

JKD Conversations with John Little

(Part 1)



Chris Kent

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Introduction



I have had the privilege of knowing John Little since 1996, and consider him a good friend. Personally, I consider him one of the most knowledgeable people on the planet with regard to both Bruce Lee's art and philosophy of Jeet Kune Do, and a trail-blazer in the world of strength training and fitness. When I approached him about putting material together from our telephone conversations and creating a pdf article for people to read, his response was an enthusiastic, "Yes, by all means!"

The following transcripts are excerpts from two telephone interviews I conducted with John between 2009 and 2011. During our marathon conversations (which were usually 2-3 hours in length) we covered numerous topics including the state of the fitness industry today, fitness and exercise, Bruce Lee and the art and philosophy of Jeet Kune Do, and yes, even the world of JKD politics. As you will see, in much of the interviews, instead of using periods to mark such things as the end of sentences, I have chosen to simply put dashes, because our conversations flowed in a very natural and fluid manner, sometimes darting off in a different direction and then returning to a particular subject.

I have one request from you, the reader, and that is that you read the material here within without any pre-conceptions and with an open mind. As Bruce Lee himself said, "Do not start from a conclusion." You may find yourself agreeing with some things and disagreeing with others, and that is perfectly fine. My goal is to simply share material with you that may enhance your personal growth, be it as a martial artist, and/or as a human being.

With that said, I invite you to "Read On!"

Part 1

Chris: You did a number of interviews for various publications in the mid to late 1990's which I personally felt really cleared up a lot of misperceptions with regard to Jeet Kune Do ... that is if people wanted it to be cleared up.

John: I don't know that they do -- That was kind of my naivete at the time -- I thought, "Oh, the water is kind of muddied and I think we can clear it a bit and people can understand it better -- But in so doing, I think, at some level, they were worried that it would diminish their market -- "Everybody doing JKD," well that's non-exclusionary... doesn't mean you have to be right or wrong, it's whatever you want so everybody... It's like the Bible, everybody can find something to support whatever their belief is, whether it's war or peace, with the right passage -- And to them, from a business vantage point, that is far more attractive than just the truth -- You say, "Well wait a minute, you have to understand this." -- And their answer is, "Uh, shoot, well that's gonna exclude people already because it requires work and it might require them to change their approach or thinking on it. And that will diminish the market. So sorry, not interested." --

Chris: I know that you haven't been involved with things to do with Bruce Lee or the JKD world for several years now, but in my personal opinion, I think that you understand the total picture of what JKD is all about better than the vast majority of other people, including many of those who practice the art. Looking at it now and from your background, what do you feel is the biggest misperception or misconception people have today regarding both Bruce Lee, and also JKD?

John: Whew! That's almost something where you'd need sub-categories (laughs) ...

Chris: You've done so much work with regard to Lee; his life and background, his writings, notes, etc. -- I also know that you have had some training in JKD with people like Ted Wong -- But you approach JKD not from the perspective of someone who has practiced it and now teaches it, but as someone who not only has a degree in philosophy, but is also a well-respected fitness researcher and accomplished writer -- What do you feel are the biggest misconceptions people have regarding Bruce Lee?

John: Well, I guess it depends on the people. -- There are those that believe that he was a 'movie martial artist' -- That's certainly one -- There are those who believe that he was a 'paper tiger', and that he used top champions to prove the validity of his theories, if you will, on martial arts, and that's false -- The thing about Bruce Lee is that he was and remains, I think, the best example of what is possible for a human being to achieve if you make your passion your focus, you grab onto it with both hands, and you go into it with an attitude that not everybody's right -- There's your target destination -- Everybody has their own belief of how you get to that end -- But he was a guy who said, "Well I'm gonna." -- He was largely self-trained. I mean, he did it on his own.

And I think the other misconception, and this just opens the doors, is that he was simply a "cross-trainer," that he took from this art, he took from that art -- That's not really true -- That's the popular one, but I think, unfortunately so many people, and so many arts have tried to "attach their wagons" to his star, so as to advance their own, that it's really muddied the waters.

C: How do you answer people when they say that he was cross-training? -- So often many of the people I run into when I'm attending events or teaching seminars say to me things like, "Well we're doing the same thing that Bruce Lee did.... We're borrowing from this art and taking from that art and creating a system that has all facets of martial arts."

J: I know -- Bruce Lee... it's funny -- Ironically, that was kind of his mindset when he first came to the States in the late 1950's -- That he wanted to create the "ultimate" gung fu system by taking 'this' from 'that' and 'that' from 'this' -- But he got away from that and he got more into, "How do I develop myself?" -- And he realized certain techniques he recognized were the supposed "best" by legendary tales had no applicability -- So it was grounded in reality, it was grounded in science, it was grounded in his aptitude, or lack thereof -- I mean, there might have been martial art techniques, for instance, that a martial artist such as George St. Pierre might be able to do, that Bruce Lee may not have had the genetic make-up to be able to execute at the same level -- Well as good as it was, he wouldn't just say, "Well, I'm going to try and keep working and keep working until I can do this technique." -- He found a better way to make it work -- And if someone showed him a technique that he felt was useful and efficient, he would incorporate it with certain modifications, until it was a very effective technique for him -- I saw on-line the other night that he learned kicking from Jhoon Rhee and Chuck Norris, and grappling from Gene LaBell -- Sorry, but that to me is horse crap -- He learned kicking by teaching himself how to kick.

And you look at his early stuff in Seattle -- Even then he was practicing, and initially it really bothered him to do a kick to the point... I remember Jesse Glover saying, quite accurately, that he really liked the high kicks -- He thought they were cool and they opened another channel of martial options for him -- But he was so tight in the hip region and everything that he really had difficulty kicking above the waist -- And so much so that he had to point the supporting leg toes in the opposite direction in order to do it without pain -- Well, that's something that endured throughout all of his kicks, even in "Enter the Dragon" when he did a hook kick or something, the toes of the supporting leg were facing in the opposite direction -- But that was because of his body mechanics -- I mean, when you mention Bruce Lee, there are so many, many misconceptions that there's not one that overwhelms you as being the big one -- There are so many that I would almost have to do it on a point-by-point.

And his art, that's another one entirely -- For me, a pet peeve has always been martial artists that claim to have influenced Bruce Lee more than they obviously did, or that trivialize his achievement -- That's always been a pet peeve of mine -- And guys like Gene LaBell come to mind right away -- I don't think Gene LaBell spent any meaningful time with Bruce Lee -- And I say that based at looking at his Daytimers [diaries] -- I don't see Gene LaBell in there -- Gene LaBell saying things like, he went to Bruce's school and almost had to leave and said, "Man, I can't stay in there because of the incense" -- Well, did Dan Inosanto ever tell you that Bruce burned incense in the Chinatown school all the time? -- Was it overwhelming? -- No. So Gene LaBell never set foot in his school -- He also told me that he thought Brandon was better than Bruce -- Okay Gene (laughs) --

You know, Bruce Lee was self-taught -- As you said, you made a good point in one of our earlier conversations -- that you say to people, "If you want to develop Bruce Lee-like qualities then

you've got to put in Bruce Lee-like time and effort." -- And where he would do 2000 punches in a given time-frame, the average martial artist might have done 300 --

Well, I think it takes about 10,000 times to achieve what they might tentatively call mastery of a certain technique -- And that's how Bruce Lee got very good, and that's an individual thing -- You don't do 10,000 punches with a teacher barking at you, you do it when you can find time -- And you do it, and you do it, and you do it and you do it -- So he did that on his own -- And once his rightly-earned success in achieving mastery of this was acknowledged, everybody want to take credit for it -- That's always been a sore spot for me on Bruce Lee, is rather than being held forth as a beacon of what is possible if you too are willing to put forth that kind of time into your training and personal development -- that you can achieve what, for you let's say, is the comparable of what Bruce Lee achieved for him, they try to make it, it's like, "Yeah, well he got it because he got it from me. I taught him this and..." -- These individuals are clearly not in the same class as Bruce Lee was.

C: This is why I was asking you about the misperceptions with regard to Jeet Kune Do -- One of the things I try to put forth during seminars I teach, and even in my classes, is the idea of not "memorializing" any particular point in time along Lee's evolution -- For the person who is involved in JKD to truly understand it, they need to follow it all the way through, past the time when, as you said earlier in our conversation, he was considering developing a system and then naming it, all the way up to when he was throwing things away and getting rid of the idea of "styles" completely -- But some people will just stop at one particular point, whether you want to call it the "Los Angeles era" or the "Seattle era" or the "1966-1969 period" -- But to me, to understand JKD you've got to look at the entire process.

J: Yes, I agree with you -- And like Bruce Lee said, and it's not a statement said a lot, "It [JKD] is a mirror in which to reflect yourself." -- And that is YOU -- You've got to do the work, you've got to do the practice -- You've got to learn about yourself -- You've got to learn what your attributes are and how to cultivate those attributes -- And you've got to be willing to put in the thousands of hours or even tens of thousands of hours required to achieve proficiency in doing it so that it becomes a reflex -- And that's what Bruce Lee did.

It's funny, I mean he studied formally for what was it, three years, maybe four years at the most? -- From age fifteen to eighteen. He was eighteen when he left Hong Kong -- He had three years of Wing Chun training -- And I'm sure he practiced that very diligently -- But then, it was shortly after he got to the States until the day he died, he was self-taught -- By far the greatest amount of time was self-teaching from Bruce Lee.

C: You put in several of the articles you wrote that you believed that it was Bruce Lee's mind that made him so good...

J: Yeah...

C: That's the other point I try make to people, that it was Bruce's thought processes that helped him actualize his potential, and if other individuals can learn to understand those thought processes, then they can either cultivate the same or similar processes to use for themselves...

J: I think one of the problems too is that a lot of people don't see themselves as being significant -- We have a real complex about that -- There are other people like Bruce Lee, who was significant, and reveled in it, and we all are like, "Man, I'd like to be that confident" or "I'd like to be this or that..." -- And unfortunately, we discount ourselves, and it becomes, instead of being the path that Bruce revealed to us to get us to the same top of the mountain he was at, we just want to fixate on the person on the top of the mountain, and it becomes a case of hero-worship -- And hero-worship's only value is in that it lights a fire under us, shows us what's possible for us to achieve -- It's very odd that we're very content to be sludge at the bottom of the pool, and to just look up at the guy that's at the top of the mountain and say, "Yeah, that's what he did, that's what he did..." -- But are you going to do it? -- "Nope, nope, but boy isn't he something. And he did this, and he wore this type of clothes. And it sort of gives me this affinity to him if I do the same thing." -- His message was bigger than that -- But it also might explain to a large extent why very few people do it -- I mean, very few people look at what his finger was pointing at, because the finger itself is so attractively packaged.

C: Or perhaps, like you said, that they realize that there's so much work involved.

J: Yeah, and people are very reticent -- In the same way they're reticent to exercise hard and tap those faster-twitch fibers that are unpleasant -- The time dedication, the what they might perceive as a monotonous repetition of neural training until they get it right -- They almost look at that in too big a picture and say, "Oh man, that mountain is way too high to climb." -- And they never make the journey, not realizing that if they just start out, it's not that overwhelming, but you do just have to keep putting one foot ahead of the other on a daily basis, and keep doing it -- And pretty soon you're halfway up the mountain -- And then it's like, "Wow, I can probably make it all the way up there."

But it does require effort and it does require critical thinking -- And in both instances that's energy out -- And we are a species that evolved and survived by conservation of energy -- So, it's unnatural -- I don't accuse these people of being lazy -- It's strictly that they've got to overcome their genetic inheritance of wanting to conserve energy, both physical and mental -- Thinking critically, that requires energy -- But the rewards are so much greater, the breakthroughs are so much more attainable if you're willing to do that rather than nestle into the safety of the herd and not think critically, not expend mental energy and not expend the physical energy necessary to fully realize all of the attributes that you can realize -- And I think that's very significant.

And the statement I made in one of the Bruce Lee books about there being a danger in standing too close to the river of another man's thoughts is very true -- I see that a lot -- That it's easier and less effort to assume a persona than it is to develop your own and cultivate your own.

C: For myself as a teacher, it would be much easier, even teaching JKD, if I when the people came in to train I would simply tell them, "Fine, this is what you're going to do..." -- But part of my thing as a teacher has always been, "It's not about me telling you what to do. If I can get you to understand this, then you can do the work yourself." -- But you run into so much resistance. -- You run into resistance sometimes from the student, but you definitely run into it from the martial art "establishment" -- Because again, it's like you're not supposed to do that -- You're supposed to "hand-walk" the student through some kind of pre-established program -- Or at least it seems that way to me anyway.

J: Well it is. And the thing is, anytime you offer up something in contrast or different than what the others are doing, they feel you've held up a mirror to them in which they see their inadequacies -- And they don't want to confront that because that again requires effort to bring them in line, or to change -- And that's never a welcome proposition -- So whenever something is advanced as different, it's immediately rejected, ignored, ridiculed, and then ultimately, if it's effective, copied and stolen -- But facts are facts -- The facts are the facts on exercise. And the facts are the facts in terms of the mechanics of martial combat -- And facts will ultimately prevail --

It's just a question of... (pauses) ...when you think about it, wouldn't it be nice if everyone embraced this? -- And the reason you and I think that is because then we wouldn't have to work as hard to communicate it -- So we're being intellectually lazy as well -- If everyone embraced it, then, again, there would be no effort to advance the cause, to dig deeper, to research, to be more certain of our facts -- I think the very reason that most people don't is why we do -- Because it's almost like a Yin and Yang, or the crest and the trough of a wave -- If there's one, there must be another -- And you have to fill the voids or the gaps that are there with knowledge -- And we do that -- And I think because there's very few of them, we feel far more comfortable in the more "workman" mode of trying to ferret out data and present it.

C: I'm always hearing statements with regards to JKD in which people say things such as, "We've surpassed what Bruce Lee was doing then", or "A lot of his material is outdated now" ...

J: That's nonsense.

C: When I ask the people making such statements to explain what it is they mean, what I usually get are comments such as, "Well, we've learned a whole bunch of different grappling techniques now" or, "We've evolved Jeet Kune Do." -- I don't understand where they come off with statements like that -- And from my perception of it, and maybe my perception's wrong, is if it [JKD] is all about "totality", how do you evolve totality? -- I mean, a person might enhance their understanding of different elements within totality, but...

J: Yeah, you can't -- Just as a mere definition of terms, you can't -- If something is "omni" or "all", you can't get beyond that -- It's like trying to go beyond 100% -- I mean, in the case of Bruce Lee, he was a very dedicated trainer, and I don't want to say open-minded, but "critical-minded" -- The open-mind just means that you take in everything without any type of analysis -- He had a very active mind and he was willing to put forth the hours necessary to perfect what he was working on -- Other people, just by adding something... okay, you might have more, but that doesn't mean you've evolved in it -- Evolution is usually an adaptation that better enhances your chances of survival.

You know too, if you leave your school and as you're going to your car, some guy grabs you by the legs, which of the seventy-two locks are you thinking of doing, or is a lock even appropriate? -- The important thing is getting away -- Are you able to make the appropriate move that results in your survival? -- And generally, that's not a lot of moves -- So is that necessary? -- Is it an evolution? -- Does it enhance your survival? -- Don't know -- It depends on the circumstance, right?

But a lot of it has to be a willingness, even in a fight, a willingness to engage -- And that is often the biggest attribute -- You can have all the techniques in the world and ‘freeze’ when you’re in a situation that requires, “now is the time you’ve got to exert yourself” -- So even the idea, the model of a guy who is willing and has no compunction about exerting himself mentally and physically to perfect a martial art or his ability to be a ‘martial instrument’, is far more significant -- It does teach a good lesson -- It teaches that there’s more to life than the undemanding and the effortless, and ultimately rewarding, and that some things are only achieved through considerable personal effort and sweat -- And that’s not a bad lesson.

And when it comes to combat, I mean, you’ve probably seen it, there are guys that may not have any martial arts training, but you know on an intuitive level that this guy would be willing to step up -- And then the question is, “Am I willing to step up and exert the kind of energy necessary to overcome the energy he’s going to be expressing?” -- If you’re not, then you politely decline (laughs)... And it doesn’t matter how many locks or anything you know -- I mean, if a guys willing... and we’ve seen it too often, even in the mixed martial arts, where a guy’s a terrific ground-fighter, and he knows all the locks and everything else, but he got tagged or he was too fatigued to be able to apply it effectively, and the opportunity got away from him -- So just having a volume of techniques is a distant second to a willingness to exert oneself to 100% of their momentary ability until there’s no energy left -- And that’s something you can get from training, whether it’s with weight training, or hitting the heavy bag, or what have you, that over time, an energy investment is not off-putting to you, because you know you can do it, and do it repeatedly.

C: Do you feel there is a difference between JKD and MMA?

J: Yeah -- On the most fundamental level there are rules in MMA -- And Bruce said that in the Pierre Burton interview, “If you’re talking about sport, that’s one thing. If you’re talking about combat “as it is”, that’s something else”-- Well, JKD is combat “as it is” -- So there’s a delineation right there -- There are no regulations, there are no rules in a street encounter -- I’ll tell you what I like and don’t like, as an individual, on the JKD front -- One, I think the further Bruce went along the path, his whole thing was about fighting -- and it was, “How do I overcome this?” -- That was the analyst in him -- “If I fight a guy who is a kicker, what do I do? If I fight a guy who is a, what do I do? How do I develop a high kick in case that presents itself? And how can I do that with force?” -- All of this stuff -- And what I’ve always found with martial arts, is that you can spend thousands of hours training for a fight that’s never going to come -- And if it’s never going to come, you know, it’s almost like watching a retired boxer doing his road work, and he’s working out hard, because he might get a fight -- And he does that for fifteen years and never gets a fight -- It’s wasted effort -- It’s wasted effort in that you can get the health benefits from that, with a lot less investment in time -- So there has to be something a little more to one’s wanting to learn a martial art than just ‘a fight’ -- And I think, initially what I liked about the early stuff Bruce did, although technically it wasn’t as complete or total, say, as what JKD became, it was nice to have a little system if you, from an art standpoint -- You learn this, you learn the mechanics -- It wasn’t all about fighting -- There was a philosophical system that underpinned it that was very cool -- He was able to, in many respects, introduce some very cool elements of Chinese culture to people who were ignorant of it -- And it’s always had a certain romantic interest in that era of his -- And then later it became about his own development -- So the system went away, and it was mainly about him preparing for a fight --

Ted Wong told me that Bruce told him at one point that he thought Yip Man was trying to send someone over to kill him at some point -- So he wanted to learn how to overcome, what he saw at the time, from his younger training, as a pretty formidable fighting system -- And work outside the system so that he could defend himself -- But he always seemed to have a mindset that people were gonna try and get him -- So he was constantly training for a fight, but it never came -- And to me, on the positive it resulted in the creation of the most celebrated martial artist that's ever lived -- But on the negative, there's a lot of time away from family, a lot of time taken away from other pursuits that he may well blossomed in -- I mean, he was a very talented artist -- That just kind of was on the side -- It wasn't necessary that he develop artistic skills or music skills or anything like that -- But when you talk about the 'totality' of a human being, those are all of those attributes that need attention and cultivation -- And you can develop a total, more fuller human being out of it.

C: So one thing can become the only colour in a person's paintbox, versus seeing the entire spectrum of colours --

J: And I think for Bruce, and it sounds really cheap for someone to say something that isn't, because we're always used to praise, but, I think the idea of training just for a fight or fighting, limits you to some extent -- And I can see if you say, "Well, it has health benefits" -- That's true, and that's good -- But that wasn't what he was training solely for -- The only reason he wanted the health benefits was because he had had a fight where he didn't think his endurance was as good as it should have been -- It was always geared to fighting -- And in that respect, I kind of liked his earlier stuff where he thought a fight should be over quick and you didn't need a ton of conditioning for it -- That was intriguing and it was different and to me at least it was exotic -- I can't dispute the fact that if you're interested in fighting, if you're interested in really doing damage to something, then yeah, JKD is the real deal, because it's, as he [Lee] said, it's about fighting "as it is" -- So no, I don't think the MMA connection is... as long as there is an arena with rules, it had nothing to do with JKD -- That would be my thought anyway --

C: In numerous articles and interviews you have talked about that when it comes to Jeet Kune Do, people either "get it" or they don't -- Can you explain what the "it" is that people should get?

J: Whew, that's a tough question, because the "it" depending on the day you speak to me, I might feel I don't have a firm grasp on it yet ...

C: My point is, with all the other stuff we've read, you've pointed out numerous times about the idea of "getting what Bruce Lee was pointing at" ...

J: Well, I mean the big thing there is the development of the self, the "root" -- The "it" isn't simply enrolling in a class and going through motions, or studying every martial art under the sun because you heard that -- You've actually got to research this too, if Bruce Lee is your role model -- And this actually goes back to... look at his daytime diaries... and lay out a class curriculum of any martial art school, and then lay out what he did...

C: Right....

J: ... And you're going to see a vast difference -- And the vast difference comes down to individual effort -- I mean, what's interesting is that Bruce Lee started martial arts when he was around 13 or 14 I think, if I'm not mistaken -- He took Wing Chun and he studied formally for about five years or so with a teacher, and he went to classes, and he had some private instruction -- We all know the story -- Nobody spoke about him -- He wasn't a dynamo -- Nothing about that caused him to explode -- But what happened was, he didn't just stop at the classes... Even then, when he was home he was practicing, he was jumping over tables, he was pushing his hand against a desk to develop better energy for chi sao -- And then when he came to the States when he was eighteen, and remained there until he was probably thirty, that's when he developed -- But who did he study under in the States? -- Nobody, he was self-taught, he was self-trained -- So any of his development, when he became Bruce Lee, the phenomenal martial artist, it was all through the personal dint of effort that he put into his own development -- This researching training as best as the knowledge existed at the time, he was into that thoroughly -- Looking at the mechanics of how the human arm and body and waist and legs are involved when a punch is thrown, you know, for power -- And a kick -- And working on it and working on it and working on it -- You see in the daytimers... I mean 500 punches at a shot, per arm -- And then it was at the point where he was doing arms three days a week and legs three days a week, and what areas of emphasis he thought were important, from the abdominals to the forearms... all of that.

So the "it" is a self-cultivation -- And as such, it's very difficult, even for me, or you, to look at someone and say, "That guy doesn't get it." ... because I don't know what the guy does in his spare time... (laughs)... I mean, maybe he does get it, maybe he working really, really hard... But if he's memorizing dialogue from Bruce Lee's films or passages from his books without any emotional attachment or real-world application of that, then I'd say it's lip-service -- You can theorize it, you can amass a tremendous Bruce Lee collection, you can read every word the guy ever wrote -- I mean, that's like having a car with no transmission in it, or even having a car with a transmission in it but never getting in it to drive it -- It's just, "There's the car".... there's this body of knowledge -- I have all of Bruce Lee's books." -- But when you ask "So what do you do?" the guy suddenly goes, "Uh..." And gets this vague, blank look on his face -- So the "it" Bruce Lee was pointing at was...

C: Self-development...?

J: Yeah, and not self in the abstract, but your "self" -- And that's the big thing -- What are you doing with it?

C: Your personal development...

J: Yeah, I mean... I know that like, when I studied with Ted, it was funny -- I remember the first time I was training with him, I was useless -- You know, I had trained in martial arts for a long time and had my own routines on heavy bag, top-and-bottom bag, bean bag -- And when he was asking me to hit the heavy bag I felt like my legs were in cement, and I couldn't get my brain to function properly to do it, because I was thinking about everything I could remember about what Bruce said, what Bruce wrote, trying to get the mechanics the way he did it -- And I wasn't relaxed, I wasn't being myself, I wasn't just "doing it" -- And it was so frustrating at the time - I couldn't kick worth a damn, I couldn't punch worth a damn -- I think I hit the heavy bag so much that my knuckles were shredded -- I think I bled all over his bag --

It was again, thinking at the time, “Well okay, Ted worked out with Bruce. I’ve got to be at a certain level here otherwise he’s not gonna think I know what I’m doing, and I’m wasting his time.” –

And the reality was the complete opposite of what I should have been doing -- I should have just hit the bag, hit it, hit it, hit in any way I can until I found my own rhythm for it and my own mechanics for it, following within those guidelines of what he was showing me; like the power line, and the vertical fist, and all that sort of stuff, and the use of the hip, and the lead side forward -- And the thing is, if I really wanted to curry his favor, and improve on that, I would have just gone home that night and just practiced and practiced and practiced, and so, I wasn’t thinking about the mechanics or how Bruce did it, and how Ted did it, but how I did it -- And that would’ve been the best way to do it, and eventually, if I really put in Bruce Lee-like hours, I may not have had Bruce Lee-like results but I would have had optimal “John Little” results.

C: I think that’s the main point -- Someone who goes to class two times a week for an hour each time, then does nothing, no thought about it the rest of the time...

J: Yeah, forgets about it when they go home... They’re viewing it solely as a recreation.. a social event -- They go to it and they’re taking what’s called Bruce Lee’s art, but they’ll give it an hour and a half a couple of times a week maybe, and that’s it -- And they accept unconditionally whatever their instructor tells them, whatever he happens to be doing -- And the problem with that is not that instructors will mislead people ... but what I’ve learned from being on the outside looking in and then being on the inside looking out, is that the martial arts is like the fitness industry -- It’s an industry, it’s a business built largely on classes, which means built largely on turnover, which means getting people in -- And the way you get people in is by giving them what they want -- You give them what they want by telling them what they want to hear -- And sometimes, I know this happens in Canada, and I’m sure it happens in the U.S. due to the population disparity, that people say, “Oh Bruce Lee learned this art.” or “He was in touch with my instructor and they shared techniques, and my instructor taught him this...” -- You know, some nonsense which is completely unverifiable or unsubstantiated, and yet people do it because it’s got that [stamp] of Bruce Lee on it somehow, and it’s however fraudulently obtained -- And my problem was always when I got into it initially, I believed everyone was telling the truth -- You know, who would lie? -- Why would they lie about it? -- And I thought, naively, that all of Bruce’s students really loved each other, that they all wanted to work together, and that they all were kind of reading off the same page -- And I didn’t realize that life gets in the way of that -- Someone else who was a friend is now viewed as a competitor for students and that’s taking food off your plate -- So someone has to have his students believe that he is THE guy -- There is only one guy -- And the big joke of it is YOU are the guy -- Doesn’t matter what the student of Bruce’s was or what the pecking order was -- What are YOU doing? -- Are you developing yourself? -- It’s like “shake the hand of the hand of the guy who shook Bruce Lee’s hand” -- It’s all nonsense -- Just because somebody has a lineage, that he knew Bruce Lee or trained with him, or was even made an instructor by him, that doesn’t mean that’s going to have any impact on you at all -- I mean, it might have and him, and his development -- But as far as your development, which is why you’re in the martial arts, to develop yourself, it could have absolutely nothing to do with it -- Ultimately, who is giving you the gift? Is it the instructor, or is it you? -- You know, when you put the hours in, you get the gift -- You get better at what you do --

C: This was exactly why I wanted you to discuss “getting it” -- It doesn’t matter what anyone else thinks about it, what do you, the individual think about it.

J: Yeah, absolutely - Whatever anybody else thinks is what anybody else thinks -- Take the message and develop yourself -- Research in depth so you can better understand, apply, and cultivate the tools that have been shared with you and develop yourself -- That’s the “it” I guess.

C: Is it true you’ve recently finished filming a documentary in which you traveled to all of the various sites where Bruce shot all of his films? --

J: That’s right.

C: I would’ve loved to have done such a thing. What prompted to you to do such a project?

J: It’s funny, when I was a kid growing up in a suburb of Toronto, Canada, and I got my first issue of Fighting Stars magazine, the first one that came out, with Bruce Lee on the cover and “Enter the Dragon”, I wasn’t that interested [in Lee] at the time. I bought the magazine because they had an article on Keye Luke, who was Master Po in the Kung Fu television series.

C: I still have a copy of that magazine...

J: The Kung Fu TV series was the coolest thing in the world,. I was intrigued by the Eastern thought even then, which was cool, and also these sort of exotic moves which were really, really cool. Using certain elements in human energy they could repel numerous adversaries. But, anyway, we were at a cottage that didn’t have a TV or anything there, so I ended up reading the whole magazine, and it talked about Bruce Lee. And he seemed, to all of us, that he was just this really interesting individual. So I made a mental note, because I re-read it several times, and “Enter the Dragon” was coming out and it sounded like a cool plot, you know? I went to the theatre, and was completely unprepared for how that impacted me. It could have been my age, I don’t know. I was twelve, almost thirteen. But seeing Bruce Lee, doing what he was doing, authentic martial art, and also the locales, that always stayed with me.

And through the other films, like when he did “Chinese Connection”, that whole ‘kwoon’ idea and the school and the people training, that was neat. That stayed with me. The film “The Big Boss”, with the fight on the front lawn... I mean, who, among us, as Bruce Lee fans, hadn’t thought, “Geez, I wonder if that place is still there? Wouldn’t it be cool to go there, and if not walk in Bruce Lee’s footsteps, at least see what he saw, and see this place up close, to see what it would have been like?” So, that was always in my mind. But it just never seemed practical. You know, when you’re working or teaching at a school, how often can you even allow yourself to think, “Geez, I’d love to go to Thailand and see where Pak Chong is.” But anyway, I got a call from John Walker, who was one of the partners when we did “Bruce Lee -- A Warrior’s Journey”, and he said that he would really like to go and see some of the locations where Bruce did his stuff. And I told him that I’d always wanted to go where the films were made. And he thought that we would be great. Anyway, I did up a budget for the film and it was accepted, and I thought, “Cool”. Then the real work began, which was, where are these places? Do they still exist? But it was cool. I mean, I feel almost embarrassed to say how many times I’d seen these films in the theaters. But to go there, and to go where he walked, and see, in some cases how they’ve changed, and in some cases how they haven’t, was fascinating. Like, the Big Boss’

house looks the same today as when they filmed the movie. The same swimming pool out front, same spirit house behind the pool, same steps, same frame, same roof, same interior. We even went downstairs where Bruce and James Tien filmed their scenes and they had the same yellow tile steps.

C: So you actually went inside the house?

J: Yeah, and there it was. Apart from the monks, I don't think anyone had been down there since then. It was cool. Finding the little waterfall that Lee sat next to in "The Big Boss" and seeing the hotels he stayed in when he was there, which are still standing, that was cool. Going to the ice factory, which is still making ice after all these years was very neat. And it had a different feeling. To me, it was almost like the closest thing to a religious experience.

C: Did you go to Italy where Lee filmed "Way of the Dragon" as well?

J: Yeah, that was cool. We saw the locations where he did his exterior work and it was the same thing. Most of the exteriors are still there, including that Guiliano's coffee place, you know, the café that he walks in front of. I mean, that was almost forty years ago and it's still there. The place where Lee looked out over the Roman Forum. Where he walked through the Coliseum and the gate he shook. And everything just kind of flooded back. You're talking about a key period of our adolescence or our youth where aged twelve to present day I've been watching Bruce with these backgrounds going past him.

And we went to Macao, where he did the "No Dogs and Chinese Allowed" scene in the park, and that hasn't changed. The same wrought-iron gates are in front of the park. That was neat. I mean, how many times did we sit in theaters and watch "The Chinese Connection"? And then Enter the Dragon", which was very cool too, where he did the "Lau's time" scene, and the scene with [the Shaolin priest} Roy Chuaio, and the scene where he sat down with Mr. Braithwaite. All of those places are perfectly preserved. Golden Harvest studios has now been torn down and replaced with two large apartment buildings. And Han's island, of course, wasn't an island at all. But seeing the jetty where they got onto the island in the film, that's still there. So that was cool. And the tennis courts where the fight scenes were filmed have all been pretty much destroyed. But there are still remnants, and all the memories kind of come back. like, "This was Han's compound." And the cemetery where Lee filmed that scene. It took forever to find it and find the right gravestone, but we found it.

C: It sounds like the film will be a real treat for anyone who is a fan of Bruce Lee and his films. What are your plans for it?

J: Well, it's been over a year of editing and re-editing. Now it's at the hands of a distributor now and their job is to try and secure television sales, and to a lesser extent dvd sales. So that's what they're working on. But I tell you, it was the trip of a lifetime, it really was.

C: I look forward to seeing it when it comes out. Thanks again for taking the time to chat.

J: You're welcome.



John Little

John Little is considered 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 authorized by the Bruce Lee estate to review and use the entirety of Lee's personal notes, sketches, and reading annotations. He edited a five-volume series of books on Lee's material. In addition, John served as the associate publisher of Bruce Lee magazine, the managing editor of Knowing Is Not Enough, the official newsletter of the JFJKD Nucleus, and as a director of the non-profit Bruce Lee Foundation.

In the world of strength and fitness training, John Little would certainly be considered an iconoclast. Recognized as "one of the top fitness researchers in North America", John has exposed and laid to rest many of the myths, lies and fallacies that surround the world of bodybuilding and fitness training. Utilizing scientific principles instead of following tradition and dogma, he is the innovator of three revolutionary training protocols, including Max Contraction Training. A prolific writer, John 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.