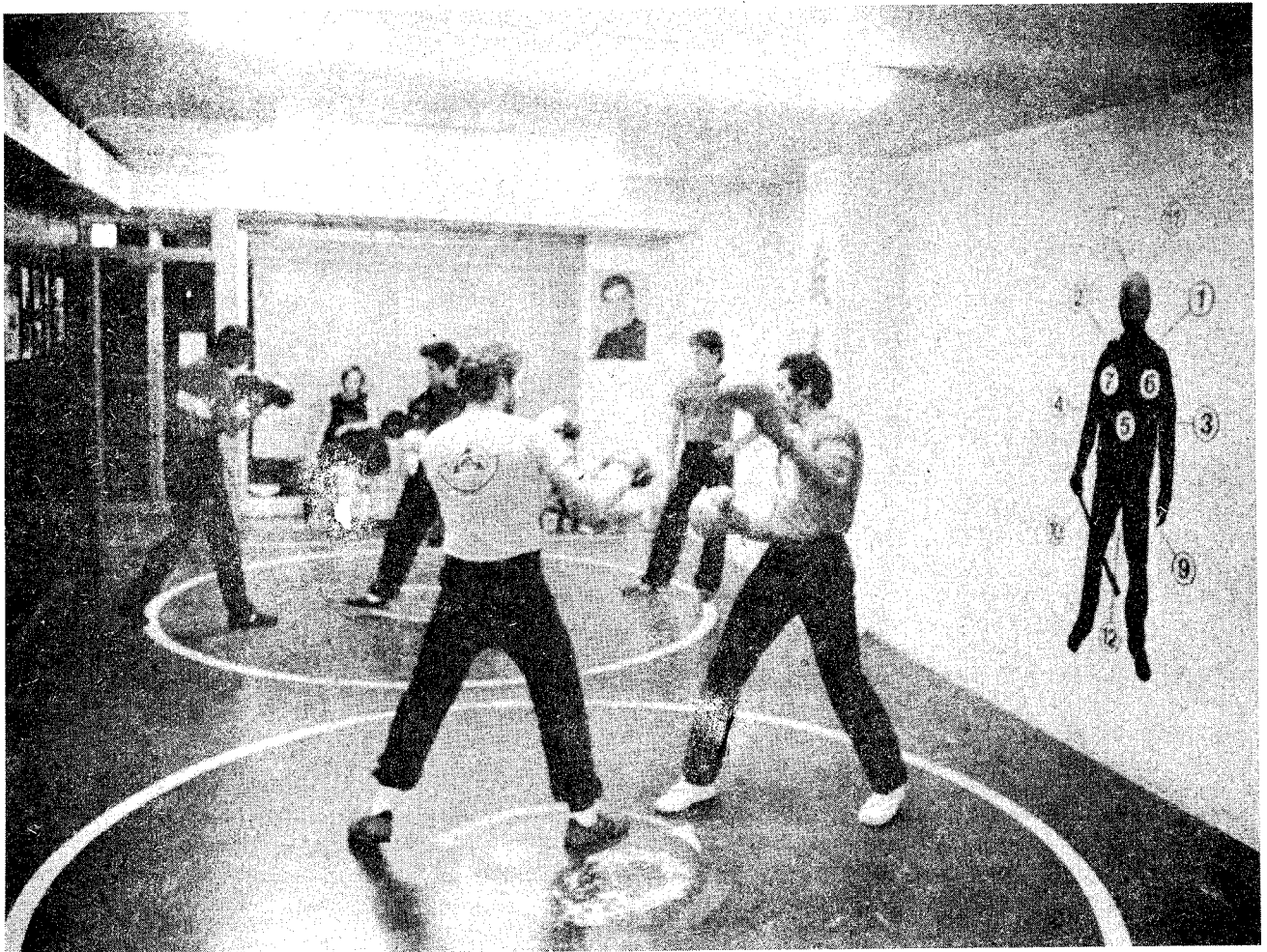


Va. Tech Self Defense Club

JEET KUNE DO

Bruce Lee's System Is Alive And Well



Instructor Dick Harrell puts his Jeet Kune Do class through its paces.

EVEN THOUGH BRUCE LEE IS DEAD, HIS JEET KUNE DO SYSTEM LIVES ON THROUGH HIS DEVOTED STUDENTS; THOUGH FEW IN NUMBER, THEIR DEDICATION IS LEGION.

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by Jerry Beasley

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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When Bruce Lee died in 1973, the martial arts world was shocked. For many years after his death, groups and individuals sought to capitalize on his fame. Books and magazines were launched on the speculation that people would pay to see pictures of their hero. Dozens of movies were made, each attempting to capitalize on the Bruce Lee name. And interestingly enough, numerous Bruce Lee Jeet Kune Do (Lee's eclectic martial art) schools were opened worldwide. The large majority of these schools were fake; their instructors had never studied the art they claimed to teach.

During his lifetime, Lee was adamant about anyone teaching his art, confining the practice to a small and select group. To be sure, Lee made it plain that the principles he utilized were universal. In this regard, anyone could lay claim to practicing a system similar to Jeet Kune Do. However, utilizing the principles doesn't necessarily result in the practice of Jeet Kune Do.

Jeet Kune Do may best be understood as a trade name given to the art performed and taught by Lee. It's applicable only in its association to Lee and his direct students. How then can others claim to teach Jeet Kune Do? Ethically, they can't. Just as one couldn't legally or ethically call a hamburger a "Big Mac" just because it tasted like one, or for that matter, call just any soft drink a "Coke," or any piece of chicken "Kentucky Fried," etc., one can't call any system Jeet Kune Do. All are specific trade names, which are subject only to their owners' use.

For almost ten years, the Jeet Kune Do "family," headed by Dan Inosanto (the man picked by Lee to act as spokesman for the group), had remained quite small. Some of the Jeet Kune Do group preferred to remain isolated, despite warnings from others that the art might eventually face extinction if anything happened to the four or five principal teachers. Moreover, the real Jeet Kune Do instructors preferred to remain few in number, so they were unable to sufficiently police their art. This allowed numbers of impostors to

open Jeet Kune Do schools.

With that in mind, plans are finally being considered to expand the Jeet Kune Do schools in several key locations. Unknown to the general martial arts public (perhaps due to the low-key philosophy of the Jeet Kune Do family), a legitimate Jeet Kune Do school has been in operation for almost ten years in Charlotte, North Carolina. The school was developed by Larry Hartsell, a native North Carolinian and direct student of Bruce Lee. Hartsell earned the title of Jeet Kune Do fighter by acting as the school's unofficial tough guy. It seems that when visitors came by to test the utility of Jeet Kune Do, Hartsell was usually on hand to put



Larry Hartsell demonstrates Jeet Kune Do grappling techniques with Fred Degerberg.

their minds at rest. Jeet Kune Do worked! After Lee's death, Hartsell moved back home to North Carolina and opened a Jeet Kune Do class through a friend's kung fu school.

In this manner, all applicants to the Jeet Kune Do class could be carefully screened from the kung fu school. More recently, Hartsell returned to California to assist Inosanto at the Jun Fan Martial Arts Academy. Jun Fan was Lee's Chinese name before he adopted the first name of Bruce. Thus, the Jeet Kune Do instructors have chosen to refer to the Bruce Lee methods as Jun Fan kick-boxing and Jun Fan Gung Fu. Jeet Kune Do continues to be solely a set of principles. The actual skills

being performed consist largely of Jun Fan kickboxing or Gung Fu. Additionally, the Jeet Kune Do principles have been applied to the Filipino martial arts through Inosanto's influence, and exist as part of the curriculum in each Jeet Kune Do school. Such is the case with the Charlotte Jeet Kune Do school.

Officially called the Academy of Martial Arts, located at 2421 Central Avenue in Charlotte, the school is now headed by instructor Dick Harrell. Harrell, originally a student of shotokan, was one of Hartsell's first students in the Charlotte school. Out of the half-dozen or so students in the Jeet Kune Do class, Harrell was chosen to carry on the teaching after Hartsell's departure.

According to Harrell, "The curriculum at the Charlotte academy is very similar to the curriculum of the California academy." Inosanto and Hartsell personally instruct the students three or four times a year, and Harrell travels to California whenever possible to continue his ten-year study of Jeet Kune Do. It's interesting to note that Harrell says, "At one time, people were not exactly sure we were for real. The seminars that Dan and Larry have given have helped our notoriety. We started with around 30 students, with classes held twice a week. But now we're looking at the possibilities of expanding to a new location. I would like to see Jeet Kune Do become more of a total lifestyle. The basics of kali and Jun Fan kick-boxing can be learned in about a year or so, but it entails a lifetime process of understanding and applying."

The emphasis on *application* is also referred to by Inosanto who cautions, "You cannot learn Jeet Kune Do. You have to *experience* it." Jeet Kune Do, according to Inosanto, actually "means troubleshooting or problem solving. You learn to believe in whatever skill you have." In Jeet Kune Do, there's a lot of stress put on simply "doing what you feel best doing." In other words, you must learn to be yourself. Jeet Kune Do instruction attempts only to expose the student to alternatives. The choice of a skill is whatever the student feels comfortable performing.

Inosanto is fond of providing examples in his explanation of Jeet Kune Do. In this regard, he likens instruction to a vacation or trip to a new area. "For example," says Inosanto, "let's say I invite you to visit

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Hawaii and I show you 12 points of interest. However, you decide for yourself that you actually only like two or three. This is not unlike the concept of teaching Jeet Kune Do. After given alternatives, you alone can make up your own mind which locations you feel most comfortable with. You, in effect, have done your own troubleshooting. In other words — make up your own mind.” Jeet Kune Do becomes what the individual actually does, which is determined by what he feels comfortable doing.

“Jeet Kune Do,” says Inosanto, “is what you can apply.” Lee was greatly influenced by wing chung before branching out into other arts. Thus, much of what Lee performed resembled wing chung. It follows, then, that the Jeet Kune Do philosophy can and has been applied to kick-boxing, karate, kali, and other arts. Stated simply, the vehicle — the actual skills employed — may vary, but the principles (i.e., speed, mobility, etc.) remain constant. In effect, Lee discovered a set of universal constants which could be applied to the

art of self-defense. Although the skills may vary from practitioner to practitioner, the principles remain the same. In his well-thought-out statement, “Absorb what is useful,” Lee took into consideration the fact that as individuals differ, their interpretations of fighting skills will vary. A short, stocky fighter is more suited for close-range grappling or

“The environment often dictates the skill ... You cannot effectively dictate what technique you will use, because the environment may not be right for that technique.”

boxing, while the tall, lanky fighter may be more effective at long-range kicking.

Says Inosanto, “Undoubtedly, one must speak in the language one knows best. You must ask yourself — does the language you speak make for a satisfactory conversation?” Jeet Kune Do attempts to introduce the

student to a variety of fighting styles, allowing the student to pick the method which best suits his character and ability.

Inosanto continually stresses the fact that the right environment is necessary for the successful use of specific techniques: “It would be difficult to perform taekwondo in waist-high water or some of the kung fu styles on slippery ice. The environment often dictates the skill. An automobile that works best in the mountains may be unsuitable for the Los Angeles freeway. You cannot effectively dictate what technique you will use, because the environment may not be right for that technique.”

Jeet Kune Do must not be pre-planned. Rather, it's designed to “go with the flow of things,” says Inosanto. For this reason, Jeet Kune Do stresses a constant series or flow of continuous techniques “because we know the first technique may be a failure,” says Inosanto. “Knowledge with imagination and creativity is the true instructor. Be true to yourself and follow your heart.” In the end, recognition of one's own identity becomes more important than the performance of preconceived skills.