

Interview with Grandmaster Mark Shuey, Sr. by Canemaster Chris Bird

CB. What actually is Cane Fu?

MS. The name Cane-Fu was coined several years ago for a cane exercise and self-defense curriculum, based on the American Cane System, which is designed for Senior Citizens and the disabled. As such, it is simple in its application yet extremely effective.

CB. Where did the idea come from?

MS. The idea came to me when I was instructing the armed forces, CIA, FBI, and martial artists and realized that the people who really needed to use a cane, I wasn't teaching. When I started engaging them, I also found that that were weak, in fact some couldn't lift the cane over their head. That's when I designed the exercise system as a way to get them strong enough to use the cane. To me a complete martial art is one that can heal as well as hurt; as such the exercises have been created for not only strengthening but healing as well.

CB. So that would be the main difference between the American Cane System and Cane Fu?

MS. It is the beginning; it shows them the basics, it gives them ideas, and it gets them started and fit so they can really learn how to use a cane as more than just a crutch.

CB. The big thing at the moment is the new American Cane System syllabus.

MS. Yes. I wanted to design something that was traditionally structured, as I am a traditional guy. You look back 50 years, and I never even thought that I would be a black belt. With the help and support of Grand Master Clifford Crandall, I created a system that has never been out there. He was the one who wanted to make this thing an icon and a "real" system. It is totally traditional as it talks about respect, discipline, and all the important attributes of the "classic" martial artist.

CB. So it is a martial art, not an exercise system.

MS. A traditional martial art with eight ranks to black belt.

CB. Yesterday you did the demonstration in Palatka, Florida.

MS. That was for health professionals. I am really pushing Cane-Fu and the Exercise System to seniors because in 7 years we are going to have 90 million people over the age of 65 in the states. Currently only two and a half percent of the population participate in a martial arts or self defense class.

CB. If you could sell them a cane each...

MS. (laughs). If I could sell just a half of one percent! The senior population is more active today than they were in my old man's time; they want something to do, they're worried about falling apart, feel insecure, the eyesight might be going; their bodies are starting to feel the impact of life. I can attest to that; I am 39 in my mind, but physically, the years are starting to take their toll, so it's something people ought to think about. It's a martial art that the average Joe can use now. The other difference between the Cane Fu and the American Cane System is you don't have to buy a complete uniform or wear a Gi etc.

CB. How is the cane being received now as compared to when you started the system?

MS. It's making a lot of people happy. When AARP (American Association of Retired People) published an article about us in their magazine, I was getting at least a hundred calls a day. People

were scared to leave the house when they were diagnosed as needing a cane. Now they are calling and thanking me as there is someone out there looking out for them. It changes their whole mindset, they like the cane now. The biggest problem we have with the cane is the perception that it is a crutch; they can't believe that it can protect you.

CB. My adopted grandmother had the same problem after a hip replacement.

MS. When you give someone a cane (the new term is "adaptive device") you should also give them a DVD or a book for instruction; let them know it's a tool, show them what it can do.

CB. How do you find things like Face Book and YouTube?

MS. I have about 5000 friends on Face Book, but they come and go quickly. It helps me, I get some people that find out about the cane and other stuff, so it helps a little bit, and I think it is something you have to do nowadays. It helps get my name out there, and is a marketing tool. 99% of the martial artists I know are on Face Book and it's good for passing on information.

CB. Something we were talking about earlier, the whole thing about becoming a Master or Dojo instructor in a weekend. We call it McDojo. I think it reflects badly on traditional martial artists.

MS. It most certainly does. I offer a 3-Day Cane-Fu Certification program that will get the participant up to an advanced level. It gets them up and involved, it's 12 hours of straight teaching, followed by homework; it is not a credential that is given away. These weekend "black belt warriors" are just stupid, it's like many Yoga people I see; they go away for weekend and come back as Yoga masters. I mean, I have been doing it for 35 years.

CB. We were considered hippies in the 70's for doing Yoga.

MS. When I first started practicing Yoga, people didn't know what I was doing. Nowadays they are playing music, but, in my judgment, you are supposed to be listening to your breath, and going after your breath; it has changed a lot. Yoga has certainly changed my life for the better.

CB. I don't suffer from a bad back as much as I used to, and my flexibility has increased. Something else you work with is the wounded warriors, how did you get involved with that?

MS. The project started when one of my students, Tom Forman, (he's a little guy, six feet five, 230 pounds; real nice man) got the idea of donating canes for the Wounded Warriors, and teaching them how to use it in an empowering way. It really changed their mindset, and they feel better about the cane being a tool versus impairment. They don't feel like a target anymore.

CB. Every wheelchair user that I have taught has been attacked in some manner.

MS. From what I've heard, folks in Canada and the northern Washington area using mobility scooters are being attacked by pan handlers. They are going along, and the pan handlers will get in front of them and demand money to pass. The good news is that some of them have now installed a cane scabbard on their scooter so they can get to their cane and "bop" these ne'er-do-wells.

CB. How did your actual interest in Yoga begin?

MS. Well, I've practiced Yoga for many years, but what really got me hooked was when I got out of bed one day and had to crawl on the floor to go to the bathroom. I went to a doctor and he wanted to operate, and THAT was not on my agenda! Then I went to Hawaii for a vacation and to consider my options. While I was there, I joined a Yoga center, and after my fifth week of pain, it was all gone, it dissolved, I ended up getting stronger and stronger, losing about 30 pounds, and as a result, I stayed for about 6 months (the Yoga diet is mainly vegetarian, though I would sneak out and have a

Korean rib once in a while). It just saved me; it turned me into a strong individual, like I said. I didn't win my first grand championship until I was 52, and it's all because of Yoga and the mindset. Yoga is one of the most important practices one can do for health and flexibility, and I think that everybody should give it a try.

CB. I know people like Madonna made it very popular.

MS. I used to do it in the 70's in my backyard and have people walk past thinking I was some kind of idiot. Now it's very popular. Back when I started, there were maybe 7 different kinds of Yoga. Kind of like the martial arts now, there are a hundred different styles; the names have been changed, and it's getting silly.

CB. We talked earlier about grades. How do you feel about these people who have so many grades in so many styles?

MS. Stupid. It's silly, it's like what we were talking about earlier having 5 year old black belts; there's no such thing. Grading, it depends. I have people call me up and want to pay me to be graded, and I say no; I don't know you; have your master grade you. They have obviously done something to piss their master off, so they are not being graded with them anymore. To me, if you want to grade, you have you go into a school and earn it. Getting a grade, that is up to your master.

CB. Where would you like to see this going over say the next 5 years?

MS. I would like to see the Cane Fu portion continue to help people that need the help. As far as the American Cane System, I think it's going to start flourishing, and move up there with Tae Kwon Do, Aikido, and the rest of them. We have been recognised by six different Grandmasters and Sokes; Black Belt magazine recognized the ACS as a complete system. With our new curriculum in place, there's no reason why you and I should be the only ones who think that the cane can stand on its own! (laughs)

CB. I know in the UK you are synonymous with the cane and Cane Masters, and I know that this has opened up a lot of doors for me, which is good.

MS. My focus is to make people aware that the cane is not a crutch. It's the only tool we have left that we can carry and use as a self-defense tool. You can take the cane through the airport. You are able to protect yourself even in a foreign city or country. You can carry something that can keep you and your family and friends safe. The way things are getting, I think it's going to take off a lot more.

CB. As we talked earlier, we are doing a lot of gun and knife disarms with the cane now.

MS. Most people are being attacked by more than one person, plus in a confrontation you have about a 70% chance that the perpetrator will use a knife. That percentage is cut down with a gun but the bottom line is I think the cane is picking up every day as a viable self-defense tool and it's going to get better as time goes on. You can buy a cane for \$100, or six standard canes for that price, but do you buy a Yugo or a Ferrari; how much is your personal safety worth?

CB. When I show people canes, at first they say they are not interested, but then I show them a technique or two, or an exercise or two, and I have a friend for life.

MS. We are getting a lot of copy cats now. I know three or four different people who are calling what they do the original Cane Fu. You know it's funny as someone wrote a story on Cane Fu saying it was an ancient art just rediscovered. When the Wall Street Journal did an article on me, they wanted to know what to talk about. My good friend Bill Casey and Jennifer Levitz, the reporter who wrote the story, started talking about the old TV series Kung Fu starring David Carradine. The main

character he played in the series was named Cain, so Bill said "Cane Fu", and it stuck. Jennifer asked me if Cane Fu worked, and I said yes. As a result, the moniker Cane Fu came out of the Wall Street Journal article. Other people are picking up on this and are trying to sell it as their own.

CB. We have a couple of copy cats in the UK.

MS. I have all the rights; the Grandmaster council showing that I am the Grandmaster who designed Cane Fu; the whole thing. To me, they should show credentials to show what they know about the cane.

CB. I have run some seminars, and find that the following week, someone at the seminar is a Cane Master expert and master.

MS. I have guys who are saying they are my black belts, are dubbing my tapes and selling them. It's crazy. It's no good getting a lawyer, as the lawyer will be the only one making money. (Laughs).