

The story told about Joe Emperado

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“Only a few top martial artists including Walter Godin (also trained by Chow) were taught this new art form in the beginning. Then in 1950, Adriano Emperado and his younger brother Joe began teaching the new art in an open class in 1950 and called their school the Kajukenbo Self Defense Institute (KSDI). Godin said, “There are no words to describe the training sessions at Palama Settlement during the early days, unless you’ve experienced it, only then will you understand.” Joe Emperado and Godin became best friends. Joe would often take him to secluded parks and practice self-defense that nobody else saw. Then he would “tell me to remember the techniques.”

Joe was responsible for most of the training in the KSDI school until the Memorial Day weekend of 1958. One night after class several Kajukenbo students were hanging out at the Pink Elephant, a bar where Joe worked part-time as a bouncer. Joe stayed late waiting for his girlfriend who was working there. When the rest of the Kajukenbo students left, Joe asked his favorite student Godin to stay. Joe must have sensed something was wrong because at closing time, three men who stayed behind wanted to start some trouble and started messing around with Godin. Godin suggested that they take it outside. Right before it started coming down to blows, Joe went outside and shoved Godin inside hoping to close the door on the three troublemakers.

While Joe’s back was turned, George Shimabukuro stabbed him from behind. At that time, Joe did not even know he was stabbed and thought he was hit by a very hard punch. The next attack thrown was a strong hammerblow from Joe that knocked his attacker into parked cars. The fight continued with Joe Emperado squaring off with an armed George Shimabukuro while Godin took on the other two guys.

Imagine as a martial artist what it would be like to be in a fight back-to-back with your instructor on your side. Unfortunately, Godin and Joe Emperado lost that fight. When the police came, everyone ran. Joe lost so much blood from multiple stab wounds that he died the next day. He was able to tell his brother Adriano what happened and from that day forward the tradition of escorts was in effect. It is a matter of looking out for one another. The escorts would accompany a higher rank whenever s/he went out in public. Their job was to go everywhere with the higher ranking, including the restroom, to take care of anything behind him because he can take care what is in front of him. This tradition is still practiced today. After all, Joe would not have died that weekend if he had more escorts.

Unfortunately, Shimabukuro avoided jail time in Joe Emperado’s death. The claim of self-defense was allowed since Joe was well known as a dangerous martial artist (plus it was probably hard to determine from the multiple stab wounds examined during the autopsy when the first stab occurred). Some people even considered Godin to be a coward. Could this be true? Godin went on to become one of Kajukenbo’s top students and chief instructors. He was also Emperado’s bodyguard. If Emperado thought Godin was a coward, neither of these things would

have happened!”

— [Sigung Andrew Evans, reposting from “Fighting Arts Hawaii magazine” on the Kajukenbo Cafe](#)