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Left Out in the Cold

BY ANNA HANKS

On the morning of May 19, Honduran worker Jose Israel Lopez Guerrero, 26, was beaten to death in front of witnesses under the bridge at Springdale Road near Boggy Creek. The assailants -- whom police believe live in the neighborhood -- ran away on foot. The murder is still unsolved.

The bridge under which Guerrero died was also his home. Upon returning to Austin after visiting his family in Honduras the week before his murder, Guerrero tried to regain admission to Casa Marianella, where he had stayed a year before. But the Casa was full, and -- as former residents get lower priority than new residents -- Guerrero was forced to seek shelter elsewhere.

According to Guerrero's friend Juan Ignacio Gutierrez, 24, who shared a barracks-style room at Casa with Guerrero last year, Guerrero lived briefly in an apartment complex near the First Workers day labor site, but was uncomfortable with the drug traffic there. He then took up residence in what *Austin American-Statesman* reporter Jason Spencer describes as a row of worn-out mattresses at a homeless camp under the Springdale Road bridge, only a few blocks from Casa Marianella. He had been returning to Casa for dinner each night during the week before his murder.

In a telephone interview translated by Casa Marianella volunteer Seth Laninga, Gutierrez said that his friend was planning to travel from Austin to a ranch outside Kansas City where he had worked the previous year, and where he had a girlfriend.

According to Austin homicide Sgt. Hector Reveles, crimes like the one against Guerrero are often solved through community involvement. "People in the community get concerned," says Reveles, when crimes against recent immigrants such as Guerrero occur in their neighborhoods.

Casa director Jennifer Long says this incident was the third time in three years that a former Casa resident had been killed. "This is a reminder of how dangerous it is to be an immigrant," she says.

While crimes against immigrants are not uncommon, it isn't clear just how often they occur. "It's a big mystery exactly how many there are," says Reveles. "Almost everybody knows that these crimes go unreported." He says that immigrants are often reluctant to report such crimes because of their fear of deportation, even though APD is "very clear that we don't communicate with the INS" about such crimes.

After an unusually long three-week delay, Guerrero's body was scheduled to be returned to his family in Honduras last Wednesday, June 7, according to Delores Litton, the Victim Services counselor assigned to homicides at the Austin Police Dept.

Anyone with information about Guerrero's murder can contact Crime Stoppers at 472-8477 or Sgt. Reveles at the police tip line at 477-3588. The Crime Stoppers system is not bilingual, but the police tip line is. There is a \$1,000 reward for information.

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