

# THE “KNOWING IS NOT ENOUGH” INTERVIEW

## This Month: Jesse Glover

*Interview Conducted by Tommy Gong*



**Jesse Glover, Fook Young and Steve Smith.**

*Jesse Glover was Bruce Lee's first student. He has conducted seminars throughout the world for the past twenty years. His contributions to the Jun Fan Jeet Kune Do Nucleus as a resource consultant are invaluable in relaying Lee's earlier training methods. In this interview, Jesse Glover recalls a young, impressionable, determined Bruce Lee in the early formative years of his art.*

— J.G. —

### ***How did you meet Bruce Lee?***

I had taken a trip to California with a couple of friends to sell magazines. My real purpose in going to California was to track down James Lee, the author of a Kung Fu book that a fellow Judoka Leroy Porter had showed me. A second reason was to look up Paul Pung, whose picture was on the back cover of James Lee's book. Earlier I had read an interesting article about Gung Fu in a magazine article. When Leroy showed me James Lee's book and said that he had been his student, I bugged him until he showed me some of the material that he had learned. By the time that Leroy completed his demonstration I was convinced that I had to learn more about Gung Fu. Later when I learned that two of my friend's were going to the bay area on a sales trip, I talked them into taking

me along. I didn't sell many magazines on the trip but I did get to meet James Lee and Paul Pung. My meeting with both men was memorable. I saw and experienced new and exciting things. Years later the same James Lee that I met in 1959 became Bruce's student and assistant instructor in Oakland.

When I returned to Seattle I told a fellow Judo player, Charlie Woo, about my trip to California and he told me that there was going to be a Gung Fu demonstration in Chinatown. I told Ed Hart about the demonstration and he agreed to go with me. The demonstration was put on by members of the Chinese Youth Club. Fook Young was the Sifu of the club and Bruce Lee was one of the club's star performers. When Ed and I left the demonstration I was more determined than ever to learn Gung Fu. A few days later I discovered that Bruce and I attended the same school and that we traveled the same path to there. After going through various schemes about how to best approach him, I decided that I would walk up to him and ask if he would teach me. When I asked him about instruction he asked me if I had a place where we could train. I told him that I shared an apartment with two other people and that we could train there. He said no one else could be around while we were training. When I said that I would make sure that no one was around when he taught me, Bruce said that he would teach me.



**Chris Sutton and Jesse Glover**

***What kind of person was Bruce?***

Well, pretty charismatic, laughed a lot, joked a lot, very likable if he liked you. He was the only person I ever knew who could make any statement about martial arts and back it up. By 1962 Bruce was far ahead of his time in terms of his Gung Fu ability.

***You were Bruce Lee's first student. What did he teach you?***

He taught me techniques from Wing Chun, Preying Mantis, Tai Chi, Ba Gwa, Eagle Claw, Hung Gar and the Tiger. He also taught me footwork, closing techniques, sticking hands, straight punching, closing attacks, kicking attacks and some wrist and arm locks. The most valuable thing that Bruce taught me was how to bring the various aspects of my life together into a workable structure. One that is flexible and allows for constant change.

***How much of a role did Bruce's seniors in Wing Chun, Wong Shun Leung and William Cheung play in his development as a martial artist?***

I know Bruce ran around with William Cheung. He always talked about William Cheung as having the most potential of anyone in Yip Man's Wing Chun clan. Bruce also said that Wong Shun Leung was the clan's best fighter. When I watch Wong move on video it is easy to see the strong influence that he had on Bruce's development. Wong Shun Leung was Bruce's primary teacher. He talked Bruce through his first Gung Fu match and taught him the properties of water that Bruce loved to talk about. In the relationship between William Cheung and Bruce, William was a fighter and Bruce followed him around to learn how he won his fights. I am sure that Bruce learned something from William but he learned a lot more from Wong Shun Leung. Bruce also learned techniques and ideas from Yip Man and some of the other senior clan members.

Bruce used to talk about Hung Gar and other systems. One of the first forms that I learned from Bruce was from the Hung. In Seattle, Bruce continued his study of Gung Fu with Fook Young. Fook Young was a friend of Bruce's father and he drove Bruce to Seattle from San Francisco. Fook Young was a

Chinese opera star and he taught Bruce material from Red Boat Wing Chun, the Southern Preying Mantis and other styles.

***You spent a lot of time doing sticking hands (Chi Sao) with Bruce Lee. How would you compare Bruce's Chi Sao to that of traditional Wing Chun and how do you compare your version of Chi Sao to Bruce's and traditional Wing Chun's?***

When I met Bruce I thought that all Wing Chun men stuck hands like he did. After I had been sticking for a while I tried it with several traditional Wing Chun people. What I discovered was that they didn't feel anything like Bruce. Bruce's sticking was based on a moderate amount of pressure and a lot of speed. He had an uncanny way of detecting impending movement and reacting to it in a way that prevented it from happening. This isn't something that everyone can develop. I use a lot more pressure than Bruce. When I was on the receiving end of Bruce's Chi Sao it felt like he was using a lot more pressure than he was. This misconception led me down a different path than the one that Bruce followed. Pressure based sticking makes it easier for the average person to learn sticking hands.

***You were in the fortunate position to witness Bruce Lee's transition from his Wing Chun roots. What were some of the reasons for abandoning Wing Chun?***

I think that Bruce just out grew what he considered to be the structure of Wing Chun and gradually came to regard it as a closed system. I also think that a case could be made that Bruce never really left the Wing Chun system but only stretched its structure. Many of the things that are attributed to Bruce came from Wong Shun Leung who was Bruce's last teacher in Hong Kong and the best fighter in Yip Man's Wing Chun clan. Many of the things that Bruce learned were based on Wong's experiences as a fighter. In Bruce's later years he stopped teaching sticking hands but he is on video during this period using this technique. Sticking hands is a Wing Chun technique.

***Was Bruce experimenting with other martial arts in Seattle?***

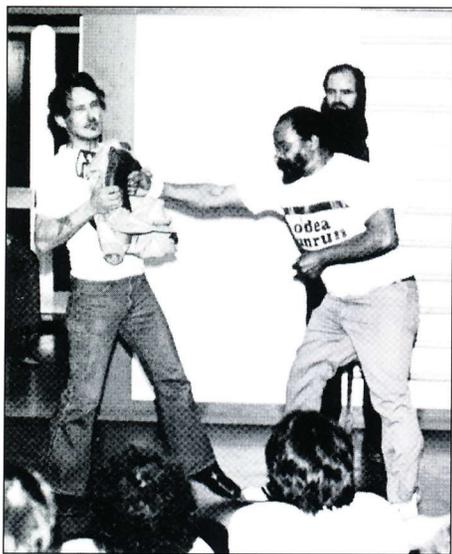
Bruce played with material from many Gung Fu styles. The ones that I remember were the Southern and Northern Mantis, Jeet Kune, Pa Gwa, Tai Chi, Hung, Eagle Claw, Choy Li Fut, Hsing Yi, boxing and Judo. During this period Bruce was heavily into various aspects of classical Gung Fu systems. Some of the material that he took from these systems stayed in his neural system and other material was discarded.

***You witnessed Bruce's interest in forms turn to criticism less than a year later.***

During that period, one of Bruce's habits was to hype something to the maximum and a few days, weeks or months later, reverse his position on it having value.

***How did Bruce view the soft styles of Gung Fu when you met him? Did the Yin and Yang play a part in his view of these arts?***

When I first met Bruce he said that the soft styles were the best ones. He thought that they contained the most valuable secrets. He loved to talk about the philosophical basis of Tai



Jesse Glover in Germany.

Chi, Hsing Yi and Pa Gwa and extolled the masters of these arts. He believed that there were masters in the soft arts that were equal to or better than the best people in his Wing Chun clan were. The Yin and Yang provided Bruce with a way to contrast everything, hard vs. soft, fast vs. slow and circle vs. straight line. He

thought about the idea of the Yin and Yang all the time and believed that it related to everything. When I met him the *I-ching* was his major source of guidance, inspiration and motivation. Trying to turn the ideas of the Yin and Yang and *I-ching* in to a reality, for him, was central to the path he followed.

***What was Bruce like as a fighter?***

Ed Hart and I were at one of Bruce fights. We were astonished by his speed in ending the fight. Bruce told me about fights in Hong Kong where he had employed the same quickness to win. At the time of the Seattle fight Bruce was still heavily into the Wing Chun concept of waiting for the opponent to attack. Later he changed this idea and carried the attack to his opponent. Bruce had a thing about domination. He didn't want to be dominated by anything or anyone.

***You wrote that before his match with the Karate man in Seattle, Bruce displayed a lot of restraint and self-control before finally accepting the challenge.***

Yes, Bruce did show a lot of restraint and self control before he finally accepted the challenge. He walked away from the guy several times and declined different invitations to fight but the guy finally wore out his patience, at that point he just wanted to pound the guy's head.

***Were you able to speak with Bruce after his match with the Gung Fu man in Oakland?***

I did talk to Bruce after the match and described what had happened and what he had learned from the fight. What he learned was that some people could retreat from an attack with the same speed that he could launch an attack. This showed him the need to greatly increase his cardiovascular fitness and his punching power. He said that he was hitting the back of his opponent's head throughout the encounter but the speed of the opponent's retreat negated the effect of his punches. We spent three or four hours at a birthday party at Linda's mother's house talking about this fight and his new training methods.

***Weren't you and your brother the ones who filled Bruce's grave?***

We weren't the only ones. Fook Young also threw some dirt on the coffin. It didn't seem right that Bruce should be buried by strange hands so we took the shovels from the workers and filled the grave. It was a very sad event for us, but it seemed like the right thing to do, so that's what we did.

***Your own development in martial arts led to the theory of the one shot punch with a backup system. Please elaborate...***

It isn't just my theory, that was what Bruce told me to do. He said it would be good to end a fight with a single punch. What I came up with is a power punch that anybody can learn. I based it on a punch that former heavyweight champion of the world, Floyd Patterson used to use. All of the boxing critics said that Patterson's punch was a bad punch but he just kept knocking out his opponents with it. Usually after not too much practice people can learn to hit surprisingly hard with this punch. My goal has always been to give the average student weapons that they can use rather quickly. If a person starts learning on a particular day I would like to see him or her leave the class better prepared than when they came in. The big punch that I teach is something that allows this. The punch works equally well for women and small men, two groups that are often neglected by many martial arts instructors. The backup system is straightblast and other combinations, closing, sticking, chasing, trapping and low kicks. Blocking is practiced but only to be used as a last resort.



Jess Glover (left) was Bruce Lee's (right) first student in America.

***What do you think of the goals and the efforts of the Jun Fan Jeet Kune Do Nucleus?***

I hope that the Nucleus is able to carry out its stated goals. I think that in order to do this it must remain a non-profit organization. I certainly can't see anything wrong with people who were taught by Bruce or his students coming together to perpetuate their version of his teachings. I use the term versions because I don't think that it is possible for anyone to present an exact replica of Bruce's technique. It is my hope that the Nucleus prevails in its attempt to pass on insights into the process that Bruce called Jeet Kune Do. Jeet Kune Do is not a system, it is Bruce Lee's evolutionary process. If Bruce were alive it would still be evolving, so keep moving in that direction.

