

The Age of **ENVY**



By John Little



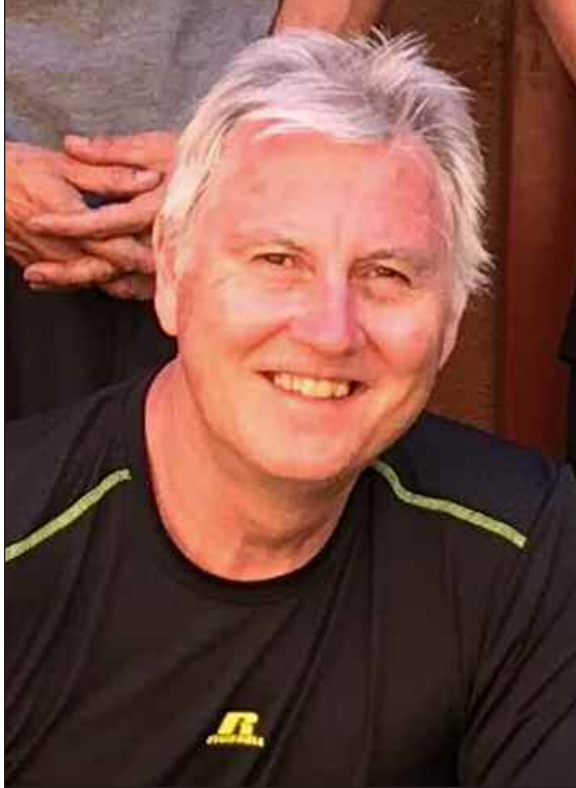
John Little

John Little is one of the world's foremost authorities on the life and work of Bruce Lee, his training methods, and his philosophy. John has been the only person ever authorized by the Bruce Lee estate to review and use the entirety of Lee's personal notes, sketches, and reading annotations. He compiled and edited material into five books in the Bruce Lee Library series published by Tuttle Publishing.

John served as associate publisher for Bruce Lee magazine, the managing editor of Knowing Is Not Enough, the official newsletter of the JFJKF Nucleus, and a director for the Bruce Lee Foundation.

John is also the author of *The Warrior Within*, as well as an award-winning filmmaker who created three documentaries on Bruce Lee: *Bruce Lee: In His Own Words*, *Bruce Lee – A Warrior's Journey* (film and book), and *In Pursuit of the Dragon*.

Recognized as “one of the top fitness researchers in North America”, John is a prolific writer and has authored 12 books on exercise and 38 books on philosophy, history, and martial arts. In addition his numerous articles have been published in every fitness and martial art magazine in North America.



Chris Kent

With over 40 years experience, Chris Kent is widely acknowledged as one of the world's foremost authorities on Jeet Kune Do, and has gained international recognition for his knowledge and leadership in perpetuating the art, training methods, and philosophy developed by the legendary Bruce Lee. As a teacher, professional consultant, and speaker, Chris has traveled the world, teaching and sharing the benefit of his expertise in the art and philosophy of Jeet Kune Do with thousands of people.

Chris has authored 3 of the highest rated books on Jeet Kune Do: *The Encyclopedia of Jeet Kune Do*, *Jeet Kune Do - The Textbook*, and *Jeet Kune Do Kickboxing*. In

addition he has both written for and appeared in countless martial art publications both nationally and internationally including *Inside Kung Fu*, *Black Belt*, *Martial Art Masters*, *Budo International*, *Combat* and *Martial Arts Illustrated*. He has also written and produced 3 series of training videotapes and DVDs which remain the standard of the industry. His latest book, "*LIBERATE YOURSELF! - A Guide to Personal Freedom*" and "*P.L.A.N. - Personal Liberation Action Notebook*" detail how individuals can apply the philosophical tenets of self-actualization utilized by Bruce Lee to their own lives.

Chris was a one of the co-founders of "The Bruce Lee Educational Foundation", a non-profit, organization created for the purpose of perpetuating Bruce Lee's art and philosophy for future generations, and for 5 years served as a member of the Board of Directors.

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PREFACE

I have been involved in JKD for over forty four years now and during that time I've seen all sorts of false claims and disparaging statements made concerning Bruce Lee. Some relate to Bruce's skills and abilities as a martial artist; others to his teaching abilities. Some are claims by individuals of being Bruce's teacher; others relate to his personal written materials. They seem to come around in cycles every several years or so.

I approached John and asked his permission to turn this article he penned, "The Age of Envy" into a PDF that people could download and read, and he approved it.

The article was written in the late 1990's (It was a long time ago and John said he wasn't sure of the exact date). I remember reading just after he completed it and thought then that it was excellent and would serve a great purpose in helping to straighten some of the factual inaccuracies and bogus claims being made against Bruce by various individuals and groups.

According to John, "As I recollect it, these other martial artists were making claims against Bruce and not one of Bruce's students stepped up to defend him - even though they would grumble to me that what these martial artists were saying about Bruce was untrue. I felt someone had to represent for Bruce on the matter and, even though I might not have been the right or best guy to do so, if I didn't do it I knew it just wouldn't be done."

John also informed me that it was not his intention to insult or offend any of the individuals mentioned in this article, merely to shine a light on the subject and bring a sense of clarity. I'm sure that sections of the article will be viewed as somewhat controversial and have no doubt that it may raise the ire of some people. However, that is not why I chose to present it.

Over the last couple of decades I feel there has been an ongoing attempt by various individuals and groups to revise and rewrite history as it relates to Bruce Lee. And I feel John's article can go a long way in helping to clear the air on certain subjects. That is why I chose to present it. And please keep in mind that if you choose to "be offended" or "take offense" at something within the article, that is your choice, and no one else's.

—Chris Kent

The Age of Envy

by John Little

"Great spirits have always encountered violent opposition from mediocre minds."

—Albert Einstein

There is an interesting phenomenon in the "Bruce Lee world" that comes around every so often. I call it "Bruce Lee-Bashing," for that is exactly what it is. Stated another way, it is the attempt made by certain individuals to belittle Lee's tremendous achievement and legacy—whether in martial art, in film, in life or, more recently, in philosophy.

The psychological underpinnings of such attacks I will consider shortly. For the moment, however, I would like to pose the following question: how is it that certain individuals within our society can look at a man who created a new martial art, a man who helped his friends, a man who gave freely of his time and money to those in need, a man who loved his wife and children and who worked diligently to cultivate his mind and body, and a man who has continued to be a beacon of inspiration to men and women all over the world for over thirty years, and conclude that this is a man whose achievements should be belittled, discounted and, in some instances, despised and held up as an object to be scorned and ridiculed?

What is the motivation behind such attacks? Isn't one's own life complicated enough? Isn't it enough of a challenge to earn a living, raise a family, perhaps learn a martial art or some other art without having to look for faults in other human beings? Perhaps it is simply a case of Schadenfreude, a German term defined by Professor Joshua Halberstam in his book *Everyday Ethics* as:

"That feeling you get when you hear about another's misfortunes. It's the opposite of envy. Envy is your private dejection at seeing another succeed; Schadenfreude is your private joy at seeing another fail. It's embarrassing to think about how common Schadenfreude is. Newspaper and television writers realized a long time ago they could make their fortunes from the delight we take at watching other people disintegrate. The joy is especially intense when the collapse takes down the high and mighty."
(Source: Pages 5-6, *Everyday Ethics*, Penguin Books, © 1993 Joshua Halberstam)

Martial artists from different styles and, thus, salesmen of a different "product" than what Bruce Lee was selling, are, of course, the first in line to contribute to and take delight in whatever new book comes out whose purpose is to reveal some flaw the author believes he has detected in Bruce Lee's character or abilities. Of course, little if any facts are ever presented for your consideration in such books, most of their conclusions are based upon interviews with people who have an agenda or an axe to grind, or upon second and, in some instances, third-hand statements made by people who, before Bruce Lee became an

icon and garnered a huge global audience, would never have been approached for comments of any kind. But, largely as a result of this audience, when it comes to Bruce Lee, if you have something to say that's negative (and by now, after 27 years, pretty much all of the "positive" comments have seen their way into print), there's always a microphone ready to record it and, if it's "different" (i.e., sensational), then, by God, there's a publisher willing to print it.

Of course, none of these scribes - who always try to wrap themselves up in the banner of "doing Bruce a favor" or "trying to humanize him" were ever close to the man (if they knew him at all), and their view of "humanizing" is anything that supports their worldview of human beings as ostensibly non-heroic, non-achieving entities with feet of clay. This certainly was not how Bruce Lee viewed human beings, which is why he chose to strive for the heroic and to achieve the most that he could out what little time he had on this earth. And this is also why he has continued to be respected and admired; for he served to show us what was possible for human beings to achieve, if they were only willing to believe in themselves.

Nevertheless, and despite the millions of dollars that have flowed into the martial art world (and many of these same individual's pockets) as a direct result of Bruce Lee's influence and example these past 28 years, no sooner had Lee's body been laid to rest, then the negativity that they had contained within their souls came pouring out. It was only a matter of time before they found a willing author to record their venom, for anybody who ever knew the man—from interviewers who spoke with him once for half an hour, to his barber!—were now being sought after for their "opinion" on Lee, and often on areas of his legacy that they were by no means knowledgeable enough to comment on in any meaningful or truthful way.

Professor Halberstam also mentioned the term 'envy,' which is, perhaps, the root of such resentment expressed toward Lee—particularly by certain martial artists. Certain world champions in sport karate who knew and/or studied briefly with Lee, have long been resentful and envious of Lee's enduring success. They don't often come right out and explicitly criticize Lee or his abilities. That would make their envy too obvious. Instead, they tend to damn him with feint praise. Chuck Norris, as an example, has gone on numerous television shows over the past two decades and when Bruce Lee's name is invariably mentioned, rather than say, "Bruce was the Michaelangelo of the martial arts and I was fortunate to have spent time with him," or to fess up to the fact that it was Bruce Lee who gave him his start in films and even procured work for him as a stuntman and bit player during films such as "The Wrecking Crew" in which Lee was employed as the film's "fight scene choreographer," instead says things to the effect that since Bruce didn't compete in karate tournaments we really don't know how good he was. The implication being that Lee was a celluloid martial artist and not the "real deal."

Chuck Norris is an accomplished and talented martial artist. One would certainly feel that he would be above having to pull down the reputations of others when he is so capable of holding up his own. How sad that martial artists feel the need to go this route. Is a trophy really the main indice of martial arts competency? Perhaps for some, but to Bruce Lee, non-contact karate tournaments had nothing to do with the reality of full-contact fighting. He had plenty of fights throughout his life—real fights—and was undefeated in that "arena." Moreover, Bruce Lee looked at martial art as a vehicle for personal (physical, mental and spiritual) growth—not simply as a means to dominate someone else, but rather to dominate your own ego, insecurities and problems. He appears to have done very well in this respect.

To make a point for a moment, besides the obvious fact that such karate tournaments as those won by Mr. Norris were non-contact affairs won over gentlemen who, while well-known in the martial arts press of the mid 1960s, are hardly names that come up in anybody's "top ten" list of all-time best fighters, these tournaments were hardly the "world championships" that the passage of time has led us to believe. Bill Wallace, a terrific point-karate competitor who also made the successful transition to full-contact karate, once told me that he won a "world championship" one afternoon way back when by defeating three guys from Chicago—in Chicago!

Joe Lewis, also an immensely talented martial artist from this era, is also one that has gone back and forth between bouts of extreme praise for Lee's skills and periods where he is less than complementary. More recently, several statements attributed to him have shown up in a book which indicate that Mr. Lewis is of the opinion that Lee "never sparred" and would have had difficulty—or so the implication extends—in handling a "heavyweight" such as Lewis. What is one to make of such comments? And what could possibly be the motivation of Mr. Lewis in making them? Again, Lewis' reputation as a karate practitioner is well-settled and will not rise or fall one notch as a result of Bruce Lee's achievement.

But again, what are the facts on this issue? Even the most rudimentary research into the matter reveals that such a contention is baseless; the facts are that Lee did, indeed, spar—in fact, he is considered the first martial artist in North America to have had his students spar with protective gear as part and parcel of learning his martial art. He even gave a public exhibition of full-contact sparring at the 1967 Internationals karate tournament in Long Beach, California. But, again, the whole issue of sparring is based on a faulty premise—that the martial arts are to be practiced solely for the purpose of participating in tournaments against other martial artists. The truth is, when self-growth is the key, the only opponent you need concern yourself with is yourself. If you make improvement, well and good. Comparing yourself (whether in tournaments—which Lee once described as "protecting games of pride"—or in a martial art class) with others is a fruitless enterprise, because you are not someone else. You are you—and so you are the only person you should strive to become.

Certain of Bruce Lee's students who were present during at least some of Mr. Lewis' training sessions with Lee have also stated that Lee—contrary to Mr. Lewis' recollection—did, indeed, spar and, moreover, that he sparred with Joe Lewis and that, heavyweight as Mr. Lewis might be, he was unable to land any punches or kicks on Lee at all, whereas, Lee was able to tag Lewis at will. But so what? None of Lee's students up until this point have had any interest in belittling or chipping away at the reputations of any of the "name" martial artists whom Lee taught, as, in their opinion, such statements—which they hold to be as true as Mr. Lee's detractors do theirs—are meaningless. Was Lee the best martial artist of all time? This is a parlor game, like who is the greatest boxer of all time? And who is the prettiest girl of all time? Was Bruce Lee the best martial artist of his generation? I suppose that depends on your criteria. If you go by innovation, then the answer is yes. If you go by the fact that—in real combat—he was undefeated, then the answer is yes, again. If you go by the standard of transcending the physical aspect of martial art to embrace the higher, spiritual principles, then the answer is yes again.

An additional "yes" is forthcoming to the question by virtue of the fact that he was the only martial artist who had the top three martial artists in the world—the so-called "best" martial artists of the time—COMING TO HIM for instruction. Stop for a minute and consider this in greater detail: THEY WENT TO HIM FOR INSTRUCTION. Lee's daytime diaries from this era do not show him going to Joe Lewis' house for lessons, nor to Chuck Norris'. Nor, for that matter, to Mike Stone's. However, all of these champions, and well established champions, respectively, took the time and trouble to leave their schools and students and come to Lee's home in Southern California to train under his instruction. Would these men have done so if they felt he didn't have something they felt they needed to become better martial artists? And how would they know whether or not what Lee was teaching worked or not, unless it passed the litmus test of an actual fight—or at least sparring—situation? Again, to learn from someone who is both a brilliant martial artist and teacher is nothing to be ashamed of. And certainly no reason to try and diminish a man's legacy or accomplishments after he's passed away.

If such individuals truly believe that Bruce Lee was as inferior to them as at least some of them now claim him to be, and, therefore, equally as unworthy of the praise that his legacy has enjoyed, then why did they go to study under him in the first place? Moreover, the time for them to step up and to prove their superiority in the martial sphere was when the man was alive—not 27 years after he's been gone. From 1967 until Lee moved to Hong Kong in 1971, these gentlemen had four years and lots of personal contact in which to put him straight—they didn't. Their words now ring somewhat hollow and are pointless on the matter.

And then there is the crop of martial artists who claim that they "taught" Bruce Lee. Please. If ever there was an example of a self-taught man, it is Bruce Lee. They might claim with some justification that they would execute a technique (say, a kick) from their own particular style and that, the next time they saw Lee, he would be able to execute that same kick—often better than they could—but does this make them his "teacher?"

Lee saw plenty of kicks, plenty of techniques during his lifetime. He also had a library containing hundreds of books on martial art styles, techniques and training methods. Some say that Dan Inosanto taught Bruce Lee how to use the nunchaku. Perhaps he did. But then Jerry Simon of Black Belt magazine once told me that "*Bruce learned how to spin the nunchaku as a result of reading Fumio Demura's book. He used to go back in the warehouse at Blackbelt and stand with his feet upon the pages of Demura's book and execute the nunchaku techniques he saw depicted in Demura's book.*" Now add to this the fact that Bruce had student George Lee making nunchakus for him when Lee was in Oakland, which means that he was familiar with the weapon by—at the latest—1964, even before he met Inosanto. So who's right? The truth is that Bruce Lee taught himself how to use the weapon. He didn't attend any classes by Inosanto, nor by Demura—he practiced the weapon by himself until he mastered it.

The same with Bruce's kicking ability. Norris has gone on record claiming that he taught Bruce how to kick "above the waist." Unfortunately, Lee's screen-test of 1965 in addition to footage of him shot at the Long Beach International Karate tournament in 1964, reveal that Lee knew already knew how to kick "above the waist" with tremendous dexterity—and this many years before he ever crossed paths with Chuck Norris for the first time, which Lee's daytime diary indicates was on July 23,1967.

A recent claim bandied about is that Joe Lewis, a fighter renowned for his power, his backfist and side-kick, taught Bruce Lee how to execute the backfist (although I don't know if Mr. Lewis himself is the one who makes it). Again, there are photos of Lee from as far back as 1963 executing this technique and, again, in his screen-test from 1965 he is seen demonstrating it. Lee and Lewis did not hook up until December 75, 1967.

Lee would often attend martial art tournaments, study the techniques of experts he had seen to determine whether or not they were practical techniques for him and whether or not he could execute them efficiently. Lee's Seattle student, Jesse Glover, recalls that Bruce spent months practicing a side thrust kick he had read about in a book on the French art of Savate. But, again, Lee taught himself, spending hundreds of hours in perfecting punches, kicks and a hundred variations of both. Lee's greatest blossoming as a martial artist came when he looked for direction inward—from himself— rather than from external authority sources such as teachers of different martial art styles. This is not to suggest, however, that Lee did not respect his friends and colleagues in the martial arts—because he most certainly did. But he was never their "student."

More recently, since the publication of certain of Lee's private notes and journals, such as within *The Tao of Jeet Kune Do* and *Artist of Life*, many people have been impressed with Lee's personal philosophy of life. The fact that he was, again, largely self-taught in this arena, has caused many people to raise their esteem for him to even higher levels. His writings on the equality of races, self-development, spirituality and how to deal with adversity have inspired and illuminated many minds throughout the world.

As result of such positive response and interest, more of these notes and private writings have been made public. Always looking for something to criticize, many of these same "Bruce Lee Bashers" are quick to point out that certain of Lee's writings that have now found their way into print were not "original" with Bruce Lee. That he—heaven forbid!—"copied" certain statements from other authors. Their motivation in pointing this out is, not that Lee was a ravenous pursuer of truth who devoured everything he could find on the subject of philosophy, but rather to have you believe that Lee was "not original," that he was some sort of renegade pirate who simply plagiarized other people's writings and then "postured" as possessing more profound insight than he really did. What these critics are missing, of course, is only the entire context of what it is they are attempting to comment on. These writings were never put forth, either during Lee's lifetime or since, as being the product of some form of higher consciousness that Lee had hard-wired into his (and his alone) brain since birth and then committed to paper. These were his notebooks!

As he did not live in an age where homes had photocopy machines, as he did not have a scanner or computer with a huge hard-drive of memory on it, he wrote down notes on certain topics, beliefs and training principles that struck him as significant or relevant—for his own use, alone!

The fact that these notes were published should be a cause for celebration (at least among those who truly care about Lee's interests and influences). Each of the books, mentions the fact that Lee drew from many diverse sources both directly (such as in the introduction to the Psychology section in *Artist of Life*, wherein tire reader is told that the contents of this chapter reflect Lee's verbatim transcription of materials from the books of Gestalt Psychology founder, Frederich Perls) and indirectly (stating that Lee made notes taking the best of wisdom from east and west that he held to be valuable to his own develop-

ment). That Lee was not the first to hold certain of these opinions (in many instances, neither were the ones who committed them to paper in the books Lee read) is not as important as the fact that Lee held them to be true.

Such information is truly an asset that is almost inestimable in import to those of us who are genuinely interested in learning more about Bruce Lee and trying to better understand his way of looking at the world and his approach to martial art. More information, particularly when written by Lee's own hand, is of infinite help in better comprehending his approach, beliefs and actions. To a minority, however, such notes do not represent a means by which we can learn more about Lee's influences and thought processes, nor even a better keyhole through which to view ideas with which Lee wholeheartedly subscribed. Instead, such notes are yet another opportunity to attack Lee's character.

It's worth pointing out to such people that during his lifetime, Bruce Lee only published one book and one essay on his art. Both are original. Profoundly so. Lee was able to look at a discipline such as spirituality and psychology and see an immediate—and never before made—application to a completely different area of human endeavor: martial art. That is a sign of genius. To my knowledge, these authors that Lee read and whose truths Lee agreed with, such as Krishnamufti, Eric Hoffer and Fredrich Perls, never once wrote about martial art.

When most of the martial artists who have now taken to criticizing Bruce Lee were busy selling memberships and doing what their Senseis and Sifus told them, Bruce Lee was questioning, reading, writing, applying, experimenting and innovating. He created something new and forever altered the paradigm of martial art, taking the emphasis of martial art—which had rested for thousands of years upon the veneration of system or tradition—and placing it for the first time in history upon the individual practitioner.

I often scratch my head in wonder at what fuels these occasional but cyclical outbursts of such hatred toward Bruce Lee. How could a man who had accomplished so much in so short a period of time and who had inspired so many people be spoken of in such negative terms? It was only recently that I was able to obtain some insight into this phenomenon. I happened upon an enlightening article by the novelist/philosopher Ayn Rand who cut to the motivational core of such negativity.

Rand writes, in an essay entitled "The Age of Envy" (found within the pages of *The Ayn Rand Reader*, edited by Gary Hull and Leonard Peikoff, Meridian Books) of a psychological condition which she describes as "hatred of the good for being the good." She writes:

"Hatred of the good for being the good means hatred of that which one regards as good by one's own (conscious or subconscious) judgment. It means hatred of a person for possessing a value or virtue one regards as desirable. If a child wants to get good grades in school, but is unable or unwilling to achieve them and begins to hate the children who do, that is hatred of the good. If a man regards intelligence as a value, but is troubled by self-doubt and begins to hate men he judges to be intelligent, that is hatred of the good. The nature of the particular values a man chooses to hold is not the primary factor in this issue (although irrational values may contribute a great deal to the formation of that emotion). The primary factor and distinguishing characteristic is an emotional mechanism set in reverse: a response of hatred, not toward human vices, but toward human virtues.

To be exact, the emotional mechanism is not set in reverse, but is set one way: its exponents do not experience love for evil men; their emotional range is limited to hatred or indifference. It is impossible to experience love, which is a response to values, when one's automatized response to values is hatred. ...In regard to one's own feelings, only a rigorously conscientious habit of introspection can enable one to be certain of the nature and causes of one's emotional responses. But introspection is the mental process most fiercely avoided by the haters, which permits them a virtually unlimited choice of rationalizations. In regard to judging the emotional responses of others, it is extremely difficult to tell their reasons in a specific case, particularly if it involves complex personal relationships. It is, therefore, in the broad, impersonal field of responses to strangers, to causal acquaintances, to public figures or to events that have no direct bearing on the hater's own lives that one can observe the hatred of the good in a pure, unmistakable form....Its clearest manifestation is the attitude of a person who characteristically resents someone's success, happiness, achievements or good fortune - and experiences pleasure at someone's failure, unhappiness or misfortune. This is pure, "nonvenal" hatred of the good for being the good: the hater has nothing to lose or gain in such instances, no practical value at stake, no existential motive, no knowledge except the fact that a human being has succeeded or failed. The expressions of this response are brief, casual, as a rule involuntary. But if you have seen it, you have seen the naked face of evil."

Having read this statement of Miss Rand's, another statement came to mind of Stirling Silliphant, one of Bruce Lee's private students who, after Lee's death in 1973, attempted to study with several other martial artists, but eventually dropped out of martial arts altogether, feeling that, in essence, once you have worked with something real, pure and honest (his time with Bruce), anything less than that could not be tolerated. In Silliphant's words:

"It's counter-productive to talk to martial artists about Bruce because you have to remember there is a big, vested jealousy there, which is still residual. I mean, how can other martial artists not resent his fame, his legend? He achieved what every one of them prays to achieve, for I haven't met a martial artist yet who doesn't aspire to be a movie star. If such a man exists, I've never met him. I don't care if the guy has fourteen legs, three heads, and is uglier than a toad, he figures he's going to be the next Bruce Lee. This seems to be an obsession endemic within the martial arts world. So how can they talk with any warmth about a man who has achieved what they can never hope to achieve?"
(Source; Stirling Silliphant quoted in an interview with Kick magazine. October 1980)

And, finally, let us consider the words of Taky Kimura, Bruce Lee's highest-ranked student, best friend, and a man whose keen insight into Lee's character give his words an integrity and purity that is all too rare and very much needed:

"Bruce Lee, I think we can agree, was indeed one of the greatest contributors to the present day status in the world of martial arts. He revolutionized the ancient physical and philosophical arts of combat into one of simplistic realism that is working today toward carrying mankind into the completeness of its vast potential. Bruce stressed the knowledge of oneself and the ultimate realization of our own unique destinies. Bruce inspired us to carve out our own legacy. and we will prevail in this by his example.- which serves to inspire us to become better citizens of the world. The media of TV, Radio, Newspapers. Movies still carry the omniscience of Bruce Lee's legacy, predominately positive but also some negatives.

Bruce was not a perfect man, there is not a man alive or dead that can make such a 'boast.' Is there anyone that can stand before God or a judge and say "I lived a perfect life. I never made a mistake." Positiveness rather than negativeness, I think we can all agree, is what carries us toward our ultimate goal of success. When we use the good name of Bruce Lee to positively identify with his influence upon ourselves, that is honest and good, but when we turn away from this and denounce him unfairly. I have to ask "why?" Is it insecurity, deceit, self-promotion, small mindedness?" The true answer can only be found when we look-into the mirror and face the truth!

I, for one, can only thank the multitude of people who continue to write the truth of our great contributor to life's journey, Bruce Lee. He wasn't perfect, but nobody is. What he was, however, was caring, decent, intelligent and dedicated. He was a great man and a great friend and a great example to us all.

Please "walk on" along your path with sincere, honest kindness to yourself as well as to others, and seek your own success."