

To Float In Totality

The Philosophy of Jeet Kune Do

Jeet kune do is everything and nothing, form and no form. It is the freedom to act and the knowledge to respond.

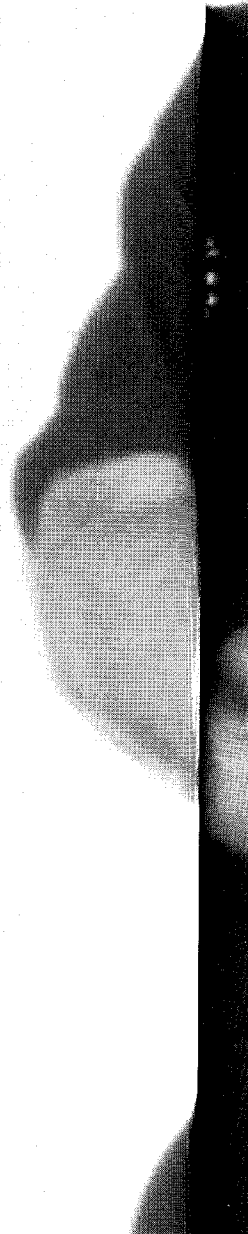
By Jerry Beasley, Ed. D.

TO UNDERSTAND JEET KUNE DO, you must prepare yourself for a different way of viewing the martial arts. First, seek the truth in combat. Experience and master the truth at each fighting range. Then, forgetting the carrier of the truth (the art), dissolve the attachment with any one art, or way.

To float in totality, we must assume formlessness. To repose in the nothing, we simply answer the attack. When you can use no art as your art, you become jeet kune do—the way of no way.

Complete Freedom

JKD is not simply a matter of joining this organization or that one, or studying a particular art with a certain instructor. JKD is the freedom to act, the knowledge to respond (like an



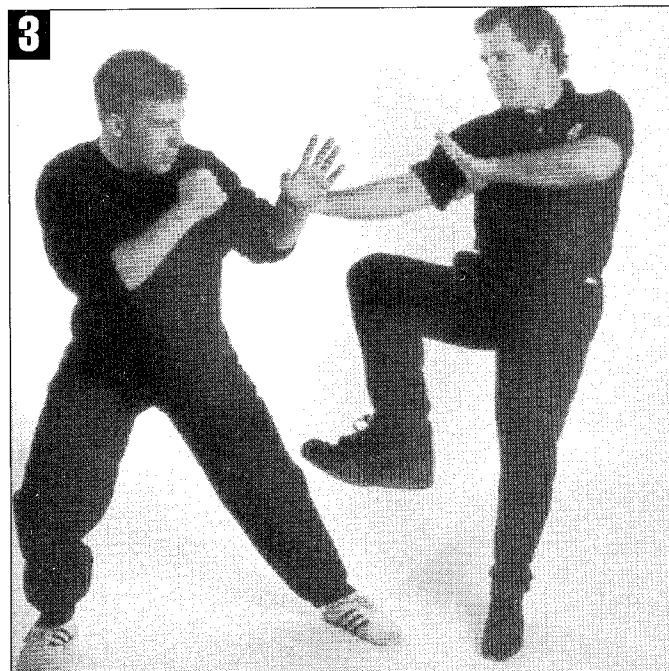
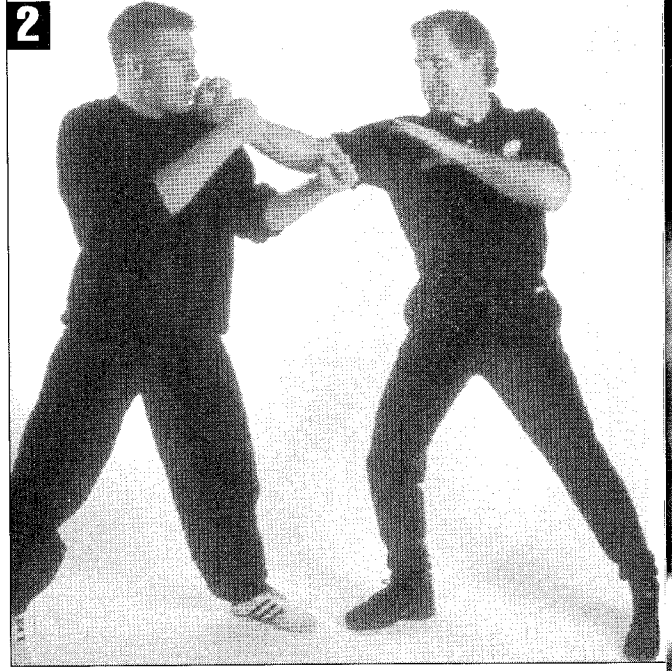
echo), and the ability to discover (the cause of our ignorance). If you possess these qualities, then you need no one's approval or recognition. You are JKD. Your quest for knowledge will lead you to many paths and introduce you to many teachers. Each experience will be unique. As Bruce Lee was fond of saying, "Walk on. Your journey begins today."

When all is said and done, your understanding of JKD depends largely on the instructor whom you select as a mentor. It seems popular for each teacher of JKD to offer his method

based on his own interpretation of that which has been given by the late Bruce Lee (or one of Bruce Lee's students). This being the case, I should note that what you read in this article is my own interpretation. It is not merely something I have read, nor something I have heard or have been taught, but something I have experienced.

Although I did not train with Bruce Lee, I closely followed his development in the 1960s and early 1970s. Lee was Asian, yet he rebuked the Asian masters. He was young, yet he created

Every art utilizes the lead hand strike and, for this reason, jeet kune do fits in with any style. Because it is so effective, the lead hand strike is emphasized in JKD. This in no way suggests a limitation in the style. The lead hand becomes a personal expression based on the sum total (totality) of all the possible ways of execution that the JKD fighter has mastered. "To float in totality," the fighter simply answers the attack "using no way as way."



In this sequence, the opponent offers no defense against the forward hand strike (1-2), which is followed by trapping the hand (3) and an inward kick to the groin (4).

his own style. He was ridiculed, yet he proved his worth. The art of jeet kune do was known as a full-contact fighting system.

“Non-classical gung-fu,” “scientific streetfighting,” and Jun Fan kickboxing are the popular names that best describe his style. I was, in the 1960s, a product of the “classical mess.” Bruce Lee offered liberation.

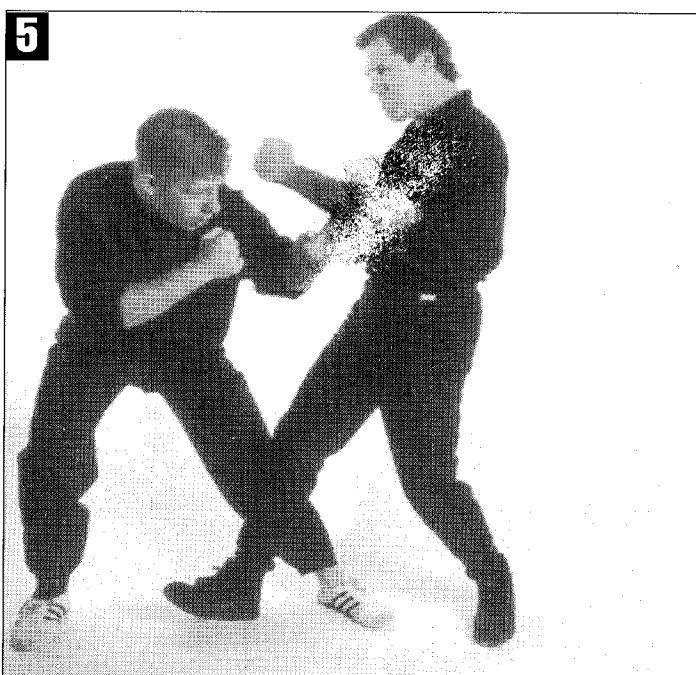
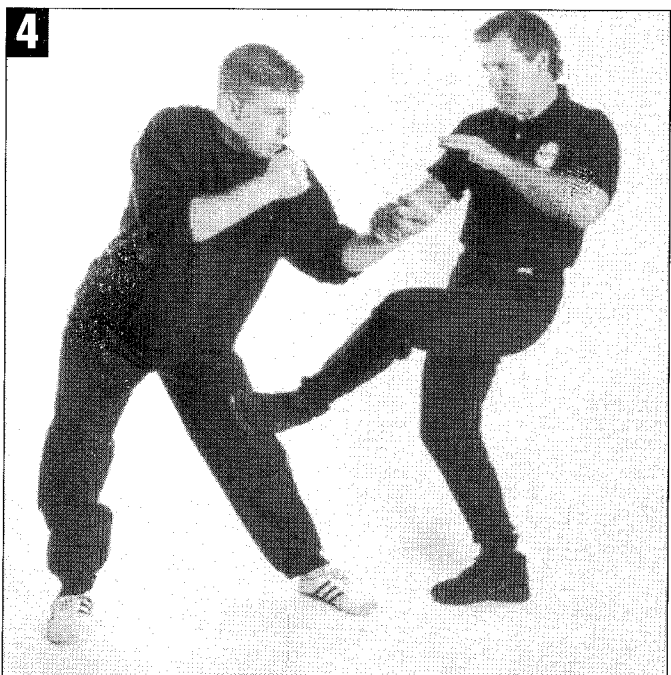
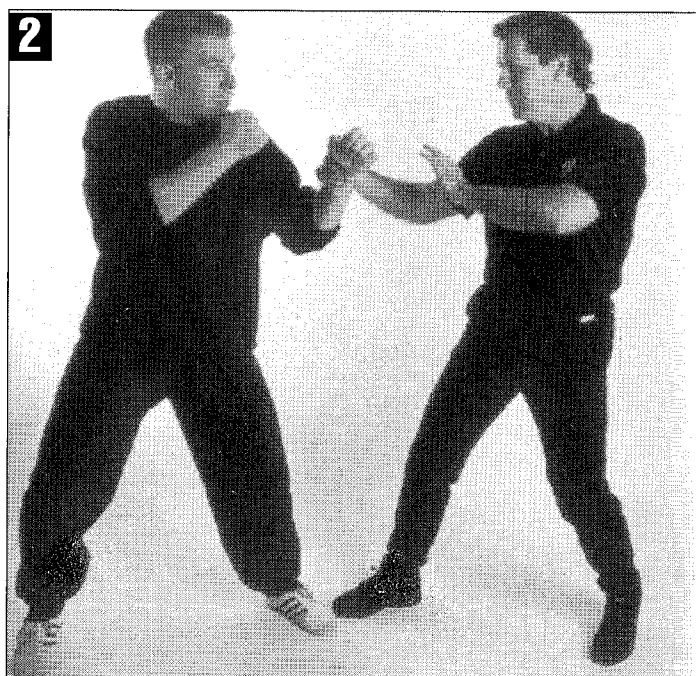
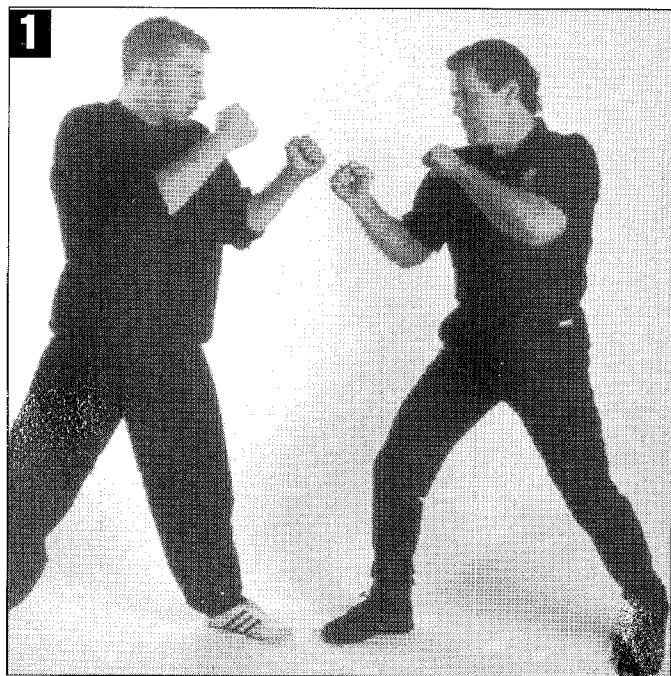
Bruce's Best Fighter

In 1973, I read articles in *Professional Karate* magazine written by Joe Lewis to explain his interpretation of Bruce Lee's five ways of attack. At the time Joe Lewis was the most feared name in all the fighting arts. Strong and fast, he had created the

sport of full-contact karate/kickboxing and had defeated all challengers by knockout. Lewis was the greatest fighter ever to work under the tutelage of his mentor, Bruce Lee.

It was not until after the completion of graduate school that I was able to meet Joe Lewis. Lewis was the consummate fighter. Every pore of his skin exuded with the knowledge of fighting arts. He was a grappler before grappling became popular. He was the boxer and full-contact fighter who set the standard by which future generations of kickboxers will be measured. Every word he spoke, every thought he possessed, conveyed his supreme knowledge of the strategy of self-defense.

I imagined that his mentor, Bruce Lee, had been equally con-



In this sequence, Dr. Jerry Beasley squares off with stand-in opponent Ian Marshall (1). Beasley first immobilizes the lead hand (2-3), then delivers an oblique kick low to immobilize the leg (4). Beasley then follows with a left-hand, right-hand combination (5-6).

sumed with the study and practice of martial arts. It is so very unfortunate that Lee died so young; so much life left to live; so much work left undone. Lewis benefits from the maturity and wisdom achieved through half a century of practice.

During the years 1982-88, I worked both with Joe Lewis and with various teachers of the concepts school of JKD. Other than Ted Wong, Lewis never had met or worked with Bruce Lee's students. It became evident to me that the JKD espoused by Joe Lewis was different from the JKD concepts taught in the popular seminars. Because of my unique personal experience, I often write of two interpretations of JKD—the original art and the concepts method. They both represent JKD, yet they are

different. Here's why:

Bruce's Spin

Bruce Lee was interested in fighting skill for self-defense purposes. He researched many arts, yet he practiced only his own interpretation of what he had extracted from each art. He may have closely examined boxing, but what he pulled from boxing did not closely resemble boxing. He was known to have studied fencing, shaolin methods, and judo. Yet his art—the way he per-

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formed—did not represent any of the arts he had studied.

In the 1989 article for *Inside Kung-Fu*, entitled "The JKD Matrix," I introduced the term *matrix* to explain how an individual can study many arts and develop a personal style which reflects both the principles from original arts studied and the new concepts derived from putting the arts together (matrix).

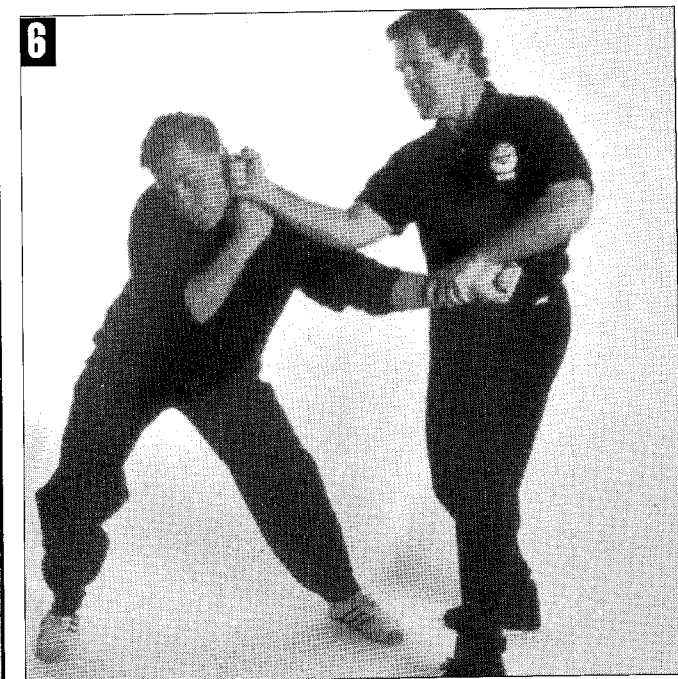
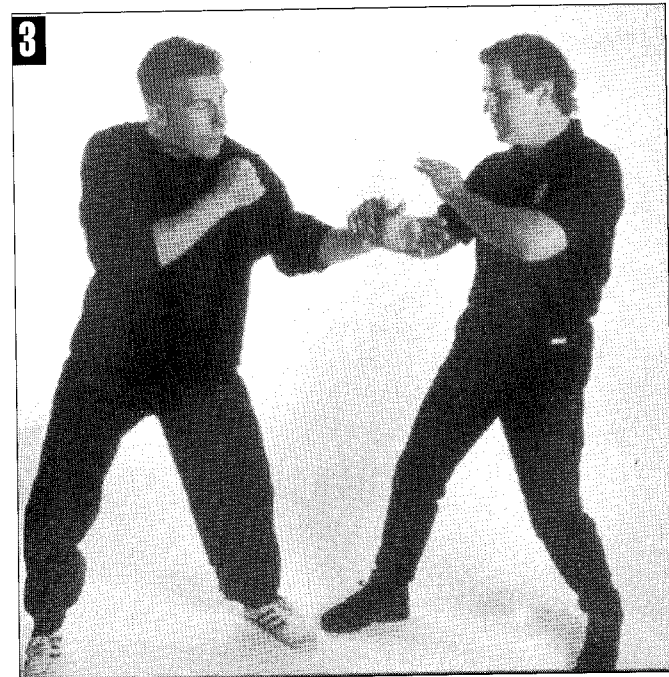
Each classical art becomes a partial truth about fighting. Karate may be the truth (that which works best) at long range; boxing, the truth at punching range. To become skilled at fighting, one must possess the necessary skills to employ each range and control the distance. To become JKD one must lose the attachment with individual arts to escape the limitations of each art.

Express Yourself

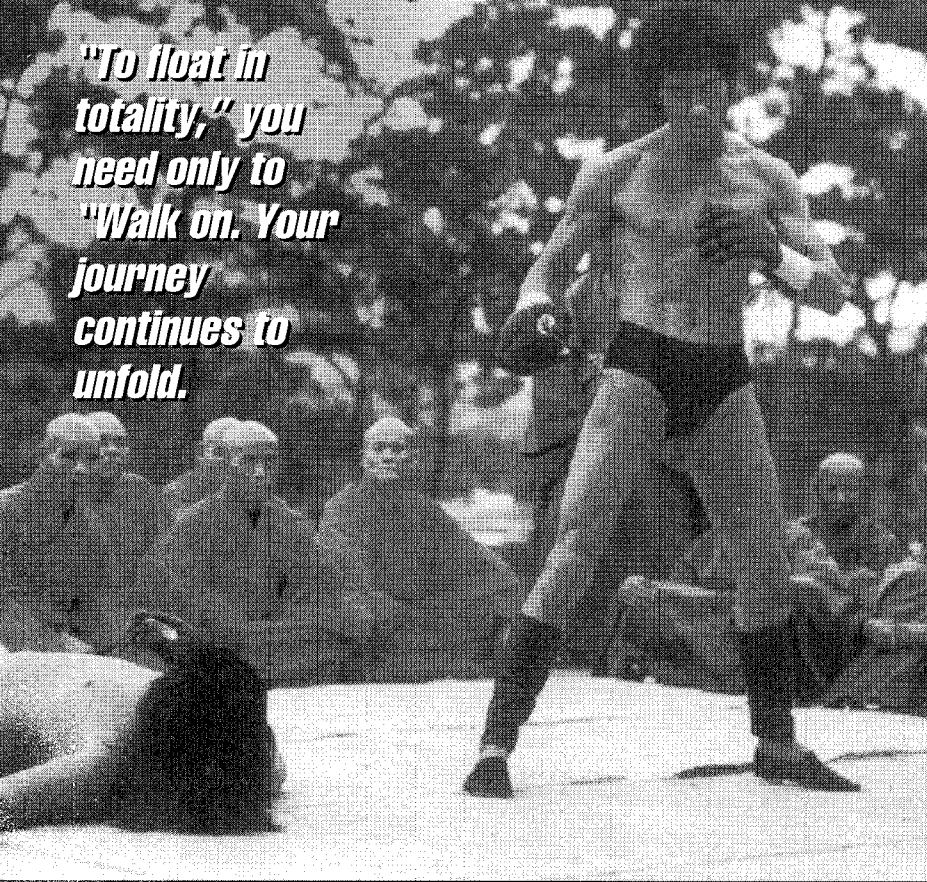
When we are free of the need to express ourselves with any one art, or with any combination of arts, then we can begin to truly express our personal desires. JKD must achieve personal expression. Totality becomes all the arts that we have experienced—our matrix. Thus, "to float in totality" means that we are not burdened by the decision of which techniques to use; we simply respond. To make a conscious choice is to recognize a limitation. An echo offers precision, for there can be no conscious choice regarding how it will sound.

When you repose in the nothing—that is, nothing in particular (remember the echo)—you become JKD. Now, here is the problem: Those interpretations can address both the macro concept of using no specific art as your art, and the micro view that JKD is, in itself, an art with unlimited variations in performance. This is where the original art and the concepts method differ.

Let's examine the micro view first. Often, I refer to Bruce Lee's JKD as original art, pre-1973 JKD (meaning before Lee's death in 1973), or Jun Fan kickboxing (JFK/JKD). In working with Joe Lewis, I noticed that whenever a technique didn't work, Lewis would not fault the technique; instead, he would address the execution of the technique. In point fighting Lewis was known for a side kick and a forefist strike (sometimes resembling a backfist). Lewis spent hours with Lee developing not dif-



"To float in totality," you need only to "Walk on. Your journey continues to unfold.



ferent skills, but different ways to execute each individual skill (thus, no way as way). The warrior will study different arts not to possess them, but to understand how to properly execute skills against them.

Those in the original art see JKD as an art with specific kicks and punches. If, in original JKD, I say that I have no way as way, what I mean is that the skill I perform can be successfully executed in many different ways. A backfist, for example, might be performed as a combination, with independent motion, with more power, etc. There is no one way that I perform the backfist. There are no kata in JKD because a kata is a limitation with rules and regulations governing the method by which techniques must be performed. JKD is free of such rules and regulations. JKD utilizes what works.

The Art of No Art

So original JKD is an art, a set of skills designed by Bruce Lee, but with no limitations on how the skills may best be performed. A warrior—a true fighter—desires to chisel away the non-essentials. To prepare for combat, he discards everything he does not need. Boxers don't enter the ring with all their training gear, videotapes, and extra clothes. They strip down to the bare essentials. All your training in JKD is to prepare you to perform a few basics with unlimited interpretations. Like real combat, JKD is spontaneous and unrehearsed.

Now enter the concepts method or the macro view. If we interpret the word "way" as meaning art, then we have the phrase, "using no art as art." We have now moved from JKD, the art, to JKD, the concept, which is a general view of JKD that considers the restrictions of a single method (art) as a limitation.

It would be natural for a concepts JKD practitioner to understand that Jun Fan jeet kune do is one way to approach combat, while kali is another way, while Thai boxing serves as yet another way. Remember what we said in original art JKD: If a skill does not work (for example, the side kick), we don't discard the skill. We simply change the execution (the set-up, speed, deceptive approach) of the technique. In concepts JKD, it would follow that, if a technique does not work, we should change the technique—that is, flow into another art.

In my years of training in the concepts school of JKD, it became evident that a premium was placed on the ability to develop some level of skill in kali, silat, and Thai to demonstrate the ability to flow from art to art.

In the "flow," we demonstrate that we have no limitation, that we are not confined to only one way (art). The expression, "Using all ways and being bound by none," is taken literally to mean using all arts. We continue to explore, experience, and absorb as many arts as possible to discover the best

art to use in a particular set of circumstances. Some would argue that this is not jeet kune do because it does not resemble original art. Moving from art to art might not be JKD, but it does follow the JKD concept of totality, of using no way (art) as way. Perhaps Bruce Lee would have agreed; perhaps not. We never will know. So let's not "fuss over it."

Bound By No Skill

In original art we adjust by changing the execution of the technique. We are bound by no one way to perform the skill. We use what works. Totality exists in the execution, not in the recognition, of technique. In concepts JKD we adjust by engaging the flow (from art to art). Some have said that JKD concepts would appeal more readily to the academic fighter, one who enjoys studying combat, as opposed to actually engaging in full-contact fighting. Original art offers "only" one way of fighting; therefore, it should appeal to the warrior who enjoys engaging in full-contact fighting with the intent of constantly developing the execution of what some would naturally misinterpret as "limited skills."

I know that my JKD mentor, Joe Lewis, is a warrior type who, at age 55, continues to explore, research, and perfect the execution of his skills. I understand that Bruce Lee was among the first to engage in full-contact training. Although lacking a professional fight record, Lee, too, is to be considered a warrior. Bruce Lee's JKD is about using his skills in any way that worked.

Those who use the term *jeet kune do* should do so in reference to the art that Bruce Lee developed during the years 1967-73. We all must continue to research and develop our

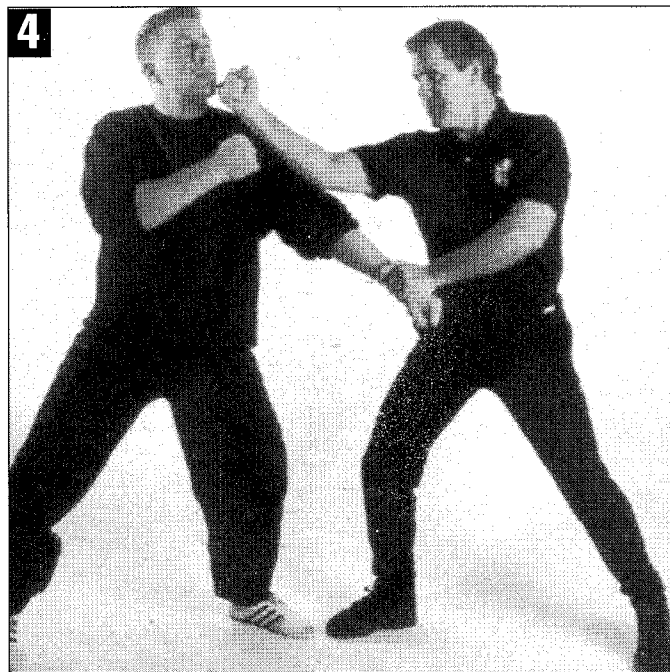
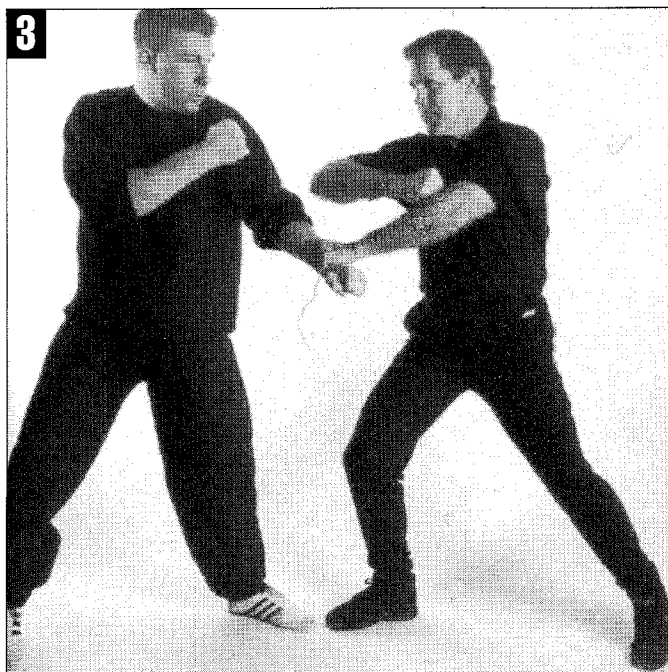
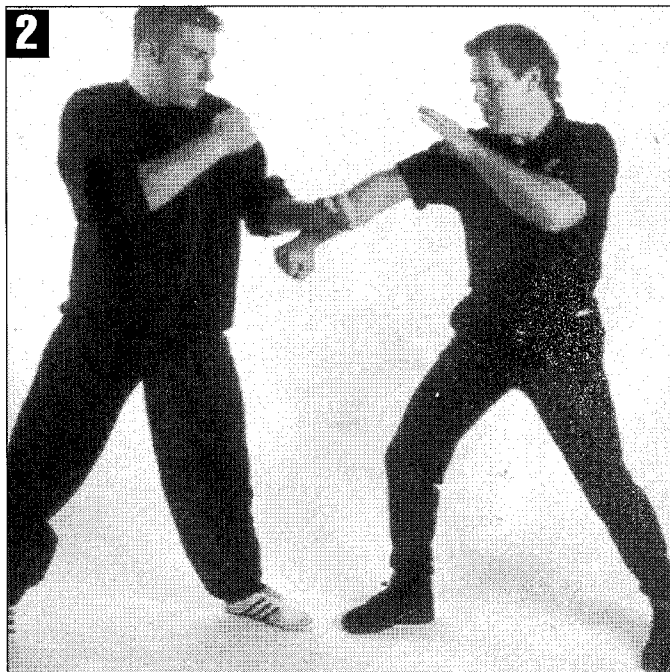
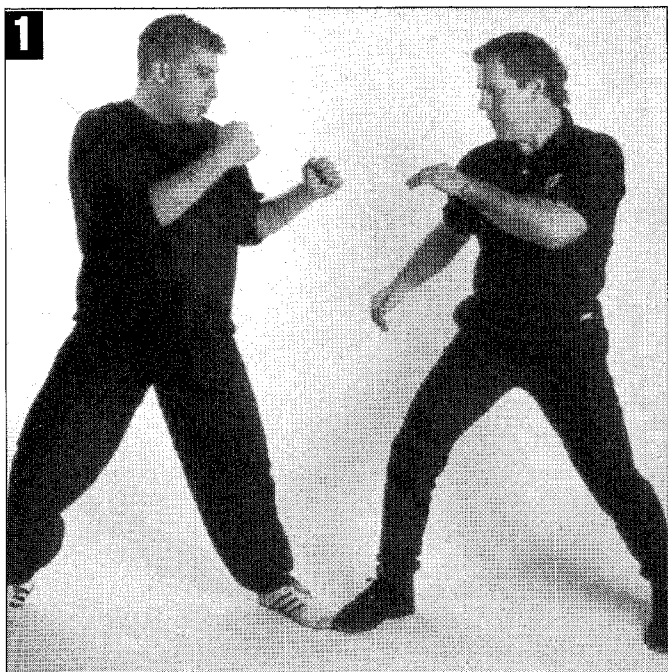
understanding of JKD. For some, this will mean constantly perfecting the execution of Jun Fan skills to escape the limitations of using only one way. For others, this could mean constantly experiencing other arts to engage in the freedom to flow from art to art.

It is possible that one could become so possessed by learning Bruce Lee's techniques that he mistakes tradition for liberty. It is equally true that one could become so enamored in experiencing the totality of the flow that he exchanges the reality of combat for the ego gratification of accumulated knowledge. JKD is a narrow path that leads to totality. Seeking totality seldom will lead one to JKD. A prudent suggestion would be to avoid the

position of contention and seek to understand each interpretation as it is provided.

"To float in totality," you need only to "Walk on". Your journey continues to unfold.

Dr. Jerry Beasley is the author of two books about jeet kune and teaches the only college-accredited jeet kune do course in the country at Radford University (Radford, Va.). Beasley recently developed Jun Fan Kickboxing/Jeet Kune Do International, an organization to satisfy the demand for his interpretations of JKD. For more information, send a self-addressed, stamped envelope to: JFK/JKD, P.O. Box 5007, Christiansburg VA 24068.



In this sequence, the author draws his opponent's attention low with a body fake (1), then attaches to the opponent's lead hand (2-3), which sets up as a backhand strike (4). The lead hand of JKD is not limited to any one way, but can be determined only by the efficiency of the fighter.