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By Karin Elton, Marshall Independent

against the odds

Honduran native, MHS grad shares story of survival with social studies class

MARSHALL - He never had a toy as a child, didn't receive birthday or Christmas presents and ate scraps if he was lucky.

Marshall High School students in Rick Purrington's social studies class got hit in the face with the real world Friday morning. Guest speaker Edras Turcios, an MHS Class of 2012 grad, told the students about his early life living in Honduras.

Article Photos



Photo by Karin Elton

"I never knew my parents, they left me when I was 1," Turcios said.

He and his two sisters lived in a home with his grandmother, uncle and aunt and 12 cousins.

"After the 12 cousins would eat, we would take the last thing they had - so the leftovers," he said. "I never got a present for Christmas when I was little. My sisters used to watch my cousins get presents for holidays - that was tough for them. I got anger inside.

I didn't care about anyone else. We used to get whipped a lot, me and my sisters. Every day."

Gang members asked him to join them, but still a young child, he didn't want to fight.

"They used to fight with machetes, stab people for no reason, rob poor people," he said.

They liked him because he was good at soccer.

"I scored a lot of goals," Turcios said.

Turcios said his grandmother was good to him but couldn't protect him from his uncle Tito. His uncle started killing people from the age of 18.

"He used to take me with him to drink," Turcios said. "I didn't want to go, but I was forced to."

The uncle tried to get Turcios to kill people, but he didn't want to.

"Every weekend we used to run away from the house, because when he was drunk he would start shooting his gun inside the house," Turcios said.

After his grandmother died, "everything collapsed, I started to think about doing bad things to the people that had hurt me," he said.

One time, Turcios got a gun and set out to kill his uncle, but the uncle didn't pass by on his usual route.

"I thought, 'if you kill him, you will be just like him,' so I didn't," Turcios said.

When Turcios was 12, his uncle killed two men. The men's family came looking for the uncle's family members and said they wanted to kill all the boys so the family name would die.

Turcios eventually walked to the United States, which took him a year - with no money or food.

"I used to see people eating, and I wished I was the one who was eating," he said. "I would walk and walk. My knees and ankles hurt."

He got caught in Mexico and spent three months in jail there.

"I saw things in jail," he said. "Guys got raped, stabbed."

He was saved from that fate because the inmates were divided by country of origin.

"I was with Hondurans," he said. "They protected me."

He was sent back to Honduras.

"That same night I started walking back," Turcios said.

After swimming in an alligator-infested river and walking in a desert for three nights and two days with no water - "I drank water from the ground; I'm pretty sure it was cow pee," he said - he finally made it to the United States, to Houston, Texas.

"A guy from Ecuador gave me a job for a week," he said. "I got \$200. I bought a PlayStation for \$100."

His dad lived in Houston.

"I called my dad, but he didn't know me," Turcios said. "He didn't want to help me."

He met people who were going to Minnesota. He had an aunt who lived in Marshall and moved in with her for awhile.

He attended Marshall High School and started to learn English in ESL classes and played in school sports including soccer. Turcios sold his PlayStation to pay for a soccer uniform.

His aunt's husband beat her every Saturday and they would make up on Sunday. One time after a particularly bad beating, Turcios called the cops and the husband was put in jail and eventually deported.

"I got kicked out," he said.

His soccer teammates asked him where he lived, and he told them he was homeless.

"Parents started freaking out," he said.

They invited him into their homes. He eventually got adopted by Kathy Bartz.

In the beginning his high school years were filled with trouble.

"I had anger problems," he said. "I got arrested - I punched a teacher."

But people helped him, including the teacher he had punched and the school resource officer, Sara VanLeeuwe.

"She said, 'it's time to change' - I started to change," he said.

After graduating he played a season of semipro soccer in California, then moved back to Minnesota and attended Alexandria Technical and Community College for law enforcement. Turcios, who is 22 now, plans on taking his citizenship test this year. He said he couldn't have accomplished the things that he has if

it weren't for all the people who have helped him in his life.

Turcios remembers his uncle telling him he would never make anything of himself, never learn English, that he wasn't worth anything and he thought, "I'm going to prove him wrong."

After his presentation a student asked how many people had he killed, and Turcios said he hasn't killed anyone. Another student asked if Turcios has ever thought about making a movie of his life. Turcios said he hadn't. The student said that Turcios should think about it.