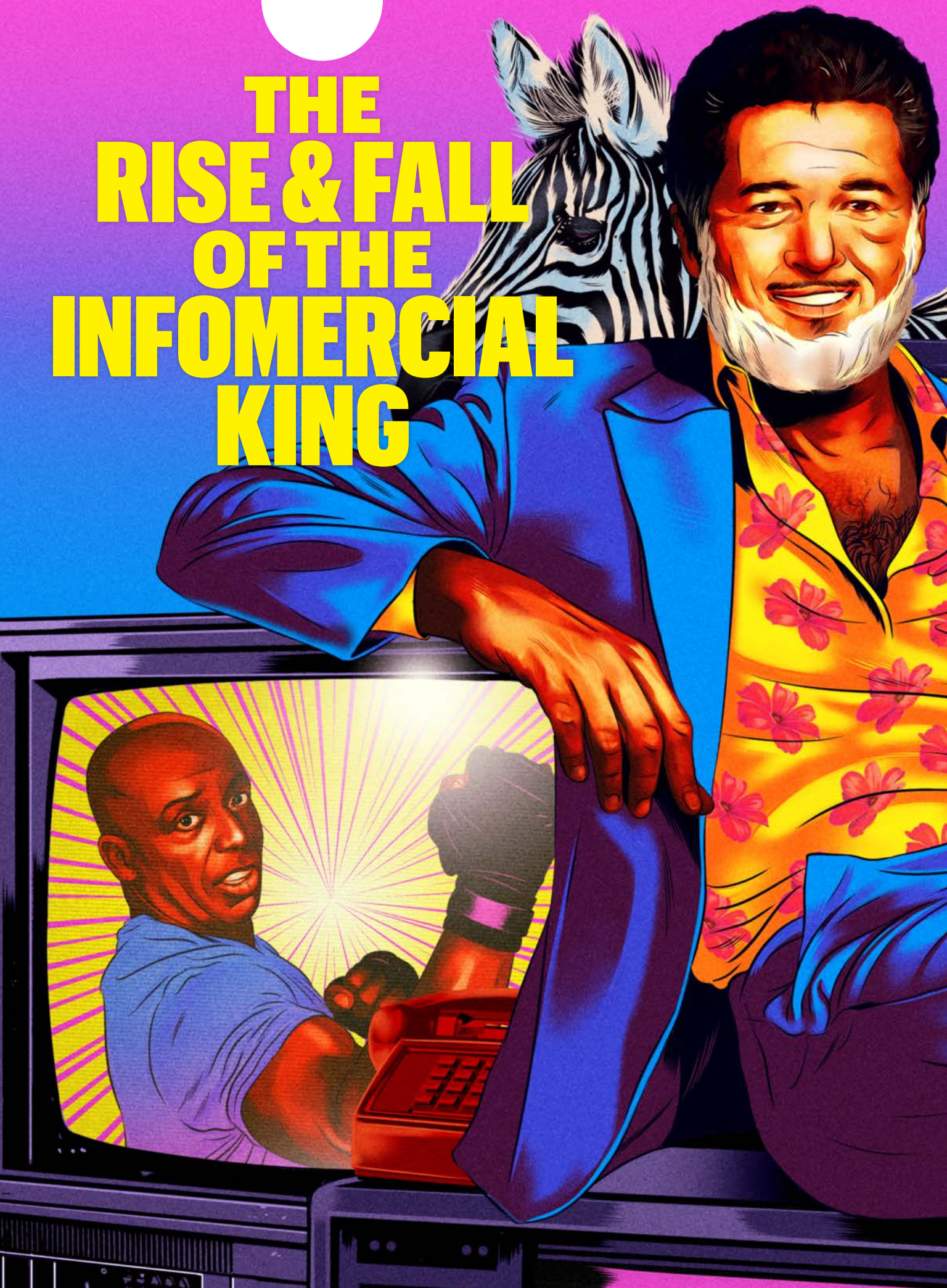

THE
RISE & FALL
OF THE
INFOMERCIAL
KING

THE INCREDIBLE TRUE STORY OF THE CON MAN, THE KARATE CHAMP, AND THE WORKOUT VIDEOS THAT CHANGED FITNESS FOREVER.

BY **KINGSTON TRINDER** ILLUSTRATIONS BY **ALEXANDER WELLS**

"I'VE BROKEN ABOUT 34 OR 35 BONES. MY WRIST TENDS TO HURT ME VERY BADLY."

Evel Knievel, the legendary daredevil, is gazing directly into the camera. It's 1994, and the man best known for wild stunts like attempting to jump a motorcycle over a canyon is starring in an infomercial titled "Saying No to Pain." "When I put the [Stimulator] on and I click it and use it, say, half a dozen or a dozen times on different parts of my wrist, my wrist begins to feel good. I also use it on my knees. It does help me feel a lot better. I use it on my ankles. I've broken both my ankles."

Knievel is holding a syringe-shaped gadget—the Stimulator—which promises natural, safe, and effective pain relief by delivering a gentle electric current when applied to the flesh. The company selling the Stimulator claims that it can remedy almost any ache imaginable—arthritis, back pain, shoulder pain, muscle spasms, carpal tunnel syndrome, painful joints, even menstrual discomfort.

The infomercial, but not the Stimulator itself, is the creation of a mercurial Ohio businessman named Paul M. Monea. Built like a cornerback, the 5'10" Monea is an empathetic listener and a persuasive talker. He owns the patent to the device and teamed up with an Akron chiropractor, William S. Gandee, DC, to sell the Stimulator directly to consumers. The 30-minute advert is their big gambit, hosted by actor Lee Meriwether and featuring endorsements from Knievel, NBA great Bill Walton, actors playing "real people," and Dr. Gandee.

Dr. Gandee gives a quasi-medical presentation, saying things like "The ancient Greeks realized that the body was an electrical system. You know what they did? They put a person in a tub of water, and they put eels in the tub of water with them so they could send electric current and help the body."

This was all pretty standard practice for early-'90s infomercials, which, as everyone over 30 remembers, were TV show–length advertisements frequently filmed like a live sales pitch. (Think of them as the ancestor of #ad posts from influencers.) They often used a mélange of celebrities, hawkers, demonstrations, and outlandish claims, marrying two American pastimes: television and consumption. As a marketing device, they date back to the late 1940s, when the lack of government regulation allowed companies to directly pitch products claiming squishy health benefits affirmed by questionable doctors. The Federal Trade Commission began regulating infomercials in 1978, and in the 1980s and '90s, the rise of cable television and satellite channels provided near-endless opportunities for these advertisements to reach wider audiences. One of the most successful of the 1980s was for the ThighMaster, a fitness product endorsed by *Three's Company* actor Suzanne Somers that has sold more than 10 million units.

In the Stimulator ad, Walton is the closer. He marvels at the gadget's palliative efficacy, enumerating his injuries before declaring, "Thank god for the Stimulator." By calling 1-800-982-2600 toll-free, you could have the Stimulator sent to you anywhere in the country for $88.30. It was never approved by the FDA as a medical device, but over the next few years, more than 800,000 were sold, generating an estimated $64 million along with lawsuits and government investigations. Whatever shortcomings Monea may have had as an inventor or an entrepreneur, vision wasn't one of them. He saw the gold mine sitting beneath Americans' insecurities and aspirations around personal health, and with the Stimulator, and, later, Billy Blanks's Tae Bo fitness phenomenon, he had hit the mother lode.

TO UNDERSTAND

Monea's rise, you have to go back to 1973, when the 27-year-old first gained local media attention by completing a 400-mile charity walk from Louisville, Ohio, to Valley Forge, Pennsylvania. Monea, who was raised as a Jehovah's Witness, secured several thousand dollars for the Muscular Dystrophy Association of America. Reporters followed his progress and Monea's picture appeared in the local paper. He was learning how to use media to push societal buttons and make money.

A few years after the walkathon, Monea, a fledgling businessman, attended a sales seminar and, apparently inspired, tried a new venture in the Akron-Canton area, a two-entrées-for-the-price-of-one dinner program called the Candlelight Dinner Club. It expanded to Cleveland, Columbus, Cincinnati, and Pittsburgh. With the expansion came trouble: According to an article in *The Cincinnati Enquirer*, 31 Ohio and Kentucky restaurants alleged they were misled about the length of their contracts and began litigation in October 1981. Monea denied the charges and countersued, citing breach of contract. Eventually, Candlelight and the restaurants reached an agreement, but Candlelight Dinner Club went on to declare bankruptcy and Monea's economic resources collapsed. He now had four children, two divorces, and almost nothing left, and according to local news stories at the time, he was subsisting largely on macaroni and cheese. (Monea declined several requests to be interviewed for this story.)

Through his brother David, Monea met an Ohio attorney named Edwin Davila in the early '90s. "[David told me Paul's] business failed because Paul had a falling out with an employee who then started a competing company," says Davila. "The story made me feel that Paul was the victim of an injustice, and I fell for it."

Davila says Monea contacted him when he was trying to market what he was calling "an electric muscle stimulator." He had secured the patent, but he needed funding for the device, which he had named (aptly enough) the Stimulator. According to Davila, an acquaintance of his referred Monea to Dr. Gandee as a possible source to pay for the infomercial. Eventually, Monea decided that Dr. Gandee would also appear in it—giving the Stimulator a medical stamp of approval. (Dr. Gandee did not respond to interview requests for this story.)

The infomercial premiered in 1994, and as sales began to multiply, so did complaints. By October 1994, the Akron Better Business

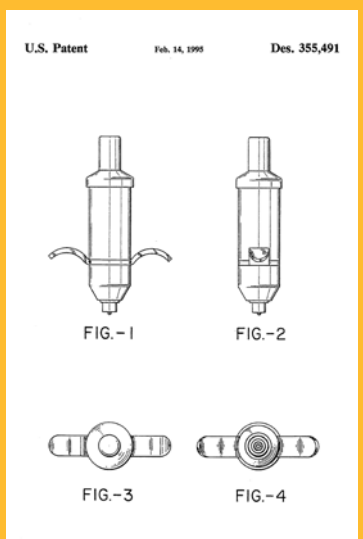
Screengrabs from an infomercial for the Stimulator, featuring Lee Meriwether and chiropractor William S. Gandee, DC.

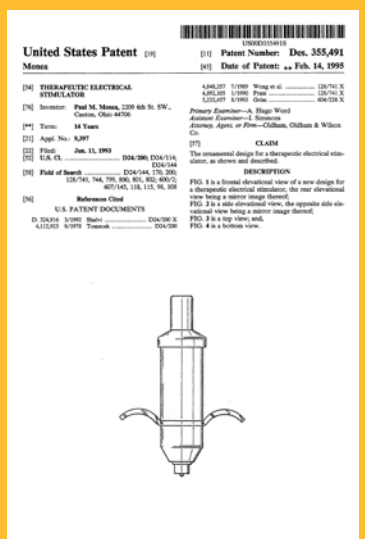
Bureau had received 35 complaints from dissatisfied consumers alleging the product was ineffective and demanding their money back. "From the tone of the complaints, I could see people were looking for a miracle, and they certainly didn't find it in the Stimulator," Akron BBB president Victor Wlaszyn told the *Akron Beacon Journal*. "It reminds me of the old snake oil sort of cure." Dr. Gandee exited the scheme around the same time that Wlaszyn's bureau notified the FDA, the governing body that must green-light all medical devices, which moved to halt sales pending approval.

Monea filed a lawsuit against the Akron BBB, and he also asked his lawyer, Davila, to stall the FDA. "Paul wanted to keep marketing the device and asked me to keep him in business for as long as I could," says Davila, "and he paid me well for the representation." It was a difficult ask because in court documents, it was revealed that the Stimulator was essentially a modified electric gas grill igniter, marketed as a pain-relieving device: "To produce the Stimulator, Appellants purchase gas grill igniters and outfit them with finger grips." The internal mechanism was produced by an Ohio-based company that made ignition products for gas appliances for brands such as Char-Broil and Sunbeam. Each Stimulator cost approximately $1 to produce.

But Davila proved effective in stymieing the FDA. Even after a federal lawsuit was filed, and federal marshals confiscated 16,000 Stimulators in May 1995, Monea's company continued fulfilling orders for more than a year. Davila had become almost a member of Monea's family, even vacationing with them in the Caribbean—where, according to later court records, Davila says he established offshore accounts and shell companies for himself and Monea. Faced with the litigation around the Stimulator, but wealthy thanks to its astronomical sales, Monea was seeking other infomercial opportunities.

Paul Monea's patent document for a "therapeutic electrical stimulator," filed June 11, 1993.





U.S. PATENT OFFICE (STIMULATOR). COURTESY OF AUTHOR (STIMULATOR INFOMERCIAL).

ON MARCH 1, 1997,

Davila says he and Monea went to Atlantic City to watch Sugar Ray Leonard fight Héctor Camacho for the world middleweight championship. At an after-party, they met Leonard's trainer—seven-time karate world champion Billy Blanks—and Seth Ersoff, who managed Leonard and Blanks. Leonard had agreed to endorse the Stimulator and another Monea product, O2Go—oxygenated bottled water.

Blanks, the charismatic, scripture-quoting, shredded six-foot fighter, had previously tried selling a workout to a major video company but was told white women in middle America wouldn't buy a fitness tape starring a Black man. Undeterred, he pitched his hybrid martial arts and aerobics workout to Davila and Monea. "When I first met Paul, he was a nice, milk-drinking guy who used to open up his Bible all the time and talked to me about God," says Blanks. "He knew I loved God, and so I think he thought that if he could talk to me like that, then I would do a lot of stuff."

That stuff would have to wait. By December, a U.S. district judge prohibited further sales of the Stimulator and directed Monea's company to issue refunds. Federal indictments began, and Davila was charged with concealing more than $100,000 of Stimulator profits in his own bank accounts. In July 1998, Davila was indicted for criminal contempt, mail fraud, and money laundering, all connected to the Stimulator.

Davila eventually pleaded guilty to five counts of money laundering and in February 1999 began serving a 33-month sentence in federal prison. "I was the best lawyer Paul could have ever asked for," says Davila, who cooperated with the investigation as part of his plea agreement. "I did three years, and Paul made $64 million. You have a deal with Paul, and he's gonna split the money. He's looking at you, and he's looking at the pile, and he's saying, 'Oh, I don't want to give you

half this pile.' He just wants to screw you," Davila told *Cleveland Scene* in 2007.

After a federal judge issued the injunction to stop sales of the device, Monea needed a new way to generate serious cash—and in Blanks he'd found a fellow working-class, God-fearing grinder with big dreams.

BLANKS GREW UP

in a Christian family in Erie, Pennsylvania, the fourth of 15 children. Billy was plagued by undiagnosed dyslexia and a hip condition that caused clumsiness. As a kid, he saw Bruce Lee on the television show *The Green Hornet* and decided, *I'm going to be like Bruce Lee*. At age 11, he started taking free karate lessons at the local youth center. In 1971, at age 16, Blanks earned his black belt. "I started working on the discipline and focus part of martial arts," he says. "Then I started watching athletes. I wanted to know what was the fastest animal. I would look at the gazelle, and I would look at a tiger and snake, and I said, 'Okay, I want to get that feeling of when a gazelle jumps, it could jump high. And then move as fast as a snake, and be like a tiger with piercing, focused [eyes] so that when people looked at me, they knew I meant business.'"

Blanks won state, national, and international martial arts championships. In 1975, the 20-year-old became America's first Amateur Athletic Union champion. Over the next decade, he worked in martial arts studios and developed a new exercise regime called "kaerobics," which mashed up elements of aerobics, karate, boxing, and dance, accompanied by high-energy music inspired by the *Rocky* soundtrack.

Blanks moved to Los Angeles and found work in martial arts and action films such as *Bloodfist*, *Driving Force*, and *The King of the Kickboxers*. He opened a fitness studio in Sherman Oaks in 1989, where he started teaching kaerobics, gradually attracting celebrity clients such as Paula Abdul, Sinbad, Shaquille O'Neal, Wayne Gretzky, Farrah Fawcett, Carmen Electra—and Sugar Ray Leonard, which led to Blanks meeting Monea in Atlantic City in 1997.

But it turned out that *kaerobics* was trademarked, so Blanks renamed his workout Tae Bo. The name comes from a combination of tae kwon do and boxing, says Blanks. "*Tae* in Korean represents legs. Females have problems with their legs," he says, referring to how many women train to build strong, shapely legs. "And *Bo*, in boxing—guys have problems with their waist." He's referring to how many guys train to become leaner. "So let me use *Tae Bo*—one to represent female, one to represent male, and put them together and create a workout that would help the world be a better place."

"If you're ready for a change in the way you look, and if you want to feel great and have more energy, the next 30 minutes [of Tae Bo] could change your life."

Billy Blanks's hybrid of karate, boxing, and aerobics that he called Tae Bo developed a devoted following at his fitness studio in Los Angeles.

Several months after the meeting at the championship fight in Atlantic City, Monea traveled to Los Angeles to watch one of Blanks's jam-packed classes in person. Tae Bo was fun *and* badass. The passion, the celebrities, the punches, the kicks, the music—Monea knew he could sell it.

Monea rented a studio in Glendale to produce Tae Bo exercise videos within a year of meeting Blanks in Atlantic City. Blanks resisted scripted production, fearful of appearing inauthentic—"I believe that Tae Bo's inside of me," he says—and because his dyslexia made reading scripts and cue cards difficult. But Monea insisted. "He kept saying, 'Script, script, script,'" says Blanks, who remembers spending seven hours trying to recite Monea's script. "I forgot I had my microphone on, and Paul heard me praying—'God, this is something you gave me. God, you gave me the ability to teach and help people.' When he overheard me, he said, 'Hey, Billy, throw the script down. Do what your God wants you to do.'"

Blanks produced four training videos—beginner, intermediate, advanced, and an eight-minute workout. At the same time, they made an infomercial cut with interviews with Tae Bo practitioners, celebrities, and athletes. Monea had already sold a sham product for massive profits by preying on people's frustration with pain. He was a savant at identifying basic, obvious human frailties and desires, then selling bullshit. But this latest venture would be his biggest yet, because this was his greatest promise: total body trans-

ALAMY (BLANKS)

formation. He had found another human frailty—our desire to look better—and our willingness to pay to achieve it.

Blanks was set to receive a guaranteed $250,000 annually as long as the infomercial aired, plus 2.4 percent of gross sales, according to the *Los Angeles Times*. In August 1998, American television viewers were introduced to *Billy Blanks' Tae Bo Workout*. "Tae Bo will infuse you with more explosive energy than you've ever felt before," for just three payments of $19.95. Monea leveraged the popularity of Olympic swimmer Dara Torres to reach men and women. "If you're ready for a change in the way you look, and if you want to feel great and have more energy, the next 30 minutes could change your life," says Torres. Blanks then reveals how Tae Bo teaches you to "reach inside and grab your spirit and conquer everything you want to conquer."

The ad aired some 150 times each day on cable networks. Between August 1998 and June 1999, Monea's company spent an estimated $1.5 million each week on TV airtime. *Billy Blanks' Tae Bo Library* became *Billboard*'s number one fitness video in America, with over $100 million in projected sales for the first year. Blanks, who is passionate and committed to his craft, and Monea, just as committed to his craft of squeezing profit out of human vulnerability, had consummated a very lucrative union.

THE TAE BO

tapes kept selling, but the business side showed signs of cracking. In April 1999, Leonard joined a suit against Monea's company, Universal Management Services, Inc. (UMSI), alleging the unauthorized use of his name and likeness in the Tae Bo infomercial. Ersoff, Blanks's and Leonard's manager, had filed the suit against UMSI to ensure he received a percentage of the profits generated by Tae Bo infomercial sales. Blanks, meanwhile, appeared on *The Oprah Winfrey Show* for a full week—exposure of incalculable value at the time—and went on a national Tae Bo tour with Magic Johnson in July 1999. Billy Blanks World Training Centers were scheduled to open in Houston, New York, Miami, Los Angeles, and Chicago.

"[Tae Bo] created its own industry," says Dan Bohlmann, who was director of marketing for Tae Bo International Fitness in 1999. Numerous Tae Bo lifestyle products went into development—Billy Wear, a nutrition line, a cookbook, suntan oil. Twenty-four new Tae Bo videos were slated for release that year, including *Tae Bo Gold for Seniors*, *Tae Bo Kids*, *Tae Bo Combat*, and *Tae Bo Wheelchair*.

Six months after Monea's Tae Bo infomercial campaign launched, the brand had earned around $75 million in gross sales. Tae Bo had become an international phenomenon, available in more than 33 countries and 11 languages. Over the next five years, sales would top $600 million.

"Paul kept me on TV 24/7," Blanks says. "No matter where I went, I could get on an airplane, and people would say, 'I want to thank you. You helped my grandfather,' or 'I've never seen my mom work out before, but now she's up off the ground.'" Tae Bo's success was not only making Monea a fortune but had also introduced him to the elites whose company he craved. Michigan congressman James Barcia honored Monea on the floor of the House of Representatives, calling him "an outstanding humanitarian and a fiercely focused, hardworking, self-made entrepreneur" and noting that "although some individuals and trusted professional advisors have taken unfair advantage of Paul and his family, he has always stood by his upbringing motto: Right will always ultimately win out." (Monea donated $1,000 to Barcia's reelection campaign.) Monea was even photographed with President Bill Clinton at a Washington fundraiser. He also donated $1 million to the nonprofit Drug Abuse Resistance Education America program, the organization's largest personal donation at the time.

With his newfound wealth, Blanks bought a house and helped his family; he donated a significant amount to his church, the Crenshaw Christian Center; and built a youth center in his hometown of Erie. Monea was flashier. He acquired one of the world's largest yellow diamonds, an immaculate 43-carat specimen known as the Golden Eye. He spent $1.3 million on the 62-acre estate formerly owned by Mike Tyson, which included a 25,000-square-foot mansion, a 10,000-square-foot pool room, a regulation-size basketball court, and a theater with zebra-striped carpeting, in Southington, Ohio. According to one former employee, Monea amassed a multimillion-dollar collection of luxury cars, including two Rolls-Royces, a Corvette Stingray, and two Lamborghinis.

Blanks felt the huge wealth was impacting Monea. "Paul Monea tried to get me to quit teaching," he says. "'You don't need to do that stuff.' I said, 'No, my goal is to work with people.' I think Tae Bo turned Paul into a person that lost himself, and his team tried to get me involved. 'Hey, man. Why don't you put your money in the Cayman Islands? Why don't you do this? Why don't you do that?' I said, 'Nope. I don't want nothing to do with that. I just want to do what God told me to do, and that's it.' I could talk to Paul and say, 'Listen, you might have put me on TV, but if God wouldn't have gave me what he gave me, you wouldn't be able to put me on TV.' I know who my source is, so I kept sticking with that." Despite the strife, the unlikely duo were poised to make even more money.

Blanks in one of his Tae Bo infomercials from 1998. All told, Tae Bo infomercials are estimated to have earned more than $750 million in total revenue.

COURTESY OF BILLY BLANKS (TAE BO INFOMERCIAL)

MONEA SETTLED

his lawsuits with Leonard and Ersoff in April 1999 and came to a new agreement with Billy and his wife at the time, Gayle Blanks, about the future exclusive rights to advertise and sell products and services under the Tae Bo trademark. Negotiated by attorneys John Younesi and Jan Yoss (who were representing both Blanks and Monea), the deal licensed the Tae Bo name to Monea for $140 million over seven years, Blanks says.

But unbeknownst to Blanks, Monea's company was using Tae Bo to upsell customers on a new scheme. In November 2000, three Ohio women filed a class action lawsuit against Billy Blanks Enterprises alleging that after purchasing Tae Bo–related merchandise, they were offered a free trial membership and unknowingly enrolled in MemberWorks, a coupon club. Annual membership cost between $60 and $100 and renewed automatically unless consumers canceled within 30 days. Approximately 650,000 Tae Bo customers were unwittingly enrolled and charged.

Meanwhile, federal tax investigators had been building a case against Monea, and on May 8, 2003, he pleaded guilty to two counts of federal tax evasion. According to court records, Monea, who was then 56, had concealed personal and corporate earnings from 1994 to 1997 in offshore corporations and bank accounts—and failed to pay $1.3 million in taxes. He was sentenced to 30 months in prison and fined $25,000. Even with Monea behind bars and feuding with the Blankses, Tae Bo continued to thrive and topped *Billboard*'s list of bestselling health and fitness videos in May 2004.

But Blanks's deteriorating relationship with Monea's company NCP Marketing complicated the litigation around the possession and licensing of Tae Bo, which would ultimately devastate the brand. NCP filed for bankruptcy in April 2004, and Blanks says he was legally prohibited from making new Tae Bo videos for seven years. His beloved franchise of omnipresent infomercials and late-night rebroadcasts all but evaporated.

"I wasn't allowed to use the word *Tae Bo* at that time," says Blanks. "People took advantage of me because I was a nice guy. People think I made a lot of money. I made some, but I didn't make what people thought I made. Altogether, I made off Tae Bo probably close to $40 million." Blanks kept doing his classes at his Sherman Oaks studio for a while, visited American armed forces members in Iraq and Afghanistan, and eventually relocated to Japan, where he was immensely popular.

Monea spent much of his prison time dealing with legal issues. He still owed the government the $1.3 million in unpaid taxes. Malibu Beach Tans, a business Monea had allegedly gifted his girlfriend, Gina Campisi, was in financial trouble. In need of capital, he began attempting to liquidate assets, including the Tyson mansion. He was released from the Elkton penitentiary in September 2005.

Even after a stint in prison and all the legal problems, the fortunes gained and lost, the ambition and/or greed that drove Monea to riches with the Stimulator and Tae Bo landed him in another, even stickier mess.

Monea reconnected with an old friend, Michael "Mickey" Miller, who owned a large automobile dealership in Canton. However, Miller's dealership was laundering money for drug dealers. One of his customers, John Rizzo, was an intermediary between drug dealers from South America and business owners willing to launder money. Miller would invest Rizzo's money (delivered by Rizzo in cash, around $100,000 at a time) in his dealerships, then write checks to Rizzo's consulting business. Miller and Rizzo enjoyed a lucrative relationship for two years. But Rizzo was actually Special Agent John Tanza of the FBI, whose Akron-based investigation of Miller was called Operation Flat Tire.

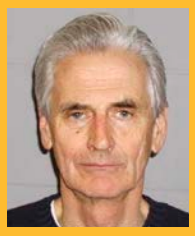
In March 2006, Miller introduced Monea to Rizzo/Tanza, and the two men bonded over cars, says Tanza. "When I met Paul, he was driving Shaquille O'Neal's former Mercedes 500. He had a driver, wasn't dressed very loudly—kind of conservative, nothing fancy or anything about him." Monea soon proposed several business opportunities to Rizzo/Tanza, including investing in a reality show, *Tyson's House Party*, featuring a group of young women living together in Mike Tyson's former estate.

Rizzo/Tanza said he wasn't interested. Over seven months, the two men developed a working relationship, and Monea started negotiating a transaction to sell the Tyson estate, the Golden Eye diamond, and a boat to Rizzo/Tanza's employer for $19.5 million. To finalize the deal, Rizzo/Tanza organized a meeting between Monea and another representative of the fictitious drug dealers at a suite at the Venetian Casino in Las Vegas.

"I had told Monea that we're dealing with a major South American drug dealer, but I want to make it clear: honorable person, don't screw around," says Tanza. "I say it in the car, and Monea turns to his friend and says, 'Oh, rug dealers, we're dealing with rug dealers.' I said, 'Don't screw around with this, guys.'" Monea told Rizzo/Tanza not to worry and that he had sold a number of boats in Miami for cash—"for bags of cash, and you never count the money. You'd be insulting them if you count the money."

At one point during the meeting, Monea sent his associate to fetch the walnut-size diamond, says Tanza. "It was beautiful, a perfect yellow 43.5-carat diamond," he says. The meeting went well, and they all agreed on a final price.

The FBI, of course, heard every word because Tanza was wearing a wire. On December 13, 2006, at the offices of Monea's attorney, Monea, Miller, and Rizzo/Tanza awaited confirmation of the $19.5 million wire transfer. Agents descended on the office and arrested Miller, Monea, and Rizzo/Tanza (to protect his undercover status).



Michael Miller's 2006 mug shot.

Undercover FBI agent John Tanza.

COURTESY OF USMS (MILLER); COURTESY OF SUBJECT (TANZA)

In January 2007, Monea and Miller were indicted on multiple counts of conspiracy and money laundering, and in May, both were found guilty of all charges. Miller pleaded guilty to 37 counts of money laundering and conspiracy to commit money laundering, testified against Monea, and was sentenced to 57 months in jail. Monea denied all charges, was found guilty on three counts of money laundering and one count of conspiracy to commit money laundering, and was sentenced to 12½ years in prison.

Tanza did not have any interaction with Monea during the trial but says he made eye contact as he left the courtroom after testifying. "He was not a happy camper," says Tanza. "This guy had done a lot of criminal things, a lot of shady-type dealings through his entire life. 'Yeah, I got caught again, and I'm pissed because this is going to be a big one.' He wasn't coming out on the other end of this thing smelling like a rose."

BLANKS, HIS NEW WIFE, Tomoko, and their daughter, Angelika, who were living in Osaka, Japan, moved to Los Angeles in 2011. These days, Blanks, 69, still teaches Tae Bo at his Sherman Oaks studio. Infomercials no longer command big audiences and profits, and he's being replaced by a new generation of fitfluencers on social media. But Tae Bo's legacy lives on in high-energy martial-arts cardio group classes at gyms like Rumble and F45. Blanks remains convinced of Tae Bo's enduring relevance and usefulness in the post-pandemic, post-Internet, AI- and avatar-suffused world—he's recently released an augmented-reality video game, *Taebo Reboot*.

"When I think of Paul Monea, I think he started off as a good person, but success got to his head," Blanks says when asked about his onetime business associate. "I didn't know anything about his past when he shot those other infomercials, but I know Tae Bo was a lot bigger. He became ego driven, and then the next thing you know, nobody could tell him anything. Tae Bo changed Paul. Tae Bo changed a lot of people."

Monea was released from prison in 2018. Today, he still lives in Canton, Ohio, where he operates several enterprises. He was recently marketing a new product with a familiar pitchman on Facebook and elsewhere on the Internet: Evel Knievel's Natural Choice Pain Relief Gel. Monea was using a video recording of Knievel himself saying, "It's not a gimmick, or a scam, or some kind of hocus-pocus product. It's the real thing." A tube of Knievel's miraculous pain relief gel cost just one easy payment of $26.90.

KINGSTON TRINDER *is a Los Angeles–based author and documentary filmmaker.*