

Golden Eagle

northern shaolin

Martial Arts

eagle claw

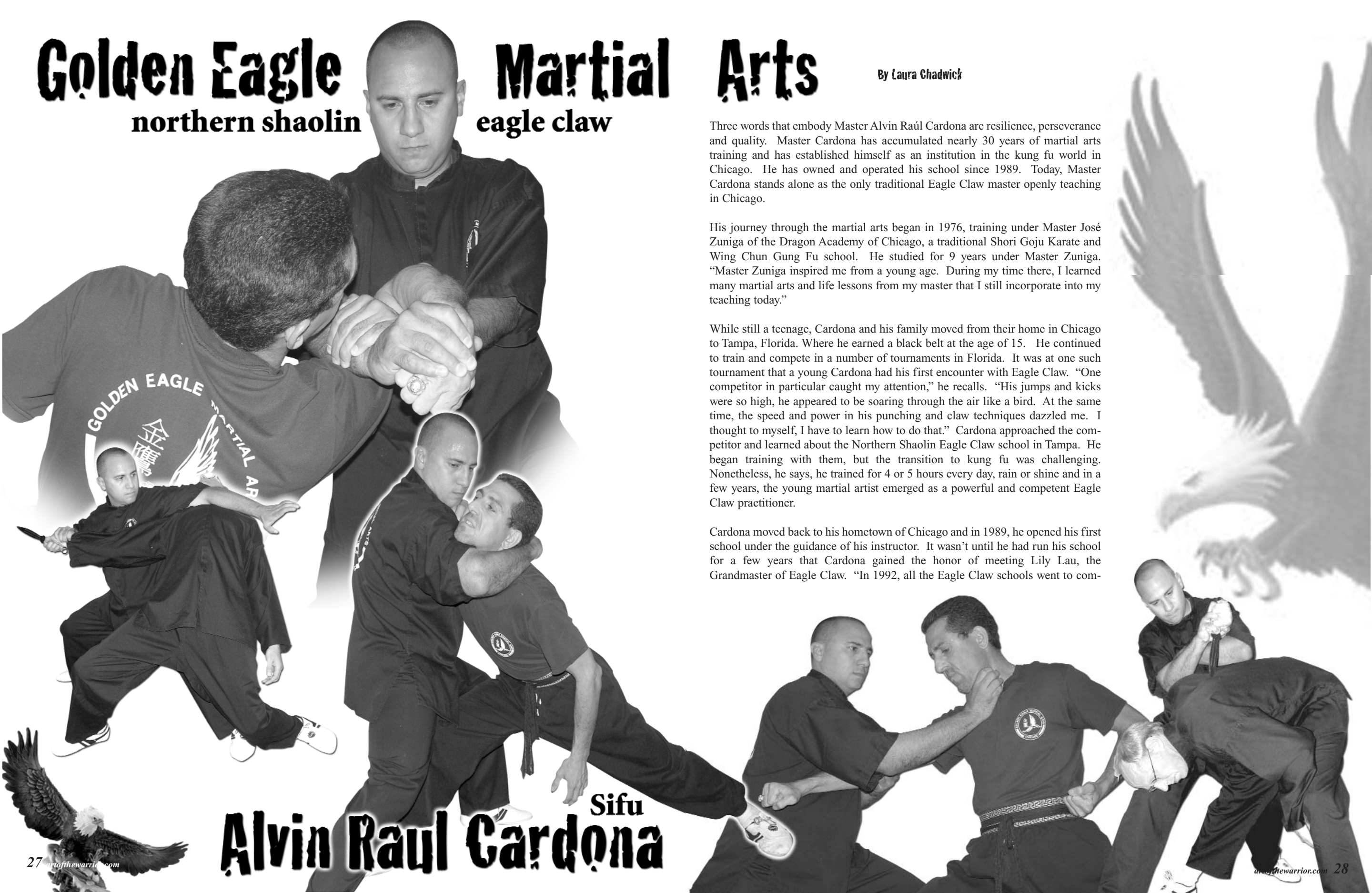
By Laura Chadwick

Three words that embody Master Alvin Raúl Cardona are resilience, perseverance and quality. Master Cardona has accumulated nearly 30 years of martial arts training and has established himself as an institution in the kung fu world in Chicago. He has owned and operated his school since 1989. Today, Master Cardona stands alone as the only traditional Eagle Claw master openly teaching in Chicago.

His journey through the martial arts began in 1976, training under Master José Zuniga of the Dragon Academy of Chicago, a traditional Shori Goju Karate and Wing Chun Gung Fu school. He studied for 9 years under Master Zuniga. "Master Zuniga inspired me from a young age. During my time there, I learned many martial arts and life lessons from my master that I still incorporate into my teaching today."

While still a teenage, Cardona and his family moved from their home in Chicago to Tampa, Florida. Where he earned a black belt at the age of 15. He continued to train and compete in a number of tournaments in Florida. It was at one such tournament that a young Cardona had his first encounter with Eagle Claw. "One competitor in particular caught my attention," he recalls. "His jumps and kicks were so high, he appeared to be soaring through the air like a bird. At the same time, the speed and power in his punching and claw techniques dazzled me. I thought to myself, I have to learn how to do that." Cardona approached the competitor and learned about the Northern Shaolin Eagle Claw school in Tampa. He began training with them, but the transition to kung fu was challenging. Nonetheless, he says, he trained for 4 or 5 hours every day, rain or shine and in a few years, the young martial artist emerged as a powerful and competent Eagle Claw practitioner.

Cardona moved back to his hometown of Chicago and in 1989, he opened his first school under the guidance of his instructor. It wasn't until he had run his school for a few years that Cardona gained the honor of meeting Lily Lau, the Grandmaster of Eagle Claw. "In 1992, all the Eagle Claw schools went to com-



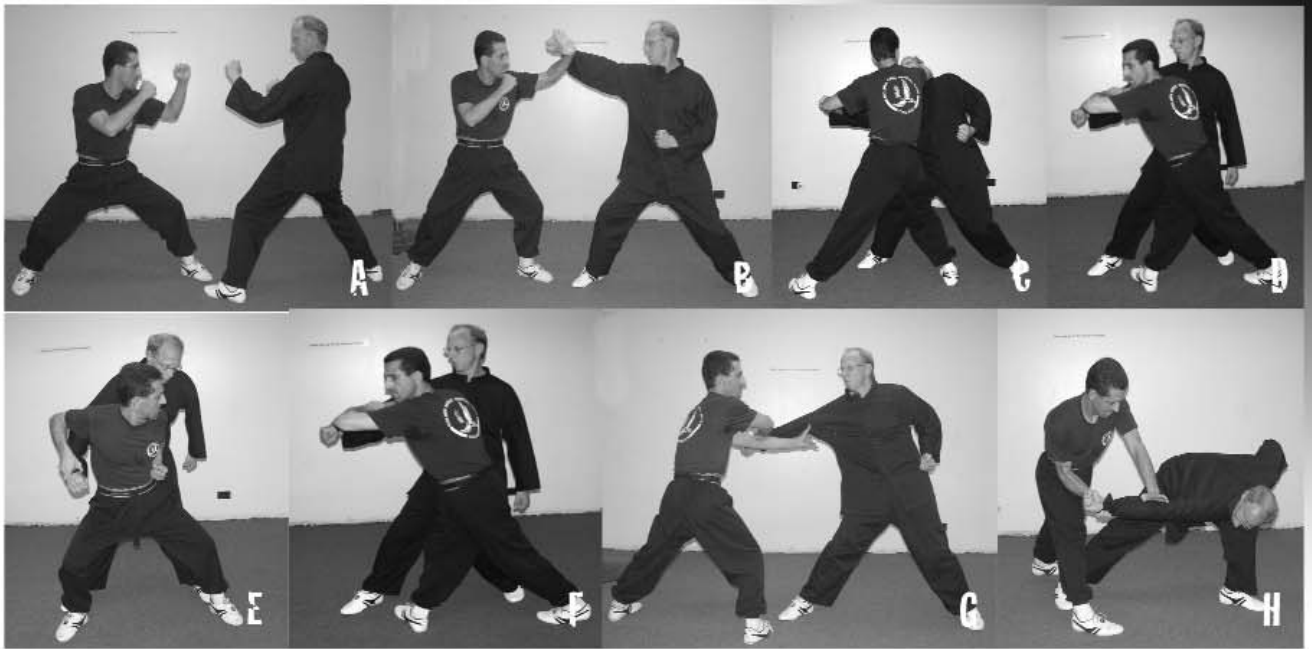
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Alvin Raul Cardona



pete in Baltimore. My instructor introduced me to the Grandmaster and set up training with her.” At that time, he says, he began training as a direct student of Grandmaster Lau. Under the scrutinizing tutelage of Grandmaster Lau, Cardona earned the title of Master.

In addition to teaching and raising a daughter, Master Cardona is in university full-time in order to pursue a Masters degree in Mass Communi-cations and Film/TV production. One of the realities Cardona says he discovered while teaching martial arts is that in the position of teacher, one is a role model to the students whether you want to be or not. For that reason, he incorporates community service and charity work into the life of the school.

“One of my personal goals has always been to run a marathon. My older sister is a marathon runner and I remember watching her train for the Chicago and Boston marathons. I admired her endurance and thought I would like to accomplish such a feat someday. In 2003, I participated in the AIDS Marathon training program to help raise money for people who are living with HIV. I’m happy to say that my students helped me reach my financial goal to donate to the charity. I logged over 500 miles in training and helped raise money for a good cause.” Not only did Cardona run the marathon again the next year, cutting almost 3 hours from his time, two of his students were also inspired to run alongside him. One student ran in honor of an uncle who was a marathon runner, but had passed away from cancer. Also following in his footsteps, one of his blackbelts is participating in the Avon Walk for Breast Cancer this year, raising \$1800 for this 39-mile walk-a-thon. Additionally, Cardona has served as a youth mentor, donated proceeds from his martial arts events to the St. Jude Children’s hospital, organized food and



clothing drives for impoverished Israelis, and held meditation workshops for cancer-survivors networks. “A martial arts community,” he says, “can be a vehicle to connect with the rest of society. During class, I believe I am training leaders, so I want my students to see that as a leader, you’re a member of a larger community and it is your responsibility to give back, to improve your community.”

When asked about the most rewarding aspect of teaching, Cardona responded, “I love to work with people. I have students from all walks of life: law enforcement officers, doctors, actors, lawyers, etc. When people come to the school, it doesn’t matter what they do outside the school once they put on that uniform. Then, they are all kung fu brothers and sisters. It gives me great pleasure to see students who couldn’t tell their right from their left perform a routine with jumps, kicks, spins, cartwheels. It’s rewarding to see students who are shy or unsure of themselves gain confidence over time, become better able to cope with surprises or unexpected situations. My greatest achievement as a martial artist is to graduate a student to black belt. The greatest feeling is watching your student go in front of a Kung Fu tribunal and pass the test. Students discover that they can do things they never thought possible.”

“Running a school,” he says, “is a lot of work. But everyone has to work to survive and it is a privilege to do something that you love. If you have supportive instructors and a good curriculum, the school will achieve great things. For any students who dream someday of running a school, my advice is to follow your dream. If you have the desire and the perseverance, if you work hard, you will be able to accomplish your dream. Whatever obstacles come along the way will only make the trip more interesting. Just keep moving forward.”

