police. They were told that Gandara is a place that held "grim consequences for strangers." Though warned not to continue, they did, and they were daring and lucky enough to convince the Chieftain of Gandara about their desire to learn a superior fighting art.

After answering questions and undergoing initiations, they were permitted to start training. Impressed of their desire to learn, the chieftain finally assigned his daughter to become their teacher. Villabrille and Dizon were assigned under the tutelage of a young lady who was blind since birth. The young Eskrimador's ego was hurt but he didn't voice it out.

Villabrille's earlier antagonism changed to respect when during their long sessions, no matter how much he tried hitting his lady teacher, his teacher could always sense from what direction or angle the attack would come. Being in darkness all her life, she had developed an extraordinary sixth sense similar to that of the bats.

Soon the two years allotted to them was over, but it was so heartbreaking for them to leave. But they had to part ways and continue their search for more knowledge.

Dizon eventually became a master of the close-quarter fighting

system known as "Serrada Eskrima", while Villabrille became the Founder and Grandmaster of the "Villabrille-Largusa System of Kali." Villabrille revived the lost art by combining the eight separate aspects of the Filipino martial arts (Arnis, Eskrima, Kuntao, Silat, Sikaran, Pagkalikali, Kalirungan and Kaliradman) into one, and decided to name it "KALI."

Kali had been somewhat of a "lost art" during all the years, and some Filipino martial artists claimed that Kali is not the real ancestral martial arts of the Philippines. It was probably because the art was hidden from the public for a very long time, and no records about it exist. Or maybe because the practice of this art was banned by the Spaniards, though some Filipinos continued to practice it secretly, and even incorporated some moves into the native dances at that time.

Trial by Fire

Once while passing Batangas province, Villabrille was challenged by two balisong experts. Although the fight was two against one, it was sanctioned and authorized by the town leaders. At that time, fight to the death was not yet illegal. The fight ended with both the balisong fighters dead - but not at Villabrille's hands - because they ended up stabbing each other.

Villabrille accepted invitations to fight not only in the Philippines, but also Australia and China. He was never defeated in any of these fights. Although he was the grandson of a Chinese Kung-fu expert, he classified his fights in China as boring and uninteresting. Maybe the fights were too easy for him! He was then working as a ship's seaman so he

was able to visit other countries.

He was in Australia when he received a telegram from his friend Felicimo Dizon that the "Stick-Fighting Champion of Mindanao", a Moro Datu, wanted to test his skill. The public match was held at the Alonan Park in Manila during the Fourth of July celebration in 1933, and was witnessed by the then American Governor General Frank Murphy.

After each fighter signed their names to the waiver of liability, they took turns to demonstrate their particular forms or sayaws. The Moro Datu, an expert in Silat-Kuntao, could easily hop from one spot to another just like a kangaroo. Villabrille's trademark of fake jabbing did not work well during the first three rounds. Every time he would attack, the Moro Datu would just hop around. And like a boomerang, the Datu would counter with a series of quick blows.

Acute at observation, Villabrille saw the Datu's strategy, and he initiated a non-stop exchange of blows. It was on the third round when Villabrille felt he was hit on the head. However, at the same time his bahi stick struck the back of the neck of his opponent. The fight ended when the Datu fell down dead!

Later on, Governor General Frank Murphy awarded Villabrille the title of "National Grand Sports Competition Martial Arts Division Eskrima Grand Champion."

Fearful of revenge by the Datu's family, Villabrille was urged by his own family to leave the country. Though reluctant, the new "Philippine Grand Champion of Eskrima" stowed away aboard an ocean-going steam liner bound for Hawaii.

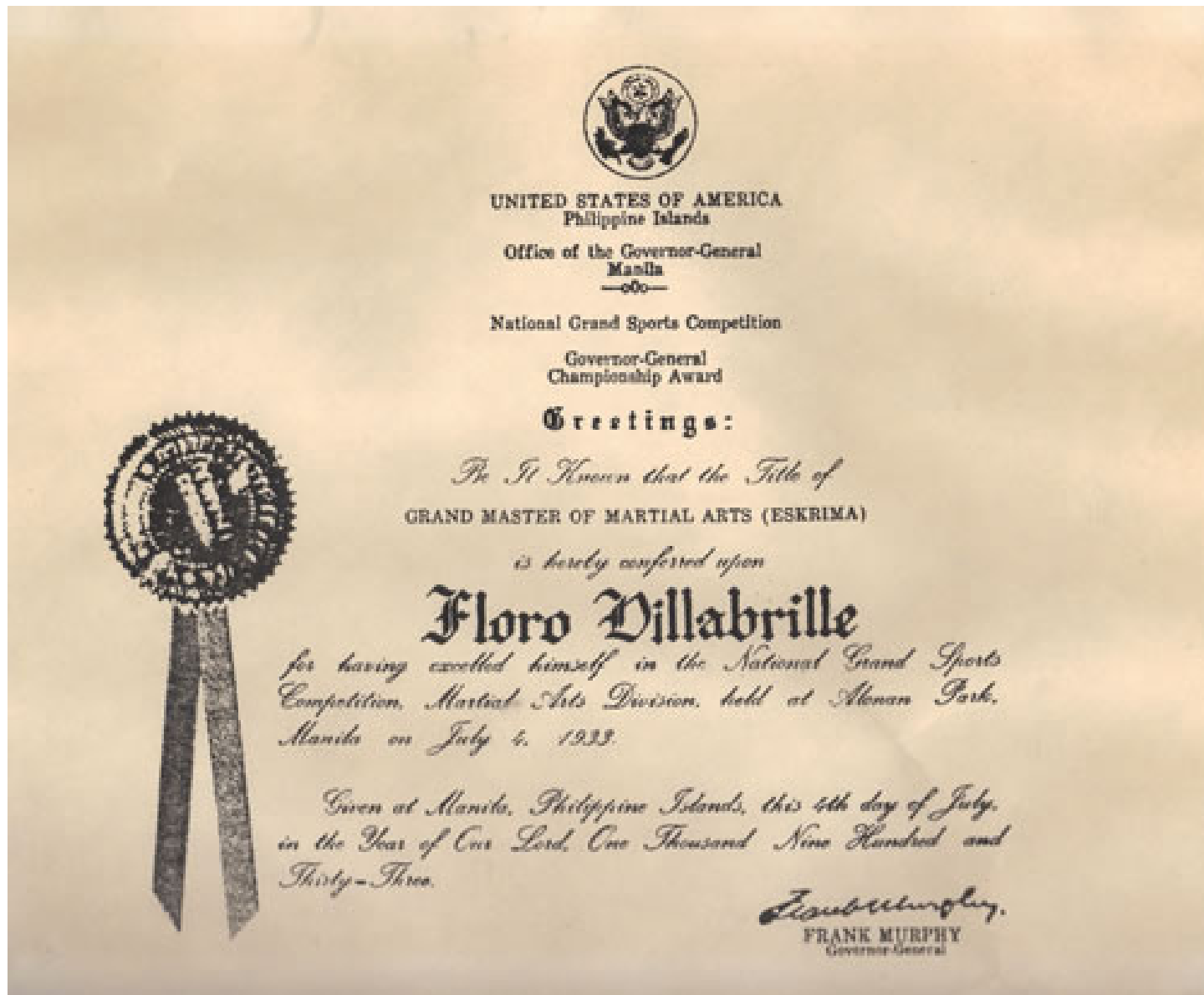
What is KALI?

KALI is an ancient but still existing martial arts system which originated in Indonesia and practiced in the Philippines even before the Spaniards came. It is so effective in combat that during Spain's conquest of the Philippines some Southern Philippine tribes successfully resisted the armored might of the Spaniards for nearly four centuries.

Kali is a system so unique that it is the source of all Eskrima, Arnis and other styles of the Philippine Martial Arts as we know now. It could also be the only martial arts system in the Philippines where there is one Grandmaster and one Master at any given time. In other systems it is a common practice that there are several Masters, Grandmasters, and even Great Grandmasters at the same time.

The very first Grandmaster of Kali as we know now is the "Grand Old Man of Kali" - Floro Villabrille. Villabrille was the most revered and feared fighter and champion of numerous stick-fighting death matches in the Philippines and in Hawaii.

From the time of the Spanish invasion to a few decades ago,



KALI's New Home

A kind of welcoming reception never before afforded any Filipino at that time awaited young Floro Villabrille's arrival in Oahu, Hawaii. Two policemen escorted him from the ship and straight to the city jail! He was incarcerated for the next couple of weeks, and then was released to the Filipino community in Waipahu. He started working in the lumber yard, and later on, with the Kauai County Public Works Department.

His fighting career was not over yet. Like in Wild West movies, his reputation as a fighter arrived ahead of him, and a score

of fighting experts were literally dying to test his skills. Being young and boyish-looking, the old eskrima experts taunted him mercilessly: *"Hey boy! I heard you were good in sticks back in P.I. I would like to see what you can do."*

"No, manong" was Villabrille's constant reply. *"I am not really good. I was just lucky in my fights."*

One day, Villabrille had an unavoidable showdown with one of his most persistent challengers, and the fight was on! The gathering was like a Filipino fiesta - because it was the first time that the

Filipinos in Hawaii would witness the Philippine Champion in action.

Villabrille's opponent was twice his age, but unlike old Eskrimadors who mellow with age like good wine his opponent did not improve with age. Despite his youth, Villabrille had mellowed early, and although he was just in his twenties, he was what you call "vintaged." He did not kill his opponent, but with a bone-shattering blow to his opponent's shoulder, the manong was never able to hold a stick again.

With Villabrille's victory, the Visayan sector found a hero who could trounce the Ilokano sec-

tor's tough *Sinait Gang*. But being alone in a strange land, Villabrille avoided street fights or confrontations. Anybody who wanted to challenge him and his skills had to fight him inside the ring, like boxers do.

Villabrille was exceptionally strong. He possessed iron-like arms and vise-like fingers. While he was still courting Trining (who later became his wife), he happened to pass by some kababayans working in the coconut plantation.

At the time, the Philippine method of husking coconuts was to drive the nut into a metal stake buried halfway in the ground. By twisting the coconut downwards against the metal stake, the husk would come off. This has to be repeated three times to husk one coconut. Villabrille was challenged by one of the men as to who could husk more coconuts at a given period of time. Villabrille won the challenge, as well as his lady love. He didn't use the metal stake, just his bare hands!

During the Fifties, Aikido master Koichi Tohei (a direct student of Morihei Ueshiba, the Founder of Aikido) visited Hawaii

to introduce the "spiritual art" to the Hawaii Police Department. Tohei showed his amazing ki (spirit) as he always did in his demonstrations. Using his strong will, none of the burly Hawaiian cops could bend his arm, nor lift him from the ground, no matter how much they tried.

But Tohei met his match when he asked for a volunteer from the audience. Among the onlookers was Villabrille (by then a Kali Master), who was invited by his friend Yawara, a Karate black belt. With Yawara's urging, the rest of the audience started chanting: *"Villabrille! We want Villabrille!"*

So there they were, the Aikido master facing the Kali Master. They took turns testing each other's internal energy, and right then and there Tohei knew that he had met his match. The immovable object against the irresistible force! They then proceeded to demonstrate their particular defensive techniques, attacks, defenses and counters.

After several simulated situations, it was apparent to the audience that Kali was always a

step ahead of Aikido. Aware of Villabrille's ability, Tohei explained to the crowd that when two men have the same strong internal powers, the contest was even - a "draw" like in chess.

When it was Villabrille's turn to address the crowd, he said: *"To find out who is the better fighter, let him (Tohei) sign his name on paper, and I will also sign."* That was a formal challenge if signed by both opposing fighters. The audience roared its approval, but Tohei declined the challenge, saying, *"I did not come here to fight, but to introduce Aikido to the police force."*

Villabrille was not only great at martial arts. Although he did not finish high school, his knowledge and intelligence was at par with college graduates. He could debate with anyone about politics, and he was so knowledgeable and influential that every political candidate in Hawaii at that time asked for his endorsement.

It would take an entire book to write the colorful true-to-life story of this great man.

Grandmaster Ben Largusa

FMA Legend and Kali Grandmaster

“To live in the hearts we leave behind is not to die.” - Thomas Campbell

“Death leaves a heartache no one can heal, Love leaves a memory no one can steal.” - Author Unknown



Kali Grandmaster Ben T. Largusa - a Filipino martial arts legend and one of the greatest martial artists in the world – has left the narrow bonds of earth to touch the face of God!

Grandmaster Largusa passed away at age 84 early Sunday morning, October 3, 2010, in his home in Kauai, Hawaii. A high-ranking yet truly humble martial artist, a husband, father and grandfather, he was preceded in death by his sons Lance and Layne, and is survived by his wife Philomena, daughter Lois, and sons Jerry and Lindsey.

His passing is a great loss to the Filipino martial arts world! Grandmaster Largusa was the head of Kali - an ancient but existing martial arts system. It is so effective in combat that during Spain's conquest of the Philippines some Southern Philippine tribes had successfully resisted the armored might of the Spaniards for nearly

four centuries.

Grandmaster Largusa is widely regarded as the final word on this devastating and deadly method of combat. Kali is a system so unique that it is said to be the source of all Eskrima styles. It could also be the only martial arts system in the Philippines and the United States where there is one Grandmaster and one Master at any given time. In other systems it is a common practice that there are several Masters, Grandmasters and even Great Grandmasters at the same time.

The very first Grandmaster in Kali was no other than Grandmaster Floro Villabrille, the Philippines' most revered fighter and champion of numerous stick-fighting death matches. It is from the Patriarch of Kali himself that Grandmaster Largusa learned a unique blend of deadly and devastating methods, strategies and techniques in martial arts.

Grandmaster Largusa was born in Kauai in 1926 where his parents immigrated to from Carcar, Cebu, Philippines. Although he started his Filipino martial arts training from his father, his first Eskrima instructor was a Master Agustin. His training with Agustin ended when he joined the U.S. Army in 1945 during World War II.

While in the Army, Largusa trained in several fighting systems that also included Judo and boxing. Upon his discharge from the Army in 1951, he returned to Kauai, and with the

blessings of his instructor Master Agustin, he was accepted as a student of Grandmaster Villabrille.

At the age of 25, Largusa trained one-on-one for seven consecutive years with Villabrille, who was still in his prime then at 39 years old. At the onset of his training, Grandmaster Villabrille had him promise to never teach anyone else the art of Kali. At the time, few people had ever heard of this deadly art because it was a closely-guarded secret that was passed only from teacher to student and from father to son.

As his years of training with Villabrille progressed, Largusa realized that what he was learning was primarily comprised of fighting techniques and theory, and that he could not teach the system the way it was taught to him. So he broke down step-by-step and move-by-move – Grandmaster Villabrille's complete system.

In recognition, the Kali Patriarch gave Ben T. Largusa a signed legal document designating him the sole heir to the Villabrille method and the title of Tuhan (Master). Largusa was also authorized to add his name to Villabrille's system of martial arts, hence it is widely known today as: Villabrille-Largusa Kali System.

When Grandmaster Villabrille passed away in March 8, 1992, Tuhan Largusa automatically became the second grandmaster of the Villabrille-Largusa Kali System. Upon assuming the mantle of leadership, Grandmaster Largusa

was duty-bound to also select who among the officially designated Kali guros (instructors) will be the next in line.

Guro/Professor Mel Lopez of San Francisco was Grandmaster Lagusa's choice! With Largusa's demise, Grandmaster Mel Lopez is the third grandmaster of the Villabrille-Largusa Kali System.

Largusa moved to San Francisco from Kauai when he was around 32 or 35 because Grandmaster Villabrille told him to train and spar with opponents of different styles. Once in the Bay Area, he met people from different Karate and Kung-Fu styles. He was invited to spar with practitioners of Choy Li Fut, Wing Chun, and Praying Mantis. Because he could easily handle the fighters, everyone thought that he trained in kung-fu, although he didn't. Villabrille's system gave him the facility to effectively deal with other martial arts styles.

I have heard that one of Largusa's constant sparring partners was a Kung Fu Sifu who claimed to be a practitioner of the "Hundred Elephant" style. Said Sifu tried numerous times to penetrate Largusa's defenses but failed. Like a master chess player, Largusa was always many moves ahead of the sifu's planned attacks.

Grandmaster Ben Largusa was the first man to bring and introduce Kali into the United States public arena. He gave America its first demonstration of Kali in 1964 at the Ed Parker International Karate Championships in Long Beach, California. Also in attendance were numerous martial artists from around the world, including the legendary Bruce Lee, Dan Inosanto and Jhoon Rhee.

On the eve of this event, Parker gathered the top instructors of the various martial arts inside a hotel ballroom. Every instructor was given a chance to present the principles and theories of their particular system. Ben Largusa was among those presenters.

Parker decided that Bruce Lee would be the last to present. While giving the values of his Gung-fu system, Bruce Lee felt he was talking above the heads of the people present. Most of the other martial arts instructors were even baffled of what Lee was talking about.

When Lee saw what was happening, he made eye contact with most of the instructors present and pointedly commented, "It seems that most of you have no idea of what I'm talking about. It looks like Ben Largusa is the only one who understands."

On the day of the Internationals, both Bruce Lee and Ben Largusa were introduced to the American public for the very first time!

On stage, Bruce Lee demonstrated his modified form of Wing Chun Gung Fu, the precursor to Jeet Kune Do, as well as Lee's very well publicized, powerful two-inch punch. Largusa, on the other hand, demonstrated sparring using Eskrima sticks with his brother, Dominador Largusa, as his partner.

Prior to their performance, Largusa asked the audience to refrain from taking any still photos or home-movie pictures. At that time there were no video cameras or cell phones yet. His plea fell on deaf ears because he noticed the flashing lights of several cameras, so he had to cut short his presentation.

The great Ed Parker was a martial artist with an open mind. Even way before the 1964 Karate Championships, Parker wanted to know more about the art of Kali. Largusa explained to him that Kali is not just about stick-fighting, and he proceeded to show Parker empty-hand movements and techniques. Parker was very impressed and decided that he and Largusa get together more often. Parker loved the Kali movements and footwork. They had another friend, a Choy Li Fut practitioner, on these get-togethers. When Parker decided to put on his famous Karate Internationals, he asked Largusa to demonstrate.

A few weeks after the Karate Internationals, Parker received a phone call from William Dozier, the producer of the "Batman" TV series. Ed Parker had a lot of friends in Hollywood and was teaching martial arts to some of the top people in the industry. Dozier was then planning to produce a new action TV series called "The Green Hornet." He asked Parker's assistance to help him search for a real martial artist to play the role of Kato, the Green Hornet's sidekick.

Parker called up Largusa and told him that Hollywood needed a person for that role, and he thought of two people - Ben Largusa and Bruce Lee. But he decided to offer the part to Largusa first and Bruce second. Largusa told him that he truly appreciated the offer but that he couldn't answer right then; he needed time to think. A few days later, he called Parker back and declined the offer. Parker was disappointed that he didn't accept, but he understood. So Parker said, "I'll have to call Bruce Lee." And the rest is history.

Everyone who knew Grandmaster Ben Largusa knows that he is a very humble man. He never dreamed of using his martial arts knowledge as a way to gain fame, fortune and glory.

I and my husband first met this great yet humble man, who describes himself as “*just a man of Kali*” back in 1976 in one of the Filipino martial arts events in Los Angeles. We were introduced to him by our very good friend and kumpadre Dan Inosanto, another martial arts legend, who is the godfather of our youngest son, Kris.

And then in 1978, Largusa made my husband a Kali Guro when his U.S. navy ship made a port visit to San Francisco. Before we changed our martial arts school to “Babao Arnis” we called it “Kali Academy of San Diego.”

In 1981, at a very special ceremony in Kauai which we attended, Grandmaster Villabrille presented then Tuhan Largusa the “Conveyance of Life Interest”, which gave Largusa the exclusive right, license and authority to use the name of Floro Villabrille School of Kali in perpetuating and

promoting the Kali system. Although there were others who trained under Villabrille, it was Largusa who was chosen by Villabrille to be his successor. It was such an honor and a privilege for me to meet Grandmaster Villabrille in person! I wrote about him, and other Filipino martial artists, in some newspapers and magazines I write for through the years. One of these papers was the San Diego Taliba (News) which I edited.

The last time we saw Grandmaster Largusa was in Los Angeles in June 18, 1993 at the

very memorable event called “The City of Los Angeles Honors the Living Treasures of the Filipino Martial Arts.” I remember that among the Filipino martial arts legends present, aside from Grandmaster Largusa, were the late Grandmaster Leo Giron, the late Grandmaster Sam Tendencia, the late Senior Guro Lucky Lucaylucay, Grandmaster Richard Bustillo, Guro Dan Inosanto, and Professor Greg Lontayao.

When not practicing martial arts, Grandmaster Ben Largusa’s main hobby was playing his guitar. He was always on the



Kali heirarchy, seated L to R: Grandmaster Floro Villabrille, Kali Patriarch; Grandmaster Ben Largusa, Villabrille’s successor; and Grandmaster Mel Lopez, Largusa’s successor.

look-out for a good guitar player or instructor from whom he could learn more. His refined ear for music was probably inspired by Grandmaster Villabrille who taught him the musical rhythm of Kali. The various beats and tempo of the drums, the gong and the kulintang (Philippine musical instruments) can only be appreciated by a

knowledgeable Kali practitioner who could use these musical beat and tempo as tools in sophisticated fighting moves.

Until now there are folk dances in the Southern part of the Philippines where the dancers’ fluid movements are actually camouflaged fighting moves. It’s up to the audiences’ depth of

knowledge of Philippine martial arts or Philippine history to actually perceive these moves.

Grandmaster Ben T. Largusa - you are gone but not forgotten. You have left a lasting legacy to us all in the Martial Arts world! You will forever be loved and revered! Rest in peace with the Lord!!



At the “Living Treasures of the Filipino Martial Arts” grand event in Los Angeles, California in 1993 attended by Filipino martial artists from all over the United States.



Visit the official website of the Villabrille-Largusa Kali System and the Kali Association of America
www.villabrillegusakali.com



Grandmaster Largusa holding the “San Diego Taliba (News)” which Zena edited at that time



Grandmaster Largusa with the Award of Recognition as an FMA Living Treasure

School Submission

The schools listed teach Filipino martial arts, either as the main curriculum or an added curriculum.

If you have a school that teaches Filipino martial arts, or you are an instructor that teaches, but does not have a school, list the school or style so individuals who wish to experience, learn and gain knowledge have the opportunity.

Be Professional; keep your contact information current. - **Click Here**



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We reserve the right to use articles or parts of articles that are given and approved from time to time as needed to promote the Filipino martial arts and the Culture of the Philippines.

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Emailed manuscripts should be typed in Ariel or Times Roman, on programs such as Notepad, Wordpad, Microsoft Word, Word Perfect and can be sent as an attachment. Photo(s) can be sent as a .jpg, .gif, .bmp, or .tiff to **Article@fmainformative.info**

We welcome your article, ideas and suggestions, and look forward to working with you in the future.