



Bruce Lee Bio

Bruce Jun Fan Lee was born in the hour of the Dragon, between 6 and 8 a.m., in the year of the Dragon on November 27, 1940 at the Jackson Street Hospital in San Francisco's Chinatown. Today, a plaque in the hospital's entry commemorates the place of his birth. Bruce's birth, in the hour and the year of the Dragon, is a powerful symbol in Chinese astrology. It would be a strong omen of the powerful life that was to be lived by Bruce Lee and the explosive impact his life would have on countless others.

Bruce was the fourth child born to Lee Hoi Chuen and his wife Grace Ho. He had two older sisters, Phoebe and Agnes, an older brother, Peter, and a younger brother, Robert. Lee Hoi Chuen was, by profession, a comedian in the Chinese opera and an actor in Cantonese films. At the time Bruce was born, Mr. and Mrs. Lee were on tour with the opera company in the United States. Thus, it was fortuitous for Bruce's future that his birth took place in America, as he would return 18 years later to claim his birthright of American citizenship.

Bruce's parents gave him the name "Jun Fan." Since it is Chinese custom to put the surname first, Bruce's full name is written Lee Jun Fan. The true meaning of Jun Fan deserves an explanation as it, too, would foretell the journey of the newly born Lee son. Literally, JUN means "to arouse to the active state" or "to make prosperous." It was a common middle name used by Hong Kong Chinese boys in those days, understandably because China and the Chinese people were very vulnerable at that time, and everyone, including Bruce's parents, wanted the "sleeping lion of the East" to wake up. The FAN syllable refers to the Chinese name for San Francisco, but its true meaning is "fence of a garden" or "bordering subordinate countries of a big country." During the period of the Ching Dynasty (1644-1911), many Chinese immigrated to Hawaii and San Francisco as laborers, and the implication became that the United States was FAN of the Great Ching Empire.

Thus the true meaning of Bruce's name--JUN FAN--was "to arouse and make FAN (the United States) prosperous." The gut feeling of many Chinese at that time, who felt suppressed by and inferior to foreign powers, was that they wished to outshine the more superior countries and regain the Golden Age of China. Bruce's parents wanted Bruce to have his name shine and shake the foreign countries, which he certainly succeeded in doing.

The English name, BRUCE, was given to the baby boy by a nurse in the Jackson Street Hospital although he was never to use this name until he entered secondary school and began his study of the English language. The story goes that on the first day of English class, the students were asked to write down their English names, and Bruce, not knowing his name, copied the name of the student next to him. His family almost never used the name Bruce, especially in his growing up years when his nickname in the family was "SAI FON," which literally means Little Peacock. This is a girl's nickname, but in being applied to Bruce, it had a serious purpose. The first-born child of Mr. and Mrs. Lee had been a boy who did not survive infancy. Their belief was that if the gods did not favor the birth of a male child, the babe might be taken away. Thus, the name, Little Peacock, was used as a ruse to fool the gods into thinking that Bruce was a girl. It was a term of great affection within the family circle.

At the age of three months, Lee Hoi Chuen, his wife Grace and baby Bruce returned to Hong Kong where Bruce would be raised until the age of 18. Probably because of the long ocean voyage and the change in climates, Bruce was not a strong child in his very early years, a condition that would change when he took up the study of gung fu at the age of 13. (Bruce always spelled his Chinese martial art as GUNG FU, which is the Cantonese pronunciation of the more commonly spelled Kung Fu, a Mandarin pronunciation.) Bruce's most prominent memory of his early years was the occupation of Hong Kong by the Japanese during the World War II years (1941-1945). The residence of the Lee family was a flat at 218 Nathan Road in Kowloon directly across the street from the military encampment of the Japanese. Bruce's mother often told the story of young Bruce, less than 5

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years old, leaning precariously off the balcony of their home raising his fist to the Japanese Zeros circling above. Another nickname the family often applied to Bruce was “Mo Si Ting” which means “never sits still” and aptly described his personality.

The Japanese occupation was Bruce’s first prescient memory, but Hong Kong had been a British Crown Colony since the late 1800’s. The English returned to power at the end of the war. It is not hard to see why young Bruce would have rebellious feelings toward foreign usurpation of his homeland. In his teenage years Bruce was exposed to the common practice of unfriendly taunting by English school boys who appeared to feel superior to the Chinese. It is not surprising that Bruce and his friends retaliated by returning the taunts and sometimes getting into fights with the English boys. This atmosphere laid the background for Bruce to begin his study of martial arts.

At the age of 13, Bruce was introduced to Master Yip Man, a teacher of the Wing Chun style of gung fu. For five years Bruce studied diligently and became very proficient. He greatly revered Yip Man as a master teacher and wise man and frequently visited with him in later years. When he first took up gung fu, he used his new skills to pummel his adversaries, but it did not take long for Bruce to learn that the real value of martial arts training is that the skills of physical combat instill confidence to the point that one does not feel the constant need to defend one’s honor through fighting.

In high school, Bruce, now no longer a weak child, was beginning to hone his body through hard training. One of his accomplishments was winning an interschool Boxing Championship against an English student in which the Marquis of Queensbury rules were followed and no kicking was allowed. Given the graceful movements, which would later be spectacularly displayed in his films, it is no surprise that Bruce was also a terrific dancer, and in 1958 he won the Hong Kong Cha Cha Championship. He studied dancing as assiduously as he did gung fu, keeping a notebook in which he had noted 108 different cha cha steps. It is easy to see that Bruce possessed the traits of self-discipline and hard work which would later hold him in good stead, even though at this stage he was not among the best academic students in the class.

In addition to his studies, gung fu and dancing, Bruce had another side interest during his school years. He was a child actor under the tutelage of his father who must have known from an early age that Bruce had a streak of showmanship. Bruce’s very first role was as a babe in arms as he was carried onto the stage. By the time he was 18, he had appeared in 20 films. In those days movie making was not particularly glamorous or remunerative in Hong Kong, but Bruce loved acting. His mother often told stories of how Bruce was impossible to wake up to go to school, but just a tap on the shoulder at midnight would rouse him from his bed to go to the film studio. Movies were most often made at night in Hong Kong in order to minimize the sounds of the city. (See Filmography)

At the age of 18, Bruce was looking for new vistas in his life, as were his parents who were discouraged that Bruce had not made more progress academically. It was common practice for high school graduates to go overseas to attend colleges, but that required excellent grades. Bruce’s brother and sister had come to the United States on student visas for their higher education. Although Bruce had not formally graduated from high school, and was more interested in gung fu, dancing and acting, his family decided that it was time for him to return to the land of his birth and find his future there. In April of 1959, with \$100 in his pocket, Bruce boarded a steamship in the American Presidents Line and began his voyage to San Francisco. His passage was in the lower decks of the ship, but it didn’t take long for Bruce to be invited up to the first class accommodations to teach the passengers the cha cha. Landing in San Francisco, Bruce was armed with the knowledge that his dancing abilities might provide him a living, so his first job was as a dance instructor. One of his first students was Bob Lee, brother of James Y. Lee, who would become Bruce’s great friend, colleague in the martial arts, and eventually partner and Assistant Instructor of the Oakland Jun Fan Gung Fu Institute.

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Bruce did not stay long in San Francisco, but traveled to Seattle where a family friend, Ruby Chow, had a restaurant and had promised Bruce a job and living quarters above the restaurant. By now Bruce had left his acting and dancing passions behind and was intent on furthering his education. He enrolled at Edison Technical School where he fulfilled the requirements for the equivalent of high school graduation and then enrolled at the University of Washington. Typical of his personality traits, he attacked learning colloquial English as he had his martial arts training. Not content to speak like a foreigner, he applied himself to learning idiosyncrasies of speech. His library contained numerous books, underlined and dog-eared on common English idiomatic phrases. Although he never quite lost the hint of an English accent when speaking, his ability to turn a phrase or “be cool” was amazing for one who did not speak a word of the language until the age of 12. Bruce’s written English skills exceeded his spoken language abilities at first because he had been well tutored in the King’s proper English prose in Hong Kong. When his wife-to-be met him at the University of Washington, he easily edited her English papers for correct grammar and syntax.

At the university, Bruce majored in philosophy. His passion for gung fu inspired a desire to delve into the philosophical underpinnings of the arts. Many of his written essays during those years would relate philosophical principles to certain martial arts techniques. For instance, he wrote often about the principles of yin and yang and how they could translate into hard and soft physical movements. In this way he was completing his education as a true martial artist in the time-honored Chinese sense of one whose knowledge encompasses the physical, mental and spiritual aspects of the arts.

In the three years that Bruce studied at the university, he supported himself by teaching gung fu, having by this time given up working in the restaurant, stuffing newspapers or various other odd jobs. He and a few of his new friends would meet in parking lots, garages or any open space and play around with gung fu techniques. In the late ‘50’s and early ‘60’s, “gung fu” was an unknown term; in fact, the only physical art that might be listed in the yellow pages was Judo. Even the name “karate” was not a familiar term. The small group of friends was intrigued by this art called gung fu. One of the first students in this group was Jesse Glover who continues to teach some of Bruce’s early techniques to this day. It was during this period that Bruce and Taky Kimura became friends. Not only would Taky become Bruce’s gung fu student and the first Assistant Instructor he ever had, but the friendship forged between the two men was a source of love and strength for both of them. Taky Kimura has continued to be Bruce’s staunch supporter, devoting endless hours to preserving his art and philosophy throughout the 30 years since Bruce’s passing.

The small circle of friends that Bruce had made encouraged him to open a real school of gung fu and charge a nominal sum for teaching in order to support himself while attending school. Renting a small basement room with a half door entry from 8th Street in Seattle’s Chinatown, Bruce decided to call his school the Jun Fan Gung Fu Institute. In 1963, having established a dedicated group of students and having given numerous demonstrations at the university, Bruce thought he might attract more students by opening a larger school at 4750 University Way where he also lived in a small room in the back of the kwoon.

One of his students in 1963 was a freshman at the University of Washington, Linda Emery. Linda knew who Bruce was from his guest lectures in Chinese philosophy at Garfield High School, and in the summer after graduating, at the urging of her Chinese girlfriend, SueAnn Kay, Linda started taking gung fu lessons. It wasn’t long before the instructor became more interesting than the lessons. Bruce and Linda were married in 1964. By this time, Bruce had decided to make a career out of teaching gung fu. His plan involved opening a number of schools around the country and training assistant instructors to teach in his absence. Leaving his Seattle school in the hands of Taky Kimura, Bruce and Linda moved to Oakland where Bruce opened his second school with James

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Lee. The two men had formed a friendship over the years with each traveling frequently between Seattle and Oakland. James was a gung fu man from way back, but when he saw Bruce's stuff he was so impressed that he wanted to join with him in starting a school. Thus the second branch of the Jun Fan Gung Fu Institute was founded.

Having now been in the United States for five years, Bruce had left behind any thought of acting as a career, and devoted himself completely to his choice of martial arts as a profession. Up to this time Bruce's gung fu consisted mostly of wing chun techniques and theory he had learned from Yip Man. Gradually though, because of his burgeoning interest in the philosophy of martial arts and his desire for self improvement, he was expanding his repertoire. A particular incident accelerated his process of self-exploration. In 1964 Bruce was challenged by some gung fu men from San Francisco who objected to his teaching of non-Chinese students. Bruce accepted the challenge and the men arrived at the kwoon in Oakland on the appointed day for the face off. The terms were that if Bruce were defeated he would stop teaching the non Chinese. It was a short fight with the gung fu man from The City giving up when Bruce had him pinned to the floor after about three minutes. The significance of this fight was that Bruce was extremely disappointed in his own performance. Even though he had won, he was winded and discouraged about his inability to put the man away in under three minutes. This marked a turning point for Bruce in his exploration of his martial art and the enhancement of his physical fitness. Thus began the evolution of Jeet Kune Do.

Just as Bruce was cementing his plans to expand his martial arts schools, fate stepped in to move his life in another direction. In the preceding years Bruce had made the acquaintance of Ed Parker, widely regarded as the father of American Kenpo. In August of 1964, Ed invited Bruce to Long Beach, CA to give a demonstration at his First International Karate Tournament. Bruce's exhibition was spectacular. He used Taky as his partner and demonstrated his blindfolded chi sao techniques. At one point he used a member of the audience to show the power of his one-inch punch. Such was Bruce's charisma that he spoke conversationally, injecting humor into his comments while at the same time emphatically demonstrating his power, precision and speed.

A member of the audience was Jay Sebring, a well-known hair stylist to the stars. As fate would have it, the following week, Jay was styling the hair of William Dozier, an established producer. Mr. Dozier mentioned to Jay that he was looking for an actor to play the part of Charlie Chan's son in a series to be entitled, "Number One Son." Jay told the producer about having seen this spectacular young Chinese man giving a gung fu demonstration just a few nights before. Mr. Dozier obtained a copy of the film that was taken at Ed Parker's tournament. The next week he called Bruce at home in Oakland and invited him to come to Los Angeles for a screen test.

Bruce's screen test was impressive, but in the meantime plans for "Number One Son" had been scuttled. Mr. Dozier was now immersed in the production of the "Batman" TV series, but still he wanted to hang onto Bruce. The plan was that if Batman was successful for more than one season, then Dozier wanted to capitalize on the popularity of another comic book character, "The Green Hornet" with Bruce playing the part of Kato. To keep Bruce from signing with someone else, Mr. Dozier paid him an \$1,800 option for one year.

About this time things were changing in Bruce's personal life as well. His own number one son, Brandon Bruce Lee, was born February 1, 1965. One week later Bruce's father, Lee Hoi Chuen, died in Hong Kong. Bruce was pleased that his father had known about the birth of the first grandchild in the Lee family. Given these events and the arrival of the lump sum option money, Bruce decided it was time to make a trip to Hong Kong to visit his mother and introduce the family to both Linda and Brandon. They stayed in the family flat on Nathan Road for four months. While there Bruce was able to "play gung fu" with Master Yip Man and the students of the wing chun school.

Upon leaving Hong Kong, Bruce and his family traveled to Seattle where they stayed with Linda's family for

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another four months. During this time Bruce spent a great deal of time with Taky and the students at the Seattle school. After Seattle, the family moved back to James Lee's house in Oakland for several months before making the move to Los Angeles. In Los Angeles, he got better acquainted with Dan Inosanto whom he had known through Ed Parker. It was not long before Bruce opened his third gung fu school with Dan as his assistant instructor

During this entire year of traveling and working closely with his best gung fu colleagues, Bruce was going through a period of intense self-exploration. Bruce was always a goal setter. However, he was never obstinate about his goals and if the wind changed, he could steer his life on a different course. He was in a period of transition at this time, deciding whether to make acting his career or continue on the path of opening nationwide schools of gung fu. His decision was to focus on acting and see if he could turn it into a productive career. He often said his passion was pursuit of the martial arts, but his career choice was filmmaking.

The chief reason that Bruce turned his attention to acting was that he had lost interest in spreading his way of martial arts in a wide scale manner. He had begun to see that if his schools became more numerous, he would lose control of the quality of the teaching. Bruce loved to teach gung fu, and he loved his students. Countless hours were spent in his backyard or in the kwoon, one on one with students. They were like members of the family. His love for his martial arts was not something he wanted to turn into a business.

In 1966, production started on "The Green Hornet." The filming lasted for six months, the series for one season, and that was the end of it. Bruce's take home pay was \$313 a week, which seemed like a lot of money at the time. When they first started filming, the cameras were not able to record the fight scenes clearly because of Bruce's speed. They asked him to slow down to capture the action. Bruce's gung fu moves thrilled audiences, and the series became a sought-after collector item in later years. Bruce maintained a friendship with Van Williams who played the part of Britt Reid.

The years between 1967 and 1971 were lean years for the Lee family. Bruce worked hard at furthering his acting career and did get some roles in a few TV series and films. (See Filmography) To support the family, Bruce taught private lessons in Jeet Kune Do, often to people in the entertainment industry. Some of his clients included Steve McQueen, James Coburn, Stirling Silliphant, Sy Weintraub, Ted Ashley, Joe Hyams, James Garner and others.

A great blessing was the arrival of a daughter, Shannon Emery Lee, on April 19, 1969. She brought great joy into the Lee household and soon had her daddy around her little finger.

During this time Bruce continued the process he had started in Oakland in 1964, the evolution of his way of martial arts, which he called Jeet Kune Do, "The Way of The Intercepting Fist." He read and wrote extensively his thoughts about physical combat, the psychology of fighting, the philosophical roots of martial arts, and about motivation, self-actualization and liberation of the individual. Thanks to this period in his life, which was at times frustrating, we know more about the mind of Bruce Lee through his writings.

Bruce was devoted to physical culture and trained devotedly. In addition to actual sparring with his students, he believed in strenuous aerobic workouts and weight training. His abdominal and forearm workouts were particularly intense. There was rarely a time when Bruce was doing nothing — in fact, he was often seen reading a book, doing forearm curls and watching a boxing film at the same time. He also paid strict attention to his food consumption and took vitamins and Chinese herbs at times. It was actually his zealously that led to an injury that was to become a chronic source of pain for the rest of his life. On a day in 1970, without warming up, something he always did, Bruce picked up a 125-pound barbell and did a "good morning" exercise. That consists of resting the barbell on one's shoulders and bending straight over at the waist. After much pain and many tests, it was determined that he had sustained an injury to the fourth sacral nerve. He was ordered to complete bed rest

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and told that undoubtedly he would never do gung fu again. For the next six months, Bruce stayed in bed. It was an extremely frustrating, depressing and painful time, and a time to redefine goals. It was also during this time that he did a great deal of the writing that has been preserved. After several months, Bruce instituted his own recovery program and began walking, gingerly at first, and gradually built up his strength. He was determined that he would do his beloved gung fu again. As can be seen by his later films, he did recover full use of his body, but he constantly had to take measures like icing, massage and rest to take care of his back.

Bruce was always imagining story ideas. One of the projects he had been working on was the idea of a television series set in the Old West, featuring an Eastern monk who roamed the countryside solving problems. He pitched the idea at Warner Bros. and it was enthusiastically received. The producers talked at great length to Bruce about the proposed series always with the intent that Bruce would play the role of the Eastern wise man. In the end, the role was not offered to Bruce; instead it went to David Carradine. The series was "Kung Fu." The studio claimed that a Chinese man was not a bankable star at that time. Hugely disappointed, Bruce sought other ways to break down the studio doors.

Along with two of his students, Stirling Silliphant, the famed writer, and actor, James Coburn, Bruce collaborated on a script for which he wrote the original story line. The three of them met weekly to refine the script. It was to be called "The Silent Flute." Again, Warner Bros. was interested and sent the three to India to look for locations. Unfortunately the right locations could not be found, the studio backed off, and the project was put on the back burner. Thwarted again in his effort to make a go of his acting career, Bruce devised a new approach to his goal.

In 1970, when Bruce was getting his strength back from his back injury, he took a trip to Hong Kong with son Brandon, age five. He was surprised when he was greeted as "Kato," the local boy who had been on American TV. He was asked to appear on TV talk shows. He was not aware that Hong Kong film producers were viewing him with interest. In 1971, about the time that "The Silent Flute" failed to materialize, Hong Kong producer Raymond Chow contacted Bruce to interest him in doing two films for Golden Harvest. Bruce decided to do it, reasoning that if he couldn't enter the front door of the American studios, he would go to Hong Kong, establish himself there and come back in through the side door.

In the summer of 1971, Bruce left Los Angeles to fly to Hong Kong, then on to Thailand for the making of "The Big Boss," later called "Fists of Fury." Between Hong Kong and Thailand, producer Run Run Shaw attempted to intercede and woo Bruce away from Golden Harvest. But Bruce had signed a deal so he stayed with Raymond Chow. Bruce's family did not accompany him on this trip because the village where the film was made was not suitable for small children. It was also felt that if this film was not a hit, Bruce might be back in L.A. sooner than expected. Although the working conditions were difficult, and the production quality substandard to what Bruce was accustomed, "The Big Boss" was a huge success. The premier took place at midnight, as was Hong Kong custom. Chinese audiences are infamous for expressing their emotions during films — both positive and negative. The entire cast and production team were very nervous, no one more so than Bruce. At the end of the showing, the entire audience was silent for a moment, then erupted in cheers and hailed their new hero who was viewing from the back of the theater.

In September of 1971, with filming set to commence on the second of the contractual films, Bruce moved his family over to Hong Kong and prepared to sell their Los Angeles home. "Fist of Fury," also called "Chinese Connection" was an even bigger success than the first film breaking all-time box office records. Now that Bruce had completed his contract with Golden Harvest, and had become a bankable commodity, he could begin to have more input into the quality of his films. For the third film, he formed a partnership with Raymond Chow, called

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Concord Productions. Not only did Bruce write "The Way of the Dragon," also called "Return of the Dragon," but he directed and produced it as well. Once again, the film broke records and now, Hollywood was listening.

In the fall of 1972, Bruce began filming "The Game of Death," a story he once again envisioned. The filming was interrupted by the culmination of a deal with Warner Bros. to make the first ever Hong Kong-American co-production. The deal was facilitated mainly by Bruce's personal relationship with Warner Bros. president, Ted Ashley and by Bruce's successes in Hong Kong. It was an exciting moment and a turning point in Hong Kong's film industry. "The Game of Death" was put on hold to make way for the filming of "Enter the Dragon."

Filming "Enter the Dragon" was not an easy undertaking. The American cast and crew and their Chinese counterparts experienced language problems and production difficulties. It was a stressful time for Bruce too as he wanted the film to be especially good and well accepted by Western audiences.

"Enter the Dragon" was due to premier at Hollywood's Chinese theater in August of 1973. Unfortunately, Bruce would not live to see the opening of his film, nor would he experience the accumulated success of more than thirty years of all his films' popularity.

On July 20, 1973, Bruce had a minor headache. He was offered a prescription painkiller called Equagesic. After taking the pill, he went to lie down and lapsed into a coma. He was unable to be revived. Extensive forensic pathology was done to determine the cause of his death, which was not immediately apparent. A nine-day coroner's inquest was held with testimony given by renowned pathologists flown in from around the world. The determination was that Bruce had a hypersensitive reaction to an ingredient in the pain medication that caused a swelling of the fluid on the brain, resulting in a coma and death.

The world lost a brilliant star and an evolved human being that day. His spirit remains an inspiration to untold numbers of people around the world.

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