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# "I REMEMBER BRUCE"

IN THE SEPTEMBER, 1994 ISSUE OF OUR SISTER PUBLICATION, MARTIAL ARTS MASTERS, AN INTERVIEW WITH ONE OF BRUCE LEE'S FIRST AMERICAN FRIENDS AND STUDENTS, JOE COWLES, APPEARED. AS A FOLLOW UP, WE ARE OFFERING THIS EXCLUSIVE, UNCENSORED COLLECTION OF ANECDOTES ABOUT THE "LITTLE DRAGON" FROM A FIRST-HAND OBSERVER.

BY PAUL BAX

**JOE COWLES:** I recall once when I had gone out to the white center area of Seattle, Washington, I went into a health studio which had a karate class going on. In those days this was rarely seen. I asked the owner of the studio about the class and he started bragging about the teacher there who was a Black Belt. I had never seen an actual karate class. I had trained a little bit under a green belt in karate for awhile but I never participated in a karate class as we know them today.

I wanted to see what a karate class looked like so I called up Taky Kimura who called Bruce and we all went to the health studio to watch the class. When we walked in Bruce saw the writing on the back on the karate gi's that the students were wearing and Bruce made the comment, "This is pretty good. This is what I started out in." As you know he had trained in different styles before he came to what he called his own clan which was the Wing Chun school in Hong Kong.

We watched the class and the instructor started to talk to Bruce after their workout was over. He asked Bruce if he taught martial arts to which Bruce replied, "Well I wouldn't have said anything but



Joe Cowles was one of Bruce Lee's first American students.

since you asked...." Then he began to explain the different things he thought were authentic in the martial arts.

Bruce held his hand out and told the instructor to press down on it. He then told the man to press harder. When he pressed harder somehow Bruce just brought his hand up and touched him on the chest. He went on discussing things with that instructor. We all went out later to have coffee with this instructor at a little restaurant. Bruce, of course, did not drink coffee.

We were sitting there talking and Bruce told this instructor, "After we go outside I'll show you I can poke your eye and you cannot stop me." He wasn't threatening the man, he was just meaning it as a demonstration of his speed. He wasn't intending to strike him or anything.

After we went outside he told the man to stand there with his arm in a certain position and try to block him as he struck his eyes with a bil gee technique or what is known as an eye strike. Bruce held his hand clear down by his leg and suddenly lashed out at the man's eyes (pulling his blow of course) and I saw the man's hand barely start to move, but Bruce was in





and out before he could move his hand. They did it about three times and the man couldn't touch his hand at all. He couldn't block him.

Later on I went back to that health studio. I was kind of curious what the owner of the school had to say. I wasn't trying to be troublesome or anything, I was just curious. The owner told me the instructor of the karate class felt he was like an amateur compared to Bruce. He thought Bruce was like a sixth degree karate man. So, that made me feel good, of course.

Another time, which was kind of a humorous incident occurred out on a school yard. The recess was going on and we were working out and there was a Chinese kid not far away from us. Bruce was in the process of telling us as he had several times before that he was prejudiced for the Chinese people. He said that all Chinese are that way. He then said he would show us what he meant. He called the Chinese kid over and he asked him if he was prejudiced for Chinese people. The kid looked kind of stunned at the question. He looked at all of us who were all Caucasian and of course Bruce was Chinese and we had one black man working out, too. He acted like he did not know what to make of the question. But when he answered he said, "No, I'm an American!" So the thing just kind of fell. Bruce just let it go.

Bruce said in China when a teacher would instruct a student and the student questioned him on how to do the technique the teacher would tell him to "shut up and do like I do." He was using that as an illustration to imitate what he was doing and not try to analyze it too much. We call it "paralysis by analysis." So good instruction he said was imitating the movement understanding of course that this is including the speed, crispness and power inherent in each move.

Bruce also told us a real fight is not messing around. He said it's just, "boom, boom, boom, boom, boom," as the guy hits the ground. It was kind of funny the way he illustrated those things.

Bruce used a stair bannister one time to show me how use most anything to practice a technique. He shot his right arm underneath the bannister and brought his left arm down while his right fist circled and struck an imaginary opponents temple. He was illustrating how I could do what we called chop choy gwat choy technique by just using common ordinary things to practice on if you did not have nice equipment.

A lot of things Bruce said just stick in my mind, not because I am trying to sound like Bruce Lee, but because I feel what he said had a wealth of information and knowledge of how to do a certain thing. One was that "you had to feel like you cannot do anything unless your opponent helps you to do it." This was a way of explaining how you had to fit in with your opponent's movement, producing "wu-wei" or spontaneous movement.

One time he said in a letter in a martial arts publication that what he did in a fight depended on what his opposition did. A lot of people may have thought that Bruce was just trying to sound knowledgeable but Bruce really meant those things and could actually apply them. That's really the way he taught. It was a sense of touch and a feeling that was coming through.

He said one time, "I listen to you through my hands." A lot of people say those things but they can't do them. Bruce was speaking from an experiential knowledge that he was actually able to perform as he was explaining it.

Although this interview was mainly on "JKD" and as I said we didn't call it that in the early days. I would say a word about Jesse Glover. We considered him (in the early times of working out with Bruce) that he was probably the best actual fighting students at that time. Of course he was Bruce's first student in America. Today I consider Jesse Glover as

being tops in Bruce's early teaching. He would come down to the school and work out with us as a friend. He was a judo man had quite a background in that. All of this contributed to his ability to pick up on what Bruce taught him. To this day I feel Jesse is one of the finest exponents of stoking hands and very powerful techniques. I wanted to add that out of respect to Jesse Glover.

Some of the things I am saying in this interview predate when we actually had a school. At first we were working out in playgrounds and places like that. It was some time later that Bruce was trying to find a school to work out in. I had mentioned a place where I had been teaching the basics of judo to some kids in a housing project. When Bruce went out to this place, he thought there would be too many kids standing around wondering what we were doing. So he decided against using this gym.

We went to a field house in a different park area. We were supposed to meet someone there and while we were waiting for them to show up

## “Finally, Bruce got impatient and wanted to leave. Some time after that he came up with the Chinatown basement school.”



we were looking the place over. Finally, Bruce got impatient and wanted to leave. Some time after that he came up with the Chinatown basement school. Taky Kimura, of course became the assistant instructor and senior to any of the other students as he is to this very day.

Out of his deep respect for Bruce, Taky continues to guide and advise the formation and continuance of "The JKD Society." I continue to call him and consider him a great friend and value his friendship very much.

*Paul Bax is a free-lance writer and JKD practitioner who publishes a newsletter which pertains to information strictly about Bruce Lee and his art of Jeet Kune Do. To subscribe (6 issues) send \$20.00 made payable to: Paul Bax, 4728 East Swallow, Imperial, MO 63062.*

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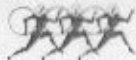
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