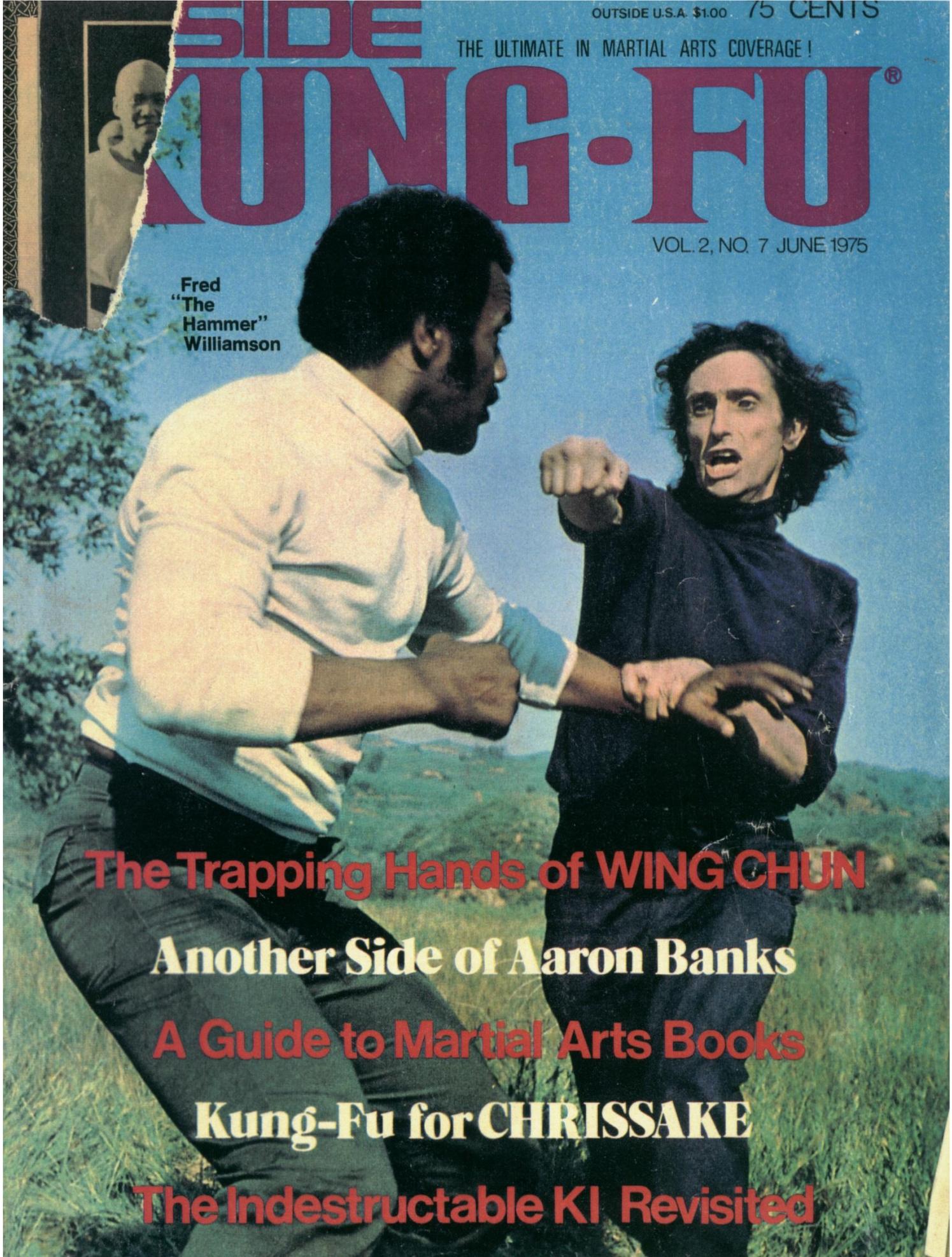


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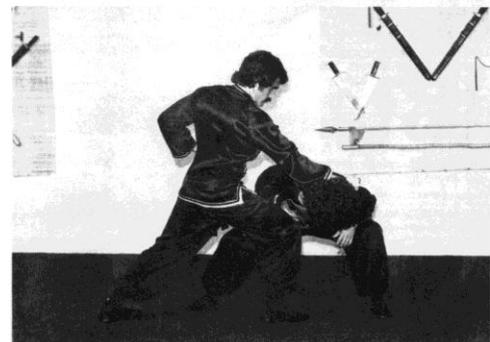
**THE MARTIAL ARTS
MEAN MANY
THINGS TO
MANY PEOPLE
JUST ASK
RAUL RIES**

STORY AND PHOTOS
By ROCCO ZAPPIA

Raul Ries was born and grew up in Mexico City. "When I was a teenager we moved to the United States and settled in the Baldwin Park area, at which time my brother Xavier and I proceeded to get into trouble with the police for stealing, fighting and whatever. When I got out of high school I was busted for beating a guy up pretty bad; my life was really messed up." The judge gave Ries the choice of going to jail or going into the service, he chose the latter. "I joined the Marines and went to thinking that I straighten out my life completely, but I was wrong. After 6 months of service I got orders to go to Viet Nam. Having been in Nam a while, I joined a group called "The Bounty Hunters" who search out and kill everything in sight. The government caught up with us after a few months and I was kicked out of Viet Nam. From there I was sent to a psychiatric ward to try and determine why I had this craving for violence and hurting people. This didn't do me or the Marines any good – especially due to my lack of cooperation; therefore, I was put up for a dishonorable discharge."

"When I first opened my school about four years ago, I was strictly out to push people around and make money."

These are the words of Raul Ries, a Kung-Fu instructor in Covina, California. Unlike a lot of people, Ries is not reluctant to discuss the bad times in his life. For example, he readily admits he first took up Kung-Fu for the simple fact that he loved to fight, liked violence and enjoyed hurting people. "I used to love fighting. I've been fighting in the streets ever since I was a kid. As I got older I became interested I boxing and studied that for a while. When I was about 18 I got tired of gloves and started looking for something else – it was at this time that I heard about a Kung-Fu teacher named Jimmy Woo." Raul studied under Woo and although he found the art to be "beautiful and graceful" he still had a fondness for violence, street fighting, and money.



After a review of his case, Ries was given an honorable discharge for not being able to adjust to military life. "I was very happy that my discharge was an honorable one – also because I was getting out two years early. I felt good and soon after got married, thinking that I finally might be settling down; unfortunately, I only got worse. I used to constantly beat up my wife and I actually almost killed her three times. I also started going out and getting into trouble again and became extremely rebellious. For some reason, I really don't know why, I blamed God for my screwed up life."



At that time Ries didn't want to have anything to do with Christianity and literally had no religious beliefs. His wife had left him, and he was completely lost and searching for something. "I didn't know where to turn and I was exposed to the teaching of the Bible through various medias," he recalls. "Earlier in my life I was exposed to Buddhism, so I figured that there might be something to all of this Bible stuff. Although I wasn't sure, I found myself saying 'If there is a God, I want Him to change my life.' I was actually on my knees praying. At this moment I found myself and I knew that Christ had come into my heart."

Ries went through many changes at that point in his life, he remembers: "I was now very happy and wanted everyone to know of the change that had come over me. However, because of my past life my wife was very skeptical and thought that I might be putting on an act just to get her to come back to me. After a few months she could see that I was truly a Christian and had finally found peace in my mind and heart. When I became a Christian God gave me the ministry 'Hidden Manna Fellowship' – working with young people and gangs and using Kung-Fu to get into prisons, high schools and gang-ridden areas in order to reach the so-called hard guys."

Today, Ries and his brother Xavier go to these places, along with some of his students, to show these guys that to be a Christian you don't have to be a sissy. The medium of their message includes a very impressive Kung-Fu demonstration. "Too many people think of Christians as goody-goody types who turn the other cheek and don't defend themselves – no so. I don't want anyone to misunderstand: We don't go looking for trouble; in fact, if possible, we walk away from it. However, by putting on these demos, we can show the guys that by combining martial arts with the ministry of God one can achieve the ultimate – that is, having physical confidence and being able to take care of yourself in a rough situation, as well as having spiritual confidence and peace of mind.

"We are Christians and are using Kung-Fu for Christ. I have been a rebel and a fighter all of my life and I definitely feel that my purpose on this earth is to go out and help others who are going through what I myself have gone through. Christ is our life; Kung-Fu is our occupation."



Says Ries (above left): *"Confidence in oneself is the main ingredient which enables a person to perform effectively and consistently..."* Here he confidently demonstrates a few free-sparring maneuvers with the assistance of one of his students.

The style that Ries teaches is called San Soo. He emphasizes that San Soo is not a sport but a fighting technique. It is based on a combination of punches, kicks, strikes and blocks – done in perfect rhythm and directed to vital points of the body. These techniques can be changed instantly to suit the situation and do not necessarily follow a set pattern. Says Ries: "a clarification of our psychology is most important. First, confidence in oneself is the main ingredient, which enables a person to perform effectively and consistently – you can take my life but you'll never get my confidence. In contrast, the other Oriental fighting systems claim to instill into their student a 'mystical' ingredient upon which they can depend in moments of stress. In other words, a crutch is given to enable the person to perform, thus creating a superficial type of confidence. We strive to develop a strong respect for our fellow man, based on the supposition that the mind and the character of any individual cannot be completely known. Because of this supposition, we know that we cannot determine who is a fighter and who is not –thus any man is potentially our equal fighter."

It hasn't been an easy road for Ries, he is still confronted with people asking him how he can preach the word of God and yet teach a deadly art. "We're not out there to show how good we are," he explains, "We're out to put Christ number one. We don't get all freaked-out on religion; we are performing the martial arts and teaching it to the best of our ability. We don't push religion on anyone; many of our students are not Christians – that's their choice. I don't preach and teach at the same time. I let the people come to me and ask about Christ and, if they are sincere, I try to put them on what I think is the right path."

When Ries first began to preach the Bible he wasn't accepted with open arms. He went to his old high school to talk to the students and literally had apples, milk cartons and garbage thrown at him. But his strong determination and guidance from above gave him the strength to continue until he was accepted, and the students began to realize what he was saying made sense. At the moment he has a sizable congregation that meets for Bible study at his Kung-Fu studio in Covina. "Everyone is invited to visit or attend one of these meetings... We are a non-denominational group. Anyone who is searching for something should come and see how young and old get together for fellowship with one another to praise, in music and testimony, the Lord Jesus Christ."

The martial arts have done many things for many people – good and bad. In the case of Raul Ries, it has done both: He used it first to make money and hurt people. Now, he is using his martial skills to help others straighten their lives out. "The Lord moves in strange ways," comments Ries. That's not to say that Jesus was a Black Belt; but, Ries does believe that God is using Kung-Fu, through him, to accomplish His mission.

Three years ago Raul Ries didn't give a damn about "Helping Thy Neighbor." Today, it's a way of life for him.



As his opponent attacks with a right punch, Ries counters with a downward block and grab (Fig. 1)

Fig. 1

Shifting his weight forward by means of a right side horse, Ries enhances his wristlock while applying pressure to his opponent's elbow (Fig. 2)



Fig. 2



Still maintaining the wristlock, Ries disables his foe with a kick to the rib cage (Fig. 3).

Fig. 3

