

by Guru Scott McQuaid

The year, 2020 will forever go down in history as the year the world stood still. The coronavirus plagued the planet and dominated the headlines and general conversation. All around the globe, countries displayed a unity to tackle this pandemic and we looked to our mentors and heroes for guidance.

In Bosnia's Mostar city in central park stands a gold statue of Bruce Lee. This statue unified a divided city. A youth group called Urban Movement Mostar decided that they would finance and build a statue in the city to unite Mostar's assorted groups under a symbol that everyone could rally behind. The group proposed numerous subjects like The Pope and Mahatma Gandhi, but with the various factions such as Muslims, Serbs and Croats, Bruce Lee was the only common symbol that all ethnic groups embraced. Today the statue is once again in the spotlight - the Bruce Lee Mostar statue is dressed with a protective mask and gloves and thus this legendary figure becomes a symbol of combat once again, this time against coronavirus.

2020 marks the 80th anniversary of the world's most famous martial artist Bruce Lee, a film director, actor, author and philosopher. He was a cross cultural icon at a time where the world was less open to cross cultural collaboration. His life has been continuously documented on page and screen and there is very little the public does not know about this remarkable man. This article aims to delve into an uncharted territory, bringing the lesser known parts of Bruce Lee to the fore front.

As we know, Bruce Lee went under the Chinese name Lee Jun-fan (or Lee Jun Fon) and was born in San Francisco in the Year of the Dragon on the Hour of the Dragon. His parents always referred to him as "Little Phoenix" while at home, which is a girl's name in Chinese. This was because before Lee was born, his parents had lost a son and according to tradition, if you did not refer to him by a male name, it would confuse the spirits who were said to steal their son's soul.

Bruce Lee did not have the hard knock life with the rags to riches story that is often mistakenly portrayed of him in Hollywood bio-pics. He actually came from money. His father Lee Hoi-chuen was a very successful opera singer and actor. Even Lee's mother Grace Ho came from a wealthy family.

Bruce's first screen debut came at the age of three months in one of his father's films. Lee would later become a child actor in Hong Kong movies, appearing in 20 films beginning in 1946. Bruce Lee was 75% Chinese, the remaining 25% was a mixed heritage including Caucasian.



In the 1950s, Bruce built a reputation as a street fighter in Hong Kong. He even ran with a gang called The Tigers of Junction Street. He was only 13 years old.

Lee attended a good English speaking school and by 1958 he was the Crown Colony Cha Cha dancing champion of Hong Kong. The grace and poise we see in his martial arts no doubt lends itself to his early training in Latin dance.

Contrary to popular belief, the first martial art system Bruce studied was Tai Chi with his father. Only much later in 1956 and at the age of 16 did Bruce begin training with the legendary Wing Chun sifu, Ip Man. At his peak Bruce Lee would train up to 18 hours a day and even devised new equipment when available martial arts gear failed to meet the needs of his intensive training regime. Bruce drank protein shakes and used supplements long before they were commonplace for athletes and even drank a blend of entire raw hamburgers.

Lee employed training methods from boxing such as skipping and road running to improve his endurance. He would run four to five miles each morning and lifted weights three nights a week, installing a squat rack, bench press, dumbbells, grip machine and an isometric machine in his garage. To alleviate the increased muscle ache, soreness and exhaustion brought on by such rigorous training, Lee used an idea he got from a fitness coach from the NFL team the LA Rams. He purchased an electric muscle stimulator from James Garvey, founder of FlexTone, in 1972.

Another story of a Bruce Lee encounter comes from American Kempo Karate instructor George Dillman who was first introduced to Bruce by karate champion Ed Parker in 1954. Dillman claims that Bruce visited his dojo a couple of times and one time they sparred, Dillman humbly admits, the session was over within a few seconds as Bruce kicked him in the head before he could move from his stance. Dillman also trained Muhammad Ali in karate for a brief time at Deer lake in Pennsylvania. Dillman notes that Ali wanted to meet Bruce and vice versa for Lee as he was massive fan of Muhammad and did one day dream of pitting his skills against the champion boxer. However unlike the recent Quentin Tarantino movie *'Once Upon A Time In Hollywood'* that unjustly characterized Bruce Lee as an ego manic show-off who ranted about one day beating up Muhammad Ali, Bruce admired Ali very much. Ali was his hero and he knew that the odds were stacked against him if they ever did spar, as he is on record saying:
"Look at my hand. That's a little Chinese hand. He'd kill me."




The meeting of Bruce Lee and Hong Kong action star Sammo Hung is yet another story that does not get much attention. The two met in 1971 in Hong Kong on a studio set where Sammo was working. Although Bruce hadn't quite become the world's most famous martial artist yet, he was still known in Hong Kong for his Green Hornet series that was renamed in the country as the *'Kato Show'*.

The story goes that Sammo asked him if he was really as fast as he appeared on television. Bruce Lee replied, *"You wanna try"*. It was a subtle challenge and Sammo accepted. As Sammo began to raise his leg, Bruce's kick was already on his head. After that, the two became good friends and Sammo went on to work with Bruce in *'Ent*

er the Dragon'

.

However, the film Bruce is said to be most proud of was the *'Way of the Dragon'*, which was written and directed by Lee himself in 1972. A few fun facts about this movie - the film takes place in Italy but 90% of the film was shot at Golden Harvest studios in Hong Kong. Lee and the crew did spend four days in Italy shooting exterior shots. The mafia villain played by the late veteran actor Jon T. Benn was cast by producer Raymond Chow at a chance meeting at a restaurant in Kowloon. A strange fact is that Jon's name never appears in the film credits despite playing such a big role. Apparently the editors literally forgot to add his name to the credits. Another interesting point is that Jon's real voice is never heard in the movie. Bruce voiced Jon's character and also dubbed almost all the English speaking characters in the film.



Bruce said that he wanted to be the most famous martial artist in the world and have a number one movie at the box office. Although all of this eventually came true, he would never live to see this. When *'Enter the Dragon'* was released in August 1973, it was a box office hit earning 20 million dollars, grabbing the top spot internationally and catapulting the name Bruce Lee across the world.

Bruce died in the apartment of his mistress, actress Betty Ting Pei, another sordid fact that rarely appears in documentaries or bio-pic movies. Betty mentioned that she was going to appear in his unfinished movie *'Game of Death'* and that Bruce was also writing another film titled *'Yellow Face Tiger'* that she too was involved in.

When we think of Bruce Lee we think of an invincible force of nature, perfection in health through mind, body and soul. However Bruce did have vices and one was his eye sight. His Jeet Kune Do students note that Bruce was a bad driver and they would often take the wheel in

his car. This could be a result of Bruce's poor eyesight or maybe he was just a bad driver.

Several months before Lee died he chose to remove his sweat glands from his arm pits. It was purely for an aesthetic look. However, this is something one should not do as sweating helps regulate the body temperature and without the release of sweat the human body is more open to getting a heat stroke. In fact, Lee had collapsed from overheating on set before and perhaps this could be a major factor in his untimely death.

Bruce's maybe biggest and relatively unspoken vice was his substance use of cannabis and hashish. Traces of cannabis were found in his body during his autopsy. Bruce never smoked it, he chewed it instead.

His use of these substances increased after his back injury in 1969. Bruce severely injured his back during a routine training session because he did not warm up properly. Doctors told him that he would never practice martial arts again and that he might never walk normally. Devastated by this news, Bruce became a researcher of his injury and ultimately created his own path to recovery.



There will never be another Bruce Lee. There will be martial artists who are faster, stronger and more evolved in their depth of combat as human evolution dictates this. However, the key to their success lies in Bruce's self-development and sharing of his studies and findings.

Recently, two time heavyweight boxing champion George Foreman acknowledged Bruce's capabilities, saying: *"Bruce Lee was a good athlete and he could've been a good boxer. He could have been anything. In his weight class, he would have been a boxing champion".*

Today Bruce Lee is recognized around the world by fighters, sportsmen, actors and philosophers for not only his actions, but for his words.

“The key to immortality is first living a life worth remembering”. **-- Bruce Lee**

Published exclusively for Black Triangle Silat 2020.