

BOB BREMER
BRUCE LEE'S **JENMA**

Bob Bremer was training kenpo karate under Ed Parker when he was informed that Bruce Lee was going to open his Los Angeles Chinatown kwoon. Being a realistic fighter and a no-nonsense martial artist, he became a student of Bruce Lee who, according to Bremer, was "the closest thing to a magician I had ever seen." From that day on, Bremer's mentality about fighting changed. He was one of the "tough guys" at the Chinatown school and Bruce used him to "scare people" out of the school who came in with the wrong attitude. Bremer understood that his sifu wanted him to be able use in combat anything he was teaching in class. He realized that everything went back to how well you can apply the theory you've learned. Being part of the inner group of Chinatown students, who also trained at Bruce's house, allowed Bremer to better appreciate the art and philosophy of jeet kune do. After "being on the couch for a long time," as he likes to describe it, and dropping out of sight. Bob Bremer decided it was time to come out of the shadows and share his "usable knowledge" with those who are ready to accept it.

Q: What was your first introduction into the martial arts?

A: My sons were really excited after watching an Ed Parker kenpo demonstration. They wanted to join his school so we got some gift certificates for assisting the classes. Ed said that for only five dollars more I could get the family plan. My wife really pushed for me to do it so I joined. To be honest I would have quit almost right away but I didn't want my kids to think I was a chicken.

Q: When you began training under Bruce Lee?

Jerry Poteet called me one day and told me that Bruce was going to give a two-hour demonstration at the opening of his L.A. Chinatown school. I guess it was around the beginning of 1967. It wasn't long into the demonstration that I was totally convinced I was going to be a Bruce Lee student. I remember that at least five guys all changed schools at the same time. We jokingly called ourselves "The Turncoats" because we all switched over from Ed Parker and went there.

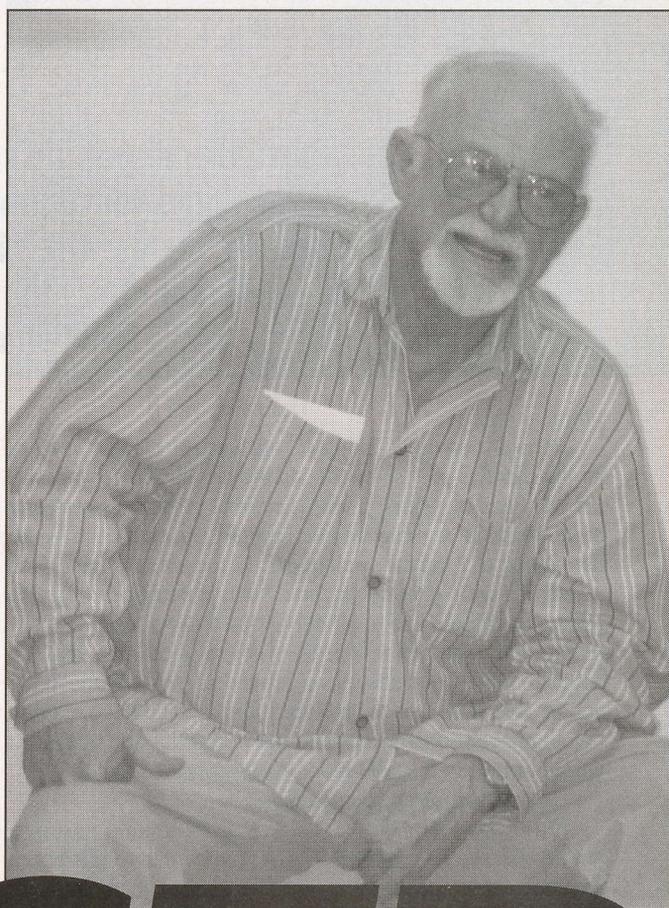
Q: Was Bruce happy with that?

Yes. The whole idea Bruce had in mind for the demonstration was recruiting students for the school – and it worked because many kenpo students began training with him. All the students were given membership cards. Mine was number 105 because all the numbers started with the number "100" which happened to be Dan Lee's card number. Inosanto had been training under Bruce since 1964 but the school opened in February 1967. Before that, Bruce was training Tony Hum, Inosanto, and Wayne Chan in a Los Angeles pharmacy.

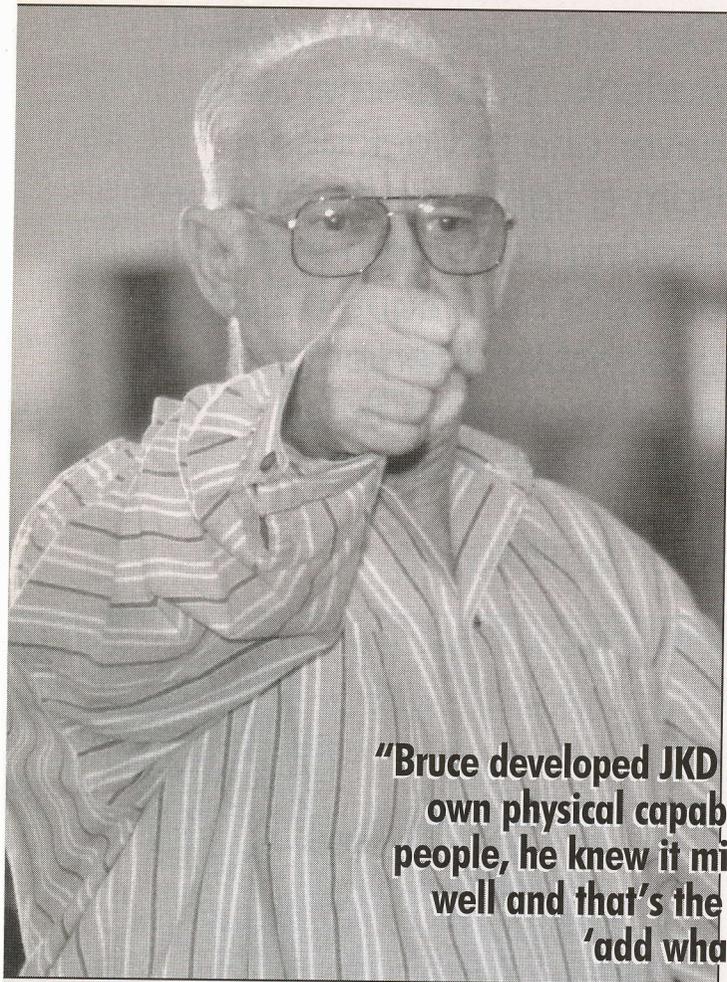
Q: What was your first impression about Bruce Lee's

One of Bruce Lee's original students, Bob Bremer was never one to back down from a fight – or an opinion. Looking at modern jeet kune do from his unique historical perspective, Bremer gives us an idea of what Bruce might have thought.

BY JOSE FRAGUAS



ORCER



"Bruce developed JKD according to his own physical capabilities. For other people, he knew it might not work as well and that's the reason he said, 'add what is your own.'"

physical abilities?

He was amazingly fantastic! He was the closest thing to a magician I've ever seen. He had moves that made you realize you were not dealing with a normal person. I guess one of the reasons so many people dropped out was because he demanded too much – he suggested too much. Bruce was consumed with what he did, and it was no wonder he got so good. But I would like to point out that to be a teacher is different than to be a practitioner. Bruce, as a teacher, had the ability to make you believe you could do it. His attitude made you believe in your own abilities. If Bruce hadn't come along I would have probably dropped out of martial arts because I was learning some stuff I didn't really consider useful.

Q: How was Bruce as a person?

A: He was very Chinese. He was an all-around neat guy, but he was stuck on martial arts. If you wanted to talk about anything else, forget it! Sometimes we used to go to parties or celebrations and he would sit around saying nothing because he had nothing to talk about but martial arts. In the meantime, everybody else was having fun! He just had no interest in any other thing, and if he did, I didn't see it very often.

Q: How was the training at the Chinatown school?

A: Very physical and very demanding. Conditioning exercises, punching and kicking on focus gloves, heavy bag, et cetera. We used to do lots of sensitivity drills from wing chun to improve our trapping skills as well. Of course, we did a lot of sparring. All the training was contact oriented. We trained pretty much like boxers. You need practice. It's just like a pilot, the more hours you fly makes you a better pilot – and the

more hours you spar makes you a better fighter. For Bruce, being in top physical condition was a mandatory requirement.

Q: Were his requirements different from other teachers you had before?

A: Yes. When I began training under Bruce it was like going from high school to college. He realistically used everything he was teaching. I guess that was the whole idea behind his teaching – being able to use what you have in a real fight. Because we sparred a lot, we could see our progress and judge how well we were doing. I remember that I used to ask myself, "What am I doing this for? I have to work tomorrow and I need sleep, and here I am driving to Chinatown, in the dark, to train martial arts! Why am I doing this?" He definitely had a charisma that made you stick to him. He sacrificed everything to become the best martial artist on earth. And you have to respect that.

Q: I've heard that you had to physically demonstrate JKD to some visitors at the Chinatown school. Is that right?

A: Yes. One time, Bruce made me spar against a very big guy. He had different black belts and he was Mr. Philadelphia in bodybuilding. His weight was around 225 pounds! I was facing this huge guy in the middle of the kwoon. The guy tried to kick me with the rear leg, so I moved back and before he could recover I began to chase him with the straight blast all

the way to one of the windows. Bruce was looking down and smiling while Dan Inosanto was yelling "stop!" Inosanto moved us back to the center of the school again and when we started I just ran over the guy. Bruce kept smiling! I remember that guy wrote an good article about Bruce's method but he didn't mention the guy





who was running all over him! One day Bruce said to me, "I want to teach you everything." I said, "Sure! You just want everyone to try out this old man!" Bruce was looking for a handful of people to be the nucleus of his group. He was planning to give us special attention, but the group kind of thinned out – and I guess he felt bad about it. I felt bad, too, because some people wouldn't show at the classes.

Q: Why does JKD seem to be fragmented now?

A: The JKD tree is going in many different ways. Some are seeking the original stuff, and that's good – but they have to question themselves if they are satisfied with it, because Bruce didn't mean for them to stop there. On the other hand, even though he looked at everything, he didn't practice everything. He left a framework to look at and if everybody had that first, they would become much better martial artists because they would be able to sort out what's effective and what's not, in a real situation.

Q: How do you feel about the added stuff?

A: It made me realize just how good the stuff that Bruce taught us at the Chinatown school really was.

Q: You mentioned once that Bruce told you he'd learned to be deceptive. What did he mean by that?

A: I remember he said once to me, "Do a finger jab." As soon as I was about to start my movement, he would turn away from me on the safe side in slow motion and make me miss! I felt that I must be really bad, even though I was always more physical and a little faster than most of the other students. So I told Bruce that he was really fast and he said, "No, Bob I'm not that fast, I've met people much faster than

me. I just learned to be deceptive." His finger jab, for example, was in your face before you knew it. He studied the body motion and the physical signs that developed before any action actually began. He could notice these small clues and react to them – thereby intercepting your motion. He developed JKD according to his own physical capabilities. He had it figured out for himself. For other people, he knew it might not work as well and that's the reason he said, "add what is your own." He wanted you to find out what really worked for you as individual. That's the very essence of what he did for himself. You would go to his house and he'd have a motion picture camera set up and he'd be watching Jack Dempsey, Jess Willard, et cetera, with a mirror. He'd turn them around and put them in a right-hand stance instead of a left. He was always looking to see if there were any movements or secrets he could discover from the old movies.

Q: What do you think about the recent popularity of grappling?

A: During Bruce's time grappling was not that strong. But Bruce looked at grappling from a different perspective than people today. I don't think he really liked to go to the ground, but he knew how to dissolve a grappling situation with fingers to the eyes, attacks to the throat and ears, et cetera. He was not into sport fighting – he was training for survival. But if you research grappling you need a JKD grappling mentality, otherwise you'll be missing some important aspects. Personally, I don't think Bruce felt inadequate about grappling in any way.

Q: Would you say that JKD is only about fighting?

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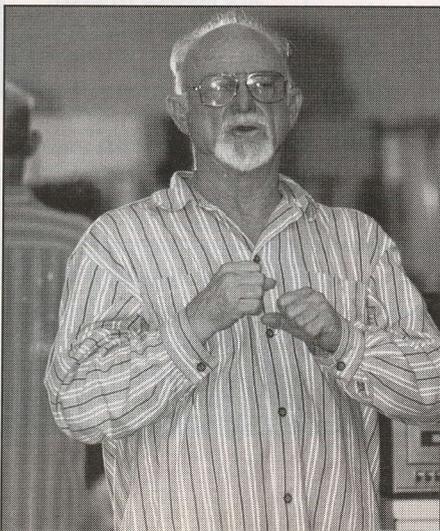
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A: Bruce described it as "bare essential street-fighting." Unfortunately, I don't think that a very high percentage of people have a clue about what real combat is. Bruce once gave me a scenario: "Imagine a truck driver on bennies who'd rather fight than eat. He doesn't give a damn about your JKD. He doesn't care about all your black belts. He's 250 pounds, built like a tank, and he just wants to rip your head off. Can you handle that?" Just think about it. By mentally putting yourself in a situation like that you can learn a lot about yourself and about your martial art system as well.

Q: Where is JKD headed?

A: I think that some people are doing a great job. Our usable knowledge has increased. It's good to look at different arts but you must be careful what you add. By truly understanding the JKD core, you're more capable of adding certain things in the right way. I really believe that you need the foundation of what Bruce was teaching back then because it is your base for further growth and evolution. It is not just knowing the core techniques, but training in them until you can efficiently use them, and know how and why they work for you. The core will give you a framework from which to study other arts and to fill whatever blanks you might have. Unfortunately, I see many people adding things without having a deep understanding of how the JKD core techniques work in combat. You need a structure to work from. Probably, that lack of understanding is the reason so many are adding so much. Just remember that Bruce used to say, "It's not what you can learn, it's what you can throw away." That means going back to simplicity. That was his whole thing – simplicity! ☯



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