



# The Bruce Lee Memorial Museum: A HERO'S TRIBUTE

by Maggie Pierce

To walk through Norman Borine's The World of Bruce Lee Museum is to be engulfed, overwhelmed with Bruce Lee. His face shines or grimaces or snarls out of hundreds of poses from all four walls at once. In a single glass display case are his personal handmade nunchakus on permanent loan from Linda Lee (Bruce's widow), original scripts of *Enter the Dragon* and *The Silent Flute* (released as *Circle of Iron* this January), the film of Bruce's screen test for his role in the *Green Hornet* television series, and the last letter Bruce ever wrote, addressed to his lawyer, Adrian Marshall, and dated 20 July 1973.

With almost no publicity whatsoever, Borine's museum in Los Angeles has gained an international reputation among Bruce Lee fans and followers. Even though the collection, housed in a tiny storefront, has kept hours only on weekends, people come from all over the world to see it, particularly on the high holidays of July 20 and November 27 (the dates of Bruce's death and birth).

"For his birthday," said Borine with a life-sized poster of Bruce in *Game of Death* peering over his shoulder, "we had people from eight or nine states here. One young man came all the way from Niagara Falls only to see this. He stayed at a motel across the street and was waiting at the door every morning when I came in for ten days. A girl came from Washington, D.C., and others from Minnesota, Montana, Texas and

Mississippi. A lot of other people come just when they happen to be in Los Angeles, but there are people who have actually come here just for this! It's amazing."

It is amazing, but that's the result of nothing more than word-of-mouth advertising. People come in, go away amazed and tell all their friends who later on come in themselves. Borine's mail is often almost embarrassingly grateful.

"Oh, yes," he said. "They go home and write those beautiful letters, and they say, 'Oh, my gosh, all my friends are so jealous of me. I can't stop talking about it. Thank you so much for The World of Bruce Lee so that we can identify with it. If there's ever anything I can do, please let me know.'

"This one girl and her husband came, among others, from New York and offered to do my addressing for me, she wanted to be in on it so badly. But it really would have entailed more to send her the things and have her send them back than if I had somebody do it right here."

The trouble right now is that Borine has had to close up the museum altogether. The posters, the framed photographs, all the souvenirs are crated up and languishing in storage, waiting for better times—and decisions on the part of Columbia Pictures.

But that's getting ahead. Borine has spent the last five years acquiring what may be the most extensive collection of Bruce Lee artifacts anywhere. It includes posters, magazines in half a

dozen languages, a myriad of small memorabilia produced during Bruce's lifetime, including watchbands and keychains and tiny plastic toy nunchakus.

Curiously enough, just five-and-a-half years ago, Borine had never even heard of Bruce Lee, although today, to talk to him, one feels certain he must have known Lee personally.

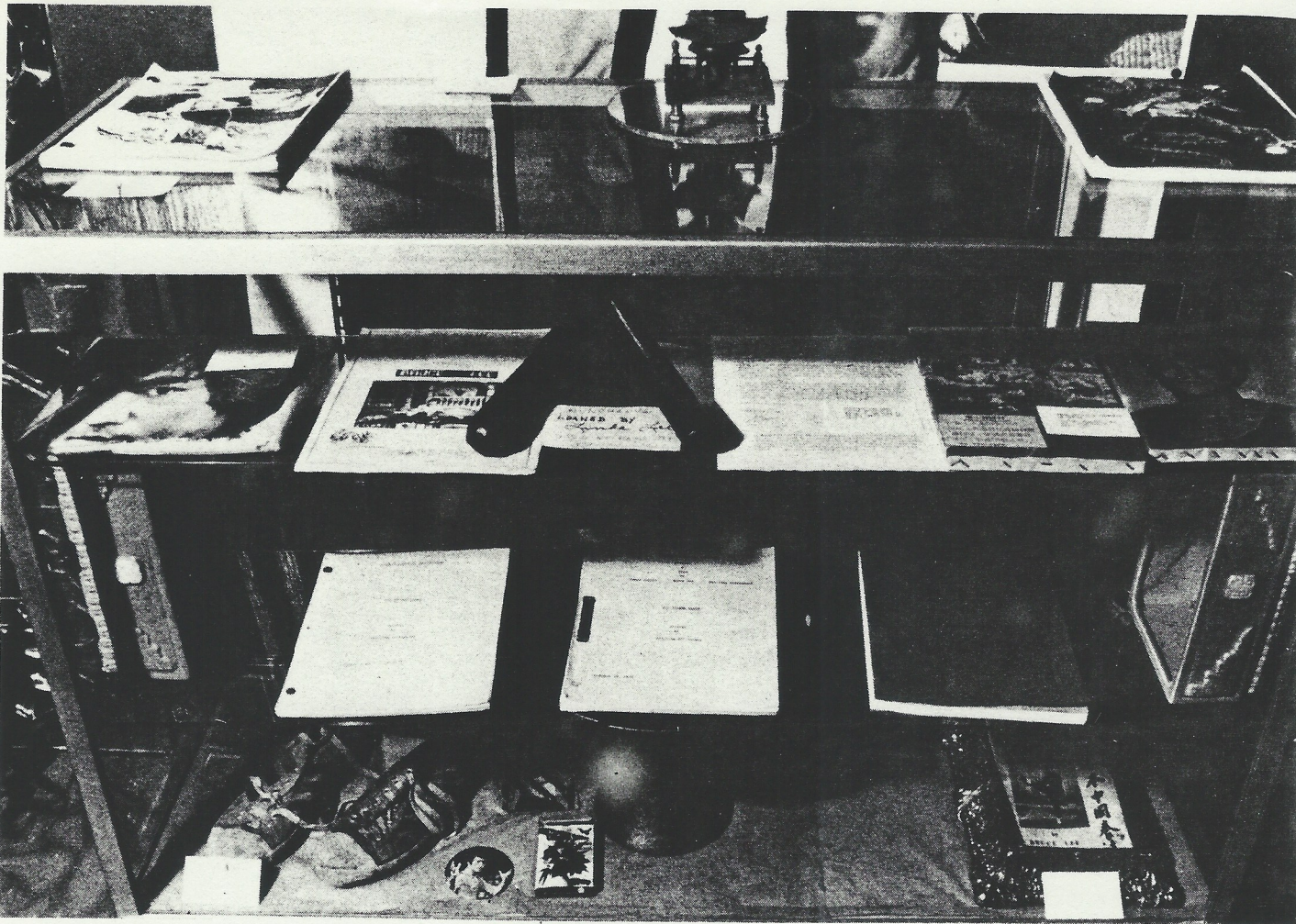
"When *Enter the Dragon* was playing at the Chinese Theatre (in Hollywood), I had never heard of him. My wife and I had this card and poster shop on Hollywood Boulevard, and this Chinese fellow from San Francisco came in selling Bruce Lee posters. I wasn't there that day, but he asked my wife if she wanted to sell some of his posters in the shop, and she didn't know who Bruce was, either. The young man tried to explain, but my wife said, 'Well, I like his face and what he's saying, but I'm really not into martial arts' and asked him to come back the next day. Well, I just thought we already had wall-to-wall posters in the shop. We hardly needed one more, if it wasn't going to sell. So I said, why don't we go and see what this dude does?"

"So I went to the movie, and I sat there so stunned I was

**Norman Borine's "The World of Bruce Lee" Museum is a treasure trove of Lee memorabilia, including numerous movie stills, many framed and glassed and some autographed. Borine has spent the last five years acquiring the most extensive Bruce Lee collection anywhere.**



Photos by Ed Ikuta



just flabbergasted. I sat through it a second time and came back and told my wife about it. So the next day we went and sat through it twice again! At this time, I've seen *Enter the Dragon* fifty-six times, but that's not unusual."

And that was the beginning.

Soon after, the burgeoning museum had to relocate. But this is no mere fannish collection, substantial though it is. The World of Bruce Lee is only the first part of Borine's dream for the future. When we talked in December, Borine said that he was closing up the museum until the still-uncertain opening of *Game of Death*. At that time, the distribution rights in the United States were still unsold.

"Until then," he said, "I feel the museum has temporarily done its thing, so to speak. So the walls (of posters) are coming down for an indefinite period."

Now that the film is tentatively scheduled for release by Columbia in May (June at the latest), Borine finds his plans simply to reopen the exhibit are not so simple after all. For one thing, he finds he has captured the interest of Dan Inosanto and Eric Lee, as well as the fervent dedication of Randy Wong, a young fan from San Francisco, in a permanent home for the collection. And for another, Columbia Pictures and Golden Harvest (the production company responsible for *Game of Death*) have discovered him.

"Both Richard Graff and Al Nathan, executives at Columbia, have asked me about the possibility of taking it (the exhibit) on tour. Mr. Nathan said the idea would be not merely to follow the movie as it opens around the country but to hit key cities and earn as much publicity for the film from it as possible through the media coverage of the exhibit. They were talking about printing up T-shirts and getting TV spots.

One of Borine's display cases contains Bruce's personal nunchakus, his last letter (dated 20 July '73) and a pair of his workout shoes, along with scripts for *The Silent Flute* and fan artwork. The store front in Eagle Rock is temporarily closed.

Nathan was very excited.

"Maury Segal, who's been connected with Golden Harvest for a long time, heard about us somehow and called me over a year ago. He said that if it were up to him, he'd have me pack up the collection and open it up at the studio for the press and then for the general public. I talked to him again a couple of weeks ago, and he reiterated, 'Something good will come of it (the collection), because I'm convinced you have something we need to promote the movie.'"

Without ever intending to, then, Borine has suddenly become caught up in the Hollywood publicity whirl he thought he had gotten out of when he retired from a successful career as a choreographer. Even so, things were still very much up in the air until just recently.

"All of a sudden I get this call," he said with a kind of awe for the workings of fate. "Richard Graff at Golden Harvest asked me to meet with him, and I showed him the albums of pictures of the museum, and he said it was the first solid publicity idea he had come across for *Game of Death*. He wanted to use it but wasn't sure how. So he took the pictures to Raymond Chow and then sent them to Columbia. He suggested the tour, television and the possibility of a permanent or semi-permanent museum either here in Hollywood or at the old place in Eagle Rock (just east of Los Angeles), only three times bigger."

Unfortunately, at the moment there is no place where the collection can be seen by the public, or anyone else, except in

the two fat books of snapshots Borine is loathe to let out of his hands. He has to wait, at the moment, for some kind of decision from Columbia and then for the completion of whatever plans they may have. After that comes what he and Randy Wong have set forth as their "dream."

That dream is for a huge, permanent world center dedicated to the memory of Bruce Lee but transcending and surpassing any mere display.

"We presently have our minds set on the eventual creation of a huge complex—a world center, an institute of learning in honor and in memory of Bruce Lee, dedicated to human growth and the betterment of all mankind."

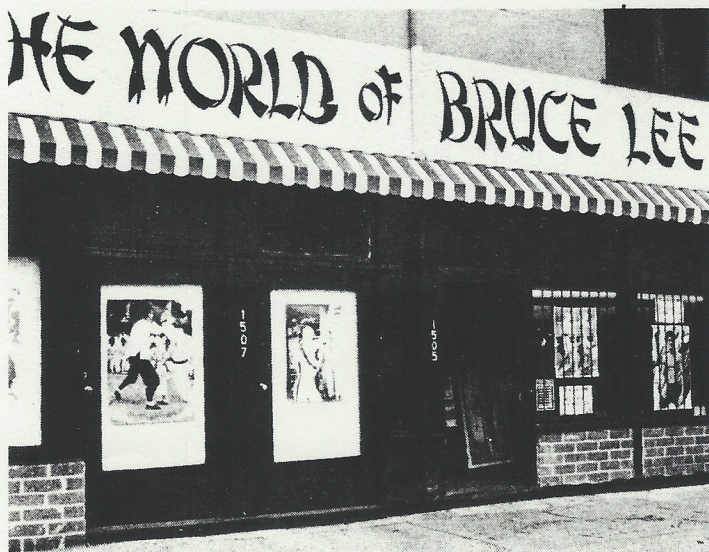
So reads the opening of a statement of purpose to which Borine, Wong and Inosanto have set their names. Plans so far include establishing a massive library of philosophy and related fields in both oriental and occidental disciplines, as well as in the martial arts and related physical sciences. The library will also be a storehouse of film and recordings on the same topics. "The object," said Borine, "is to make sure Bruce will live forever."

Furthermore, the complex, surrounded by Japanese ornamental gardens, will contain screening rooms, a lecture hall, reading rooms and a great meditation hall, as well as a complete martial arts gymnasium. All this in addition to the complete Bruce Lee collection, which they hope will eventually include detailed reproductions of the sets from Lee's films and the best original artwork from the legions of fans.

The collection will remain, in any case, the sole property of Borine, no matter what Columbia decides to do relative to *Game of Death*, and no matter how three-dimensional his own plans become. The greatest goal for the moment in establishing the cultural-philosophical-martial arts center Borine and his coconspirators envision is money. Lee has lately volunteered his services and brainpower to promote the museum project and has already indicated that he has some ideas on fund-raising. Borine said further that he is about to talk with Stirling Silliphant (*Circle of Iron*) and eventually with Steve McQueen and David Carradine, with an eye to gaining their support and involvement in the project.

The one thing he is most certain of is the support of the fans.

"It's surprising how deeply these people feel," he said



## Memorial Dedication of the World of Bruce Lee

*These twin torches here in the World of Bruce Lee will continue to burn as a tribute to the man who will be remembered so long as Man continues in his great individual search for his own identity.*

*Bruce Lee was not a god, and he was only a hero to those who are capable of identifying with the principles which he, as one human being, was able to set into motion and make work.*

*As with other truly remarkable men, Bruce made no claim to infallibility. He invited us to use his knowledge to the degree that it found acceptance in our personal lives. And to toss aside that which we found uncomfortable or undesirable. He realized the uniqueness of each human being.*

*Bruce understood that self-knowledge, properly con-*

*trolled and used, is the basis not only of jeet kune do but also for life as expressed and experienced by each human personality.*

*In his own words, "The control of our being is not unlike the combination of a safe. One turn of the knob rarely unlocks the safe. Each advance and retreat is a step toward one's final achievement."*

*If you are one of the millions who feel an intangible pull from the spirit of Bruce Lee, it is a sign that he did not live for himself alone. Each one who senses the spirit of Bruce is being guided by the same flaming torch which led him on his journey through life. Grasp that torch. Walk with it. Run with it . . . and hold it high, for it is yours!*

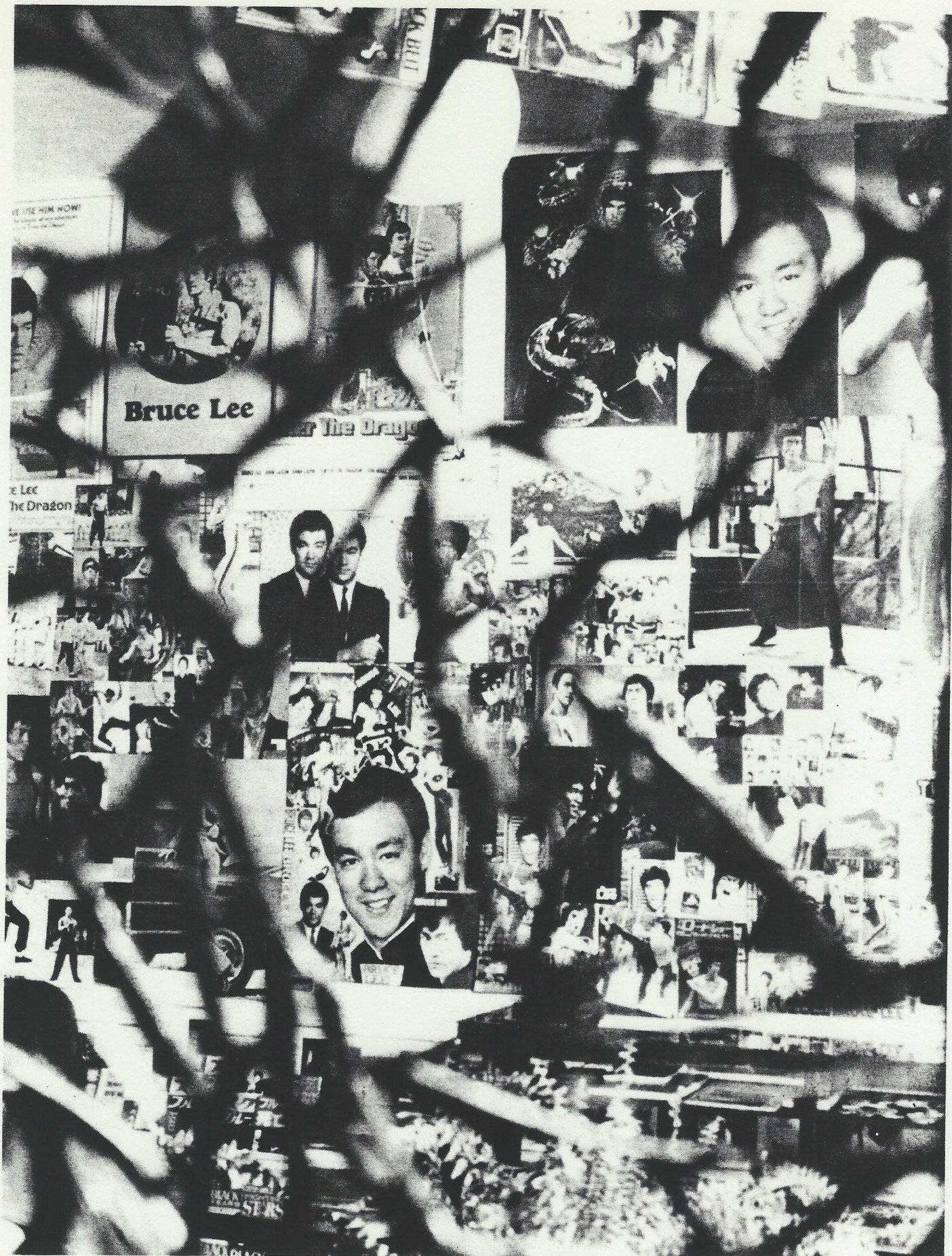
*—Norman Borine, 1978*

thoughtfully. "It's more than a movie-fan type of thing, although it's true it is like Marilyn Monroe or James Dean. It's something of a cult. But it's not a facetious thing. A friend of ours—Gary Kahatsu—always comes in with two of his friends to offer their services whenever we have a celebration or anything.

"When Linda Lee first heard about the museum, I don't think she was too happy about it. That was when I had the shop on Hollywood Boulevard. But when she came to the opening here with Mr. Marshall, her attorney, they both said, 'Norman, we've changed our minds. You're doing something that is needed and that people want. So you have our permission to do anything you feel is in good taste.' And they've kept up that support. Linda said she had been all over the world and had never seen a collection like this one. And one day she came and said, 'I would like you to have something that no one else would be able to give you.' That's the nunchuks. She said Bruce had made them himself, and they were the ones he used to practice with at home. If Brandon decides he would like to have them as he grows older, of course they will be his."

There have been some problems, however, and one good reason for temporarily packing up the whole collection might be to protect it from other collectors who cannot bear to share what Borine offers with anyone else.

"Someone broke in upstairs," Borine recounted sadly, "and took \$2,500 worth of magazines. I had several dozen copies of two very expensive, very rare magazines that come from Tokyo. They're the most beautiful magazines anywhere in the world. They only come out once or twice a year. I had several



The dream of Norman Borine and Randy Wong is for a permanent memorial which will stand as a cultural center and as a shrine to the memory and philosophy of Bruce Lee.

hundred of them, and someone broke in and took every one of them.

"That's all they bothered taking, except some slides and some French Bruce Lee magazines. They knew what they were doing, obviously, so it's somebody I know. I think I know who did it, but so far we're doing nothing about it. I keep thinking eventually they're going to feel bad about it and come back and leave them at the door or something. I just don't understand the thinking that could let anyone do a thing like that against a name they supposedly admire. The police took some beautiful fingerprints and footprints, but I haven't pressed any charges. I think they're going to turn themselves in eventually."

In the long run, Borine feels that Bruce Lee will be remembered ultimately for his philosophy and world view more than his athletic accomplishments. The still-a-dream Bruce Lee Memorial will be dedicated to that end.

"You see," said Borine, "Bruce was not limited in his appeal to any set group. He is for all people, for all time. The old, the young, men, women, everyone. When people talk about him, it's as if they have some sort of vision of something very personal in their lives.

"I remember some older women, a couple of black women who used to come in all the time. And they would say, 'Mr. Borine, you know, when I go to see a Bruce Lee movie—which I do every time one comes around—I go in there, and no matter how tired I am or how much I've been working or if I'm troubled or anything, I just seem to lose all that by the time I get out of there. I come out feeling like a hundred-percent better person.'

"It was a catharsis and at the same time an exchange. Bruce was magnetic on the screen. I mean, they could really draw from him.

"He's broken down the barriers that our society has set up regarding race, nationalities, classes, money or no money, job or no job.

"Our center is going to be built around this memory of Bruce, because I feel this is what he was struggling for. We will be stressing his philosophy and his attributes. Those attributes that make him admirable, that make him a hero—and we don't care enough about heroes anymore—are what is going to bring people in. Not merely the fact that this is Bruce Lee.

"It isn't just a Bruce Lee center, after all. It's something for everyone. I really feel that strongly. People are inquiring more and more, where can they get any books on Bruce Lee's philosophy? Naturally, I always say *Tao of Jeet Kune Do*. That has a lot of it. And I think that these are things that will take precedence over the posters, the keychains, the buttons, the souvenirs. So it isn't just the Bruce Lee fans who will be eventually deriving the good from it."

Tom Wolfe called the present era the "Me Generation" and said the only heroes any of us have are our sacred selves. Perhaps the continuing spirit of Bruce Lee, interpreted and nourished by the dedicated likes of Norman Borine, will help us out of that self-obsession and into a new awareness of the potential of each human being. ☆

*Editor's Note: You can put yourself on the World of Bruce Lee mailing list and get a newsletter and a photo of Bruce Lee by writing. Send one dollar and three 15-cent stamps to Norman Borine, P.O. Box 3475, Hollywood, CA 90027; or Randy Wong, P.O. Box 425, San Francisco, CA 94101. Randy and Norman are each sending out different photos. Both will update Game of Death and museum information, as well as make sure you get advance word on an upcoming contest. For contest information, send a self-addressed stamped envelope with your letter.*