

Chris Kent:-The Prince of Jeet Kune Do

Exclusive Interview on Jeet Kune Do and his return to the U.K. (Part 1)

With over 35 year's experience, Chris Kent was the youngest and final member admitted into Dan Inosanto's fabled "Backyard JKD" group during Bruce Lee's lifetime, and was one of the first students to be awarded the title of Full Instructor in the Jun Fan Martial Arts (Jeet Kune Do) and the Filipino Martial Arts by Guro Dan Inosanto.

A full-time, professional martial art instructor and author/ co-author of 4 of the highest rated books on Jeet Kune Do, he has written and produced 2 series of training videotapes and DVDs which remain the standard of the industry. Plus he has been featured in such books as "Jeet Kune Do Conversations" and "Jeet Kune Do – The Art and Philosophy of Bruce Lee", and co-founded and served on the Board of Directors for the Bruce Lee Educational Foundation for 5 years. Due to his exceptional background he has gained international recognition for his knowledge and leadership in disseminating the art and philosophy developed by Bruce Lee, and is considered one of the few individuals in the world having total comprehension of all facets of Lee's martial art. He is widely acknowledged as one of the world's leading authorities on the art and philosophy of Jeet Kune Do.

Andrew Staton: - You are recognized as one of the premier Jeet Kune Do instructors in the world today. It's been several years since you've conducted any seminars in the U.K. Is there any particular reason for this?

Chris Kent:- I don't think there's any one particular reason. It's probably more a combination of things. I no longer live in a major city like Los Angeles, where people often combine their visit to train at a particular school with a vacation. In addition, I have not maintained a visible presence in the various martial art magazines by writing articles for them, nor attended any of the recent Bruce Lee Foundation events (although I serve as an advisor for them). At the present time I don't have any representatives in the U.K. (although I am currently in the process of changing that) who would bring me over on a regular basis. And for the last few years I haven't actively sought out any seminars.

A. S.:- What have you been doing in the meantime?

C. K.:- Teaching at my school in Boise, raising my daughter, Sarah, and working on ways in which I can apply my skills in ways that are both challenging and meaningful to me. More recently I've been working on some other writing projects and taking what I do into some other avenues, looking at the broader application of the material.

A.S.:- So what has prompted you to come back onto the seminar circuit?

C.K.:- I don't really consider myself involved with any kind of seminar "circuit". When people approach me concerning the possibility of my conducting a seminar for them, we discuss the matter, and if we come to a mutual agreement, I do it. I conduct

seminars for people who are representatives of other JKD people. Dave Carnell is a good friend, and a representative of Cass Magda. I know that there are some individuals in the JKD world who won't allow their instructors to train with other JKD people, but to me, that's wrong. But just because I conduct a seminar for someone does not automatically mean that I will certify them as an instructor or as my representative. Over the last year or so, people have begun contacting me and asking about my availability to teach seminars for them. Oftentimes I'm told that people in the upper echelons of JKD referred them to me because of my background in the art and my position with regards to teaching it and how I teach it. I've been intimately involved with JKD for over thirty five years now, and a lot of people now see me as a 'bridge' between the various JKD generations and the different camps. And it's just kind of blossomed from there. Maybe it also had something to do with the release of my book, *"The Encyclopaedia of Jeet Kune Do -- A to Z"* and the re-release of the books I wrote with Tim Tackett, *"Jeet Kune Do Kickboxing"* and *"Jun Fan/Jeet Kune Do - The Textbook."*

A.S.:- Your books and training videos are still considered to be some of the best anywhere. Then they seem to disappear. What happened to them?

C.K. -- Health For Life, the company I made the "Dynamic JKD" videotapes with, basically disappeared from the face of the Earth. I have no idea what happened to them, or my tapes. Then in somewhere around 2003, CFW Enterprises (Inside Kung Fu, etc.) informed Tim and I that due to legal problems with the Bruce Lee estate, they would no longer be doing anything about Bruce Lee, and in one fell swoop discontinued all of our books, tapes, etc. Not only ours but others as well. So over the course of a few years, everything I had done in terms of books and videos was swept off the table. Gone.

A.S.:- When were you approached to revise your books?

C.K.:- Empire Media approached me a couple of years back about the idea of taking both volumes of *"Jeet Kune Do - From A to Z"*, revising them and combining them into one book which would be titled *"The Encyclopaedia of Jeet Kune Do -- From A to Z"*. We did that and it came out sometime in 2007. Then last year, all of a sudden, out of the blue the publishers of Inside Kung Fu contacted Tim and I and told us that they wanted to re-publish both of our books, but that they needed all new photos. So Tim and I revised the books, shot new photos, and they've both since been re-released.

A.S.:- Do you have any other books or dvd's coming out?

C.K.:- Yes. I have a new dvd series coming out which is called *"Masterclass Jeet Kune Do"*, and a book on equipment training which, while written from a JKD perspective if you will, is designed to help any martial artist improve their skills. The dvd's should be out in June or July, and I'm not sure when the book is coming out.

A.S.:- You started your training in Dan Inosanto's backyard over 35 years ago. How has the JKD world changed since that time?

C.K.:- Well there's the art and philosophy of JKD and then there's the world of JKD, and while they are interconnected, they're different. With regard to the art and philosophy of JKD, there have been improvements made in with regard to things such as training methodology, training equipment, etc. The knowledge base has expanded. But fundamentally it's still about an individual cultivating their body as a 'martial instrument' and then learning to express themselves with maximum efficiency and without any form of restriction or confinement. With regard to the world of JKD, I think it's probably become, by far, the most political hornet's nest in martial art history. This has less to do with the art itself and more to do with "real estate" and business. Whether people recognize it or not, or like to hear it or not, Jeet Kune Do has become big business. It has market value and is a drawing card for the martial art public. Today you see the name Jeet Kune Do plastered on the outside of martial art schools along with a plethora of other arts the school offers. You can find advertisements in martial art magazines offering to show you how to add a JKD class to your traditional martial art school in order to increase revenue. You can find such things as online certification courses, dvd certification course, and people who will train you for a week or weekend and certify you as an instructor. To me there is a big difference between taking an online course on literature and writing an essay to get school credits, and being able to teach a physical art along with its philosophy. So I don't agree with these things, but I understand why people do them.

A.S.:- Is that why you've stated in other interviews that in some ways you feel that "certification has become the black belt of Jeet Kune Do"?

C.K.:- Yes. When a lot of people start studying martial arts these days, the first thing they want to know is, "How long will it take for me to get a black belt?" And this is understandable because it's something that they've been entrained to expect by both the martial art media and the entertainment media. But even the term "black belt" has become nebulous now. The bottom line is that all it means is that you have fulfilled the necessary requirements that institution requires for a black belt. And different martial art schools might have vastly different standards. I've seen schools where it may take ten years to earn a black belt for whatever reasons. And I've seen other schools where a student is guaranteed to get a black belt in two years because that's the longest people are going to stay. And that's what's happening in the JKD world today, but because we don't give out black belts, the focus shifts to "How long will it take me to get certified as an instructor." And in the same way, different JKD schools can have vastly different requirements.

Next month Chris looks at what Jeet Kune Do can offer to the Martial artist today as compared to other martial arts

Chris is giving his first exclusive seminar in several years at IMPACT MARTIAL ARTS ACADEMY the in Stoke-On-Trent on the 11th and 12th of July, if you are interested in this seminar and want further information please contact Dave by:- Email:dave.carnell@ntlworld.com or phone Tel: 01782 823984 the exact location is:- IMPACT MARTIAL ARTS ACADEMY ,165-167, High St ,Tunstall ,Stoke-On-Trent ,Staffordshire ,ST6 5EA.