

Preserving Jeet Kune Do—One Man's Quest

KARATE



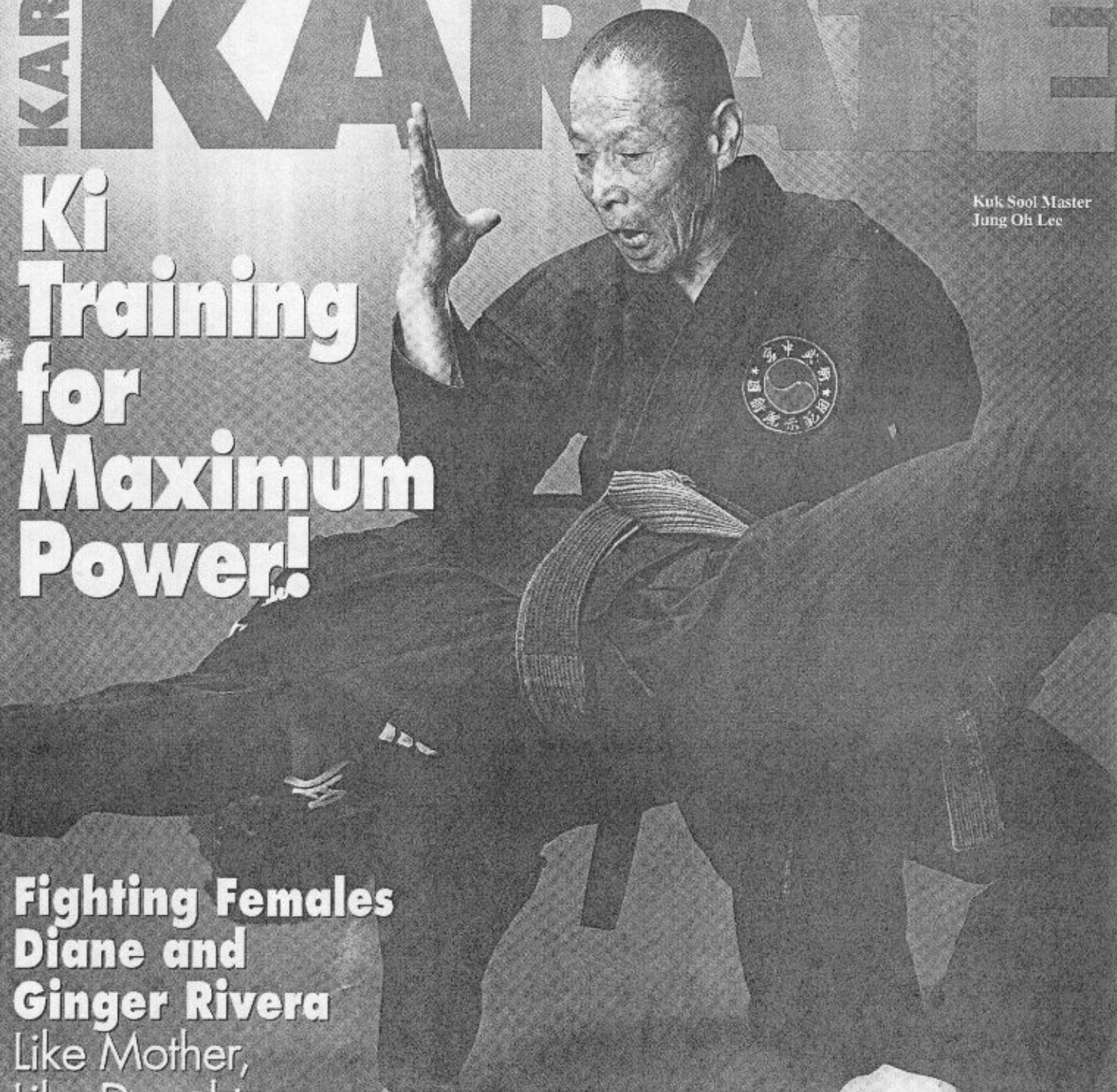
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Working Hard to Preserve Jeet Kune Do

Alabama's Lamar Davis took the hard approach to JKD training, and has taken a lot of heat. Now, in this personal interview, he explains his stance and takes on his critics.

Interview Conducted by Paul Bax

INSIDE KARATE: Prior to your JKD training, what was your experience in the martial arts?

LAMAR DAVIS: I started actively training in the martial arts at the age of ten, getting my first experience from basic Japanese judo and karate. I started purchasing books, magazines and everything else I could get my hands pertaining to the martial arts. At the age of fifteen, I was actively training in Shaolin kung fu, Chinese Kenpo, Tae Kwon Do and Tang Soo Do. Later on I studied Filipino Escrima and kuntaw and eventually achieved guro certification in escrima and a fourth degree black belt in kuntaw.

I also studied a Chinese style called shin pao chuan (leopard boxing) and achieved full instructors certification in that style. By this time, I was twenty two years old. I had developed a pattern of cross training in the martial arts that anyone would be hard pressed to equal!





In the late seventies I met and started training with Sifu Joe I. Cowles, who had trained with Bruce Lee in Seattle, Washington. This was my formal introduction to Bruce Lee's fighting method! I had already studied some basic Wing Chun.

IK: Explain your fascination with Bruce Lee and Jeet Kune Do.

LD: At the age of ten I started watching Bruce Lee as Kato on the Green Hornet TV series. I was thoroughly fascinated by the way that he had moved! It was unlike anything I had ever seen before. I made up my mind right then that I was going to learn to one day move like that! I did not fully realize how knowledgeable he was until I saw a two-part story



Lamar has been a life-long admirer of Bruce Lee.

on him in early issues of a martial arts magazine. I still have these magazines and they are a treasure part of my collection!

When I saw him on a TV show called *Longstreet*, which was a favorite show of mine, I could not sleep that night! I was so excited about what I had seen! He had actually explained Jeet Kune Do on TV! I knew right then that whatever it took, I would one day be an instructor of this incredible art called Jeet Kune Do! That became my most important goal in life, to learn and be able to teach this art to others. Since I couldn't actively study at this time, I set out to learn everything I possibly could about the arts!

IK: Describe your personal collection of Bruce Lee material.

LD: I have been collecting Bruce Lee and JKD related items for quite some time now, so I do have a pretty valuable collection! I have just about all of the American publications that came out before and after Bruce's death. My two most valuable possessions are an original printing of "Chinese Gung Fu: The Philosophical Art Of Self-Defense" and one of Bruce Lee's original business cards. I also have several Bruce Lee publications from Hong Kong, such as the entire set of all twelve issues of *Bruce Lee and Jeet Kune Do* magazine. I also have all of the publications that were put out in the late seventies by the Jeet Kune Do club of Hong Kong. I have nearly every issue of *Kung Fu Monthly*, a Bruce Lee publication originally from England, and all of their special publications. I have a large collection of Bruce Lee magazines printed in Chinese. I can't read them but they have great pictures. I also have quite a bit of rare footage of Bruce Lee on videotape, such as the 1964 and 1967 Long Beach Internationals demonstrations, training footage, demonstrations and interviews. I have many other books, posters, audio tapes, video tapes, t-shirts, jewelry and other items too

numerous to mention in this interview! When you put it all together it is quite a collection!

IK: Which of Bruce Lee's students have you trained with and what did you learn from each of them?

LD: The first Bruce Lee student that I actually met and trained with was Joseph I. Cowles. He trained with Bruce for a few years in Seattle, Washington. From him I learned predominantly Jun Fan Gung Fu, with the strong emphasis being on Wing Chun. This is the trademark of all the students from the Seattle period! The main things that I personally acquired from the training with him were the center-line preservation,



the rotation bil jee (finger jab), the rotation chung chue (vertical fist), lin sil die dar (simultaneous defense and attack), reference point trapping hand drills, both simple and compound, sensitivity drills such as don chi sao (single arm sticking hands) and seoung chi sao (double arm sticking hands) and some extremely effective low-line kicking techniques.

Joseph had founded his own system based on the things that he learned from Bruce Lee in Seattle. His knowledge of the techniques from the Seattle period was very complete, and I must credit him for the strong foundation that I have in this art!

Another Seattle student with whom I have trained with is Jesse Glover. Jesse is an incredible martial artist! Things that I learned from Jesse are the use of forward pressure in seoung chi sao, how to use this pressure to your advantage in trapping and striking and a very powerful straight blast! He has some devastating strikes that he has developed on his own since training with Bruce Lee. One of them is a step-through lunge punch which enables you to get every ounce of bodyweight into the strike! It is a bit telegraphic but it is trained for deceptive delivery. Sort of a "sucker punch!" The other strike is the "big backfist" which I have often referred to as the "backfist from hell!" It too is trained for deceptive delivery with maximum power. I have no doubt whatsoever in my mind that Jesse could knock a man out easily with either of these strikes! Jesse Glover has a lot to offer the serious Jeet Kune Do practitioner and he also has some excellent insights into Bruce Lee's training methods.

I also had the opportunity to train with Joe Lewis. He trained privately with Bruce Lee for several years. From Joe I obtained a better understanding of footwork, offensive and defensive theory, and overall explosiveness in the delivery of techniques. He is a powerful individual

who learned how to apply the knowledge that he gained from Bruce Lee with maximum effectiveness!

Sifu Jerry Poteet was one of the well-known students from the Chinatown era. His knowledge of energy/sensitivity training, trapping hands and Bruce Lee's five ways of attack were invaluable to me! He also has a good working knowledge of Jeet Kune Do's motion mechanics. He is an interesting individual and very willing to share openly his experiences with his instructor, Bruce Lee. Although we seem to have gotten our wires crossed a while back, I still have a lot of respect for Jerry and his knowledge of Jeet Kune Do!

Sifu Ted Wong, in my opinion, is the greatest living practitioner of Jeet Kune Do today! He specializes in Jeet Kune Do as it existed right before the untimely death of Bruce Lee. From Sifu Wong I learned the true value of Jeet Kune Do footwork, the intercepting fist, and the stop kick. He moves more like Bruce Lee than any other Jeet Kune Do practitioner I have seen! He is very non-telegraphic, quick and explosive! I have much respect for Sifu Wong because he is a man of high moral standards, he continues to hold true to Bruce Lee's original teachings, and financial gain is of no concern to him at all when it comes to teaching the art!

I have trained with several other original students of Bruce Lee, but these are the instructors from whom I learned the most. I have also gotten some good insight into the art and the way that others teach it by training with several second generation students such as Bill Holland (student of Jerry Poteet and Abel Sandoval), Ted Lucaylucay (student of Dan Inosanto), Richard Harrell (student of Larry Hartsell and Dan Inosanto) and a few others. Everyone has something to offer, and they can all add to your knowledge of teaching the art!

In 1994 I hope to train with original Bruce Lee students Steve Johnson, Bob Bremer, Pete Jacobs and Howard Williams. I have a good knowledge of the art already, but I feel that these men have much



Davis feels there's no need to improve upon Bruce Lee's concepts.

to offer and I want to experience their knowledge. It seems that Bruce Lee gave each person something a little bit different, and I feel that I should experience as much of these differences as possible to round out my skills and make me a better instructor to my students. I want to make sure that I have a complete understanding of all the material that Bruce Lee taught, not just some of it!

IK: There are two schools of thought regarding Bruce Lee's art. On one side you have practitioners performing original JKD, the art as it existed

before Lee's death. Then you have "JKD concepts" which has a much more flexible definition. Why do you focus on the "original JKD" method and what problems do you see with favoring either approach?

LD: I focus on the "original" approach simply because that is what fits me best! I am interested in self-defense, not sport or aesthetic martial arts. Jun Fan Gung Fu and Jeet Kune Do as taught by Bruce Lee concentrates on simplicity, directness and effectiveness. That is exactly what I am interested in, therefore I need no more!

I understand why some people prefer the concepts method, but I don't have to be one of them. I've taken a lot of heat for my attitude, but I think that Bruce Lee was a physical, mental and martial genius, and it's hard to improve over what he had.

Where I have a problem is when people start tearing a guy down or calling him a fraud because he's business competition, especially when the people doing the criticism don't know anything, and their information is based on hearsay and conflicting histories. I do what I do, they do what they do, and we agree that we disagree.

IK: When you recall sayings from Bruce Lee such as "Jeet Kune Do is just a name, please don't fuss over it", or "all fixed patterns are incapable of adaptability or pliability. The truth is outside of all fixed patterns", do you feel that you are turning his art into the "classical mess" he always despised?

LD: No, not at all! I guess a person could turn Bruce Lee's teachings into a "classical mess", but that is the last thing that I would ever do! You see, to me the beauty of Jeet Kune Do is that the art bends to fit the person, the person doesn't bend to fit the art! There is a certain amount of individual freedom that allows you to make the art your own, and to make it best serve your own individual needs! As long as this freedom is present, there is no "classical mess!" Now, on the other hand, if I suddenly started implementing forms, belts and a non-yielding rigidity



to the way techniques have to be performed, then I would be turning Jeet Kune Do into the "classical mess" that Bruce Lee so despised! Instead, you have to look at each student as an individual, taking into consideration many things such as age, height, weight, athletic inclination, physical handicaps, range of flexibility and their level of attribute development.

You also have to look at their reasons for wanting to learn Jeet Kune Do and their desired outcome of the training they are about to receive. What is their mental, or psychological motivation for wanting to train?

Have they had any previous training in JKD or any other martial art? As long as this "individual freedom" is emphasized over "concrete doctrine" there is no "classical mess!" And besides, I could easily spend the rest of my life researching and training all of the ways to use these techniques!

IK: Have there been any other obstacles with starting your organization?

LD: No, nothing really worth mentioning! I will say that there are apparently many jealous, childish, immature people out there who are always the first to jump on the bandwagon and criticize someone for doing something differently than them! These people need to grow up and get a life! I know in my heart that what I am doing is right and that is all that matters to me!

IK: How do you feel about the theory that you have to have lineage in Jeet Kune Do to teach the art?

LD: In an ideal world, this would be true. After all if no one taught it to you correctly, how can you teach it? I don't believe, however, that you had to have trained with Bruce Lee! There are many students of Bruce Lee out there with much to offer the serious practitioner. All you have

fits their personality! In other words, I'm not Bruce Lee, nor will I ever be, so it would be futile for me to try to copy his "style"! I can, however, use his "system" or "method" to develop my own personal "style" of applying the techniques of Jun Fan/Jeet Kune Do! This goes back to what I said earlier about the art bending to fit the person rather than the person having to bend to fit the art! The people who have influenced me most to teach the art the way that I do are Sifu Ted Wong, Jesse Glover, Jerry Poteet and Joseph Cowles. I also have much support from many people who believe in what I am doing! This alone is enough to inspire me to keep going!

IK: Starting with the foundation, explain what's inherent of JKD training.

LD: That's a very simple question, but it requires a very complex answer! I could write several volumes in answer to it! Rather than write several volumes, however, I will attempt to give a simplified answer! As a basic guideline, all JKD techniques are simple, direct and effective. The JKD practitioner prefers to assume the *bi jong*, or on-guard position, with the power side leading. The idea is to protect your own centerline while exploiting any openings on the opponent's centerline. *Lin sil die dar*, or simultaneous defense and attack, is used to accomplish this quite effectively. The idea is to attack the nearest target



Lamar Davis instructing at his JKD school in Alabama.



to do is seek them out and learn from them! This is what I have done and it worked very well for me!

I mean, after all, if Bruce Lee taught someone something and they taught it to me just as he taught it to them it's still Jun Fan Gung Fu or Jeet Kune Do! Someone else teaching it doesn't change where it originated from!

Look at it this way. What if Bruce Lee had been a math teacher? If he taught Sifu Ted Wong that two plus two equals four, then Ted Wong taught me that two plus two equals four, what's the difference? Does that suddenly make two plus two equal three or five? Of course not!

How many doctors in this century studied from Hippocrates?

IK: Who specifically has influenced your beliefs in teaching JKD as a style?

LD: First of all, I do not teach JKD as a style! To me the word style is more of a personal expression of something. I prefer to use the term "method" or "system" for my approach to teaching Jun Fan/Jeet Kune Do. I teach someone this "method" or "system" and they turn around and develop their own "style" of applying the technique so that it best

fits their personality, which would usually be a finger jab or a side kick.

Jeet Kune Do means "Way of The Intercepting Fist." The JKD practitioner goes through extensive training to develop the basic intercepting fist technique. This punch uses the vertical fist structure, applying the whole body to the technique. Stop kicking, the lower body equivalent of the intercepting fist, is also trained extensively. Five ways of attack are emphasized in JKD. Single Direct Attack (SDA), Attack By Combination (ABC), Hand Immobilization Attack (HIA), Progressive Indirect Attack (PIA) and Attack By Drawing (ABD). Energy/sensitivity training is also highly emphasized for the development of what we call contact reflex, which is the ability to react instinctively to the opponent's movement immediately on contact with their attacking or defending limb.

This leads to the skill that is referred to as trapping hands. There are many trapping drills which are practiced over and over until the movements become second nature. Through the sensitivity drills you learn when to trap and which trap to use. From the trapping drills you learn how to execute all of the basic simple and compound trapping

techniques. Through training on the mook jong the wooden man dummy from Wing Chun Gung Fu, you learn how to get the power into your trapping movements. Equipment training is a very important part of Jeet Kune Do. We use focus gloves kicking shields, forearm shields, the heavy bag, the double-end bag the speed bag, the Wing Chun wall bag and many specialized pieces of equipment designed just for JKD training.

Right from the start, however, the most important area of training is mobility. JKD footwork is light, quick and to the point. No wasted motion no wasted energy! You could have the most powerful punches and kicks in the world but they would not be of any use at all if you couldn't get them where they needed to be at the proper time! Through a series of progressive sparring drills, the JKD student learns to gauge distance and maneuver his weaponry with speed, accuracy and proper timing. There are several other things that I could talk about, but I feel that these are the primary elements of JKD training.

IK: If there is one aspect of the art that would best define what JKD is to you, what would it be?

LD: The ultimate goal of the JKD fighter is to intercept and destroy their attacker at the earliest possible moment, ending the fight before it even



gets off to a good start! Learning to intercept an opponent takes much hard work and virtually buckets of sweat, but the training is more than worth the end result! Would have to say that this is Jeet Kune Do at it's finest!

IK: You have trained with Lee's protege, Ted Wong. What are some of the major differences in his applications of the art as opposed to Bruce's other students?

LD: Sifu Wong places a lot of emphasis on mobility training! I feel that his footwork is the best in JKD today! He concentrates more on basic tool development and intercepting the opponent's attack than anything. These are the things on which Bruce Lee worked with him the most extensively! He places less emphasis on trapping and chi sao than most of the other Bruce Lee students that I have trained with. Don't misunderstand me, though, he is very skilled and knowledgeable in all phases of Jeet Kune Do training, including chi sao and trapping!

I saw no flaws or weaknesses in his personal structure! He is very close to the size of Bruce Lee. Therefore, his "style" is very close to

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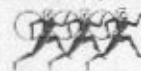
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Bruce Lee's. In fact, he moves more like Bruce Lee than anyone I have personally seen!

IK: Do you feel that Bruce held back certain things from his teachings at his L.A. Chinatown school?

LD: It is a little known fact that Bruce Lee actually did not teach that much at the L.A. Chinatown kwoon. He placed Dan Inosanto in charge of the classes there. Most of the L.A. Bruce Lee students, while technically Bruce Lee students since they were learning his material as conveyed to Dan, his personal student, were Dan's students most of the time. Bruce would show up occasionally to measure the progress of the students or to introduce any new developments in his system but he very seldom taught an entire class!

Another thing that you have to consider here is that Bruce Lee preferred to spend most of his time developing and perfecting his own personal skills. So yes I'm sure that there were many things that the students at the Chinatown kwoon never saw! Fortunately it was usually Ted Wong who Bruce worked with to perfect these new developments so there is still someone familiar with what Bruce was doing and capable of teaching it to others! Another thing that you have to consider is that Bruce Lee's skill level was so much higher than his student's that there were many things that the students just weren't ready for! You have to learn to walk before you are ready to run!

IK: Where do you see yourself and the art of Jeet Kune Do by the year 2000?

LD: I see myself in the best physical condition of my life even though I will be 42 years old! I have had many setbacks in recent years that have really hurt my training, such as a herniated disk in my lower back and a twisted ligament in my left knee. I have had to adjust my training to compensate for these things to avoid further injury. Things seem to be going quite well now and I seem to be well on my way to recovery! I plan to train with at least four more original Bruce Lee students in 1994, increasing my knowledge of Jun Fan Gung Fu and Jeet Kune Do to a much higher level. I will be doing much more writing in the next few years to promote the art and help people better understand it. I also have five more series of instructional videotapes to be completed over the next few years, incorporating anything new that I may learn before they are done.

As for the art and science of Jeet Kune Do, I hope that all of the jealousy, possessiveness and childish games will end soon! Why can't everyone just get along and do their own thing? There are plenty of students out there for all of us! No two practitioners of the art will be the same. This is the way it is supposed to be! Why can't everyone just realize this and mind their own business! By the year 2000 I hope all of this ridiculous behavior has died out and everyone is happy and doing their own thing! I also hope that by the year 2000 the art of Jeet Kune Do will have finally gotten the recognition and appreciation that it deserves! I know that I will continue working hard to see to it that this happens through my writing, my seminars, my instructional videotapes and the United States Jeet Kune Do Alliance!



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