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FREE



## Fighting Peacefully: Local Man Masters, Teaches Martial Arts

By Marian Cooper

Fascinated by the amazing leaps and kicks of Bruce Lee, the small boy sat riveted to his seat. His eyes were fastened on the movie screen and his heart was pounding with excitement.

He decided to become a great Kung Fu artist when he grew up. In fact, he wanted to be the first black superstar martial artist to act in the movies.

Willie "Bam" Johnson set his mind on the task. The dream did not pass away as he grew older. At the age of seven, he began studying karate. He went on to study boxing, Tae Kwon Do, gymnastics and, finally, Kung Fu.

The young man from East Baltimore applied himself until he got a black belt in karate, a brown belt in Tae Kwon Do, and an instructor's certificate in Kung Fu. At the age of 18, Mr. Johnson is now on his way to competing nationally in Kung Fu.

The Carver High School student teaches martial arts and gymnastics at the McKim Recreation Center, 1120 East Baltimore Street. He now has 15 students. Among his pupils have been a policeman and a security guard. By next year, when he has completed high school, Mr. Johnson hopes to have enough Kung Fu students to open up a school.

He has already competed successfully locally in several different fields. He entered the 1980 Junior Olympics in Gymnastics and placed second in trampoline and fifth in floor exercises. Last year he placed second and third in a black belt

karate tournament.

Last August he competed in his first national Kung Fu event in Syracuse, New York, and won second place.

The study athlete says he first began to feel real self-confidence in his work when he began studying Kung Fu with Dennis Brown last year. Mr. Brown is an internationally known competitor from Washington, D.C. who was recently sent to the People's Republic of China by the American Wu Shu Association. While there, he studied the Chinese applications of Wu Shu, the current form of Kung Fu practiced there. Wu Shu is as popular a sport in China today as baseball is here.

Mr. Brown, seeing Mr. Johnson's intense interest in the martial arts, agreed to allow him into his classes in exchange for lessons in gymnastics.

"Bam" Johnson says, "I consider Dennis Brown one of the greatest. I came up in the projects. A lot of friends tried to get me involved in drugs. I turned to martial arts instead. I had heard of Dennis Brown. I read books about him. He was in every book and magazine about martial arts.

"When I went to see him about lessons, he saw I was serious. He adopted me. He took me under his wings and said all I had to do was work hard. When I went into town to meet him I felt so good about it—like my dream had come true. He's the first really great instructor I've had. Being around Dennis Brown I got to compete with some of the best. I went against John

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Mr. Brown speaks highly of his student.

The Washingtonian explains that Wu Shu (the form of Kung Fu he teaches) was developed by Chinese monks to aid them in meditation. "It wasn't put together for fighting. It was put together as a form of exercise by monks in a Chinese temple. It helps keep you in good shape so that



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Mr. Brown speaks highly of his student. "Willie had been competing on his own before we met. He had seen me work and decided he wanted to study my system. He started showing up and working hard. I started realizing he was serious. He kept coming in. So I decided to go ahead and work with him. He comes over to Washington and camps out. I know he's got to be serious."

Mr. Brown says Mr. Johnson is one of the unusual people who is able to master Wu Shu Kung Fu, which requires self control and mental discipline. "I generally don't teach the art to a violent person," says Mr. Brown. "They don't have the mental discipline to really work. If you spend five years learning the art, you don't want to waste it on a street fight."

Mr. Brown emphasizes the spiritual aspect of the martial arts, rather than the fighting side. "I came into Kung Fu to learn to fight," he admits. "I was never big. I found it gave me self-confidence that helps me. It develops mental discipling that helps on the day-to-day job, and with the family. "It can definitely be used for self-defense," he adds.

In Kung Fu, fighting is considered the lowest form of self-defense. You learn it hoping you'll never have to use it. You should be able to get out of trouble first because of the self-control and discipline



Willie "Bam" Brown

Kung Fu develops. To have to physically fight means that everything else had failed. Fighting is the bottom line."

The Washingtonian explains that Wu Shu (the form of Kung Fu he teaches) was developed by Chinese monks to aid them in meditation. "It wasn't put together for fighting. It was put together as a form of exercise by monks in a Chinese temple. It helps keep you in good shape so that you can meditate. Of course bandits used to attack the temples, and the monks would defend themselves with Wu Shu."

When Mr. Brown went to China, he discovered that Wu Shu is taught to all of the school children to develop their strength and character. He hopes to promote that concept in this country.

"In order to Wu Shu to grow, it must be used as a teaching tool for children," he says. "It can be used to instill character, as a means to move from Point A to Point B."

"We're trying to get away from the killer image and to teach that the reason for Kung Fu is to develop self-confidence and an understanding of the self."

"My purpose is to get the *new* idea of the martial arts out. The image that 'The wise man walks with his head bowed, not 'Nobody messes with me.' We feel that if the martial arts continue in a violent direction, it could be bad. The physical aspects must be taught along with the internal."

Mr. Brown looks forward to seeing Willie "Bam" Johnson spread the artistic Wu Shu form of Kung Fu in the Baltimore. And Mr. Johnson hopes to continue perfecting his Wu Shu skills. One of his dreams is to find a sponsor so that he can go to China next June with the American Wu Shu team. Look out Bruce Lee—here he comes!