



Episode 305 - Bruce Lee A Life by Matthew Polly | [whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com](http://whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com)



**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Hey everyone, thanks for tuning whistlekick martial arts radio episode 305. Today, I'm joined by Mr. Matthew Polly who I think we can safely call the world's foremost expert on Bruce Lee. If you're new to the show you might want to check out the show notes at [whistlekickmartialartsradio.com](http://whistlekickmartialartsradio.com) and you might want to hit [whistlekick.com](http://whistlekick.com) you can sign up for the newsletter you can check out all our great products, you see the other projects that we work on and really get a sense for who we are as a company and all the things that we're doing to lift up the traditional martial arts community and that's you. By definition that's you, because you're listening to this show and I think you for doing so. Today's episode's a little different, here I am having a conversation with Mr. Matthew Polly, a martial artist in his own right, a passionate martial artist but he's also an author he recently released a book on Bruce Lee. Now I know what you're probably saying yeah, Bruce Lee there a ton of books out there, I've read stuff, there are biographies, there are movies, there's a bunch of it. Well, this is not your standard book, this is the most researched most well documented biography of Bruce Lee that's ever been put out. I've seen I've read through it. I'll confess, I haven't read the whole thing because it is a huge. It is an amazingly well-written book well researched book so here we are Mr. Polly and I talking about his life, his martial arts story, his path and how Bruce Lee fits into it and why he became the person to write this book. Check it out.

Mr. Polly, welcome the whistlekick martial arts radio.

**Matthew Polly:**



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Thanks for having me on, its and honor to be here.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Hey, it's an honor to have you here. We are, were not here primarily to talk about you and I say that because this is a, this is not typically what we do. You know listeners, Mr. Polly is an author who recently released right? The book's out I didn't get a prerelease copy or something.

**Matthew Polly:**

No the books out, it came out June 5th, its out everywhere Amazon you can get a copy anywhere you want.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

So I haven't even told them what the book is yet, I might have in the intro, I don't know, we will see how this goes, I hope to record the intro later but we're here to talk about Bruce Lee the book you've written on Bruce Lee and almost secondarily Bruce Lee's impact on your life and your training.

**Matthew Polly:**

Yeah.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

You know Bruce Lee, I think I'm guessing you would agree, we've talked about on the show number of times despite being dead for a very long time he is still most influential martial artist on earth.

**Matthew Polly:**

Yes that's the remarkable thing he died 45 years ago the summer July 20, 1973 and yet he remains the patron saint of the martial arts. Anyone who comes up ends up being referenced and compared to him and so I wanted to as a martial artist and also an author, dig into his life and find out who he was as a man because we've all heard the myth.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

How much were you able to separate those two?

**Matthew Polly:**



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Well it's not easy. You know what's interesting about Bruce is that he's the only major celebrity could die before he becomes famous. Enter the Dragon was released a month after his death and so all of his tremendous fame was posthumous and as a result, the fans didn't have anything to work with other than his movies, he didn't have, you know he wasn't on the Johnny Carson show there weren't tons of TV interviews or profile that you could go back to and so the martial arts magazine sort of plan with Bruce Lee the character from enter the Dragon and his other three Golden harvest movies and so he became the character he played as supposed of the man he was behind the scenes and that resulted in sort of image we have of him as this ascetic Shaolin monk who if you dishonor his family will take you out. When you know he was something quite different as you would expect if you think about it for a second.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Obviously you wrote an entire book on the subject so I can expect you're going to tell us everything not only in this short time that were going to speak today but in a couple sentences but what are the primary differences between the perception of Bruce Lee and the reality of Bruce Lee?

**Matthew Polly:**

I think one of the biggest impacts I had when researching this book which took seven years and I spent six months in Hong Kong and time in LA and Seattle talked over hundred people but probably the biggest impact I had was I spent two weeks in the Hong Kong film library just watching the movies he made as a child actor. And what struck me was people don't think about him as an actor first they think about them as a martial artist first but his father was an actor, Bruce Lee showed up on film when he was two months old from the age of 6 to 18 he made nearly 20 Cantonese movies, none of them were kung fu flicks. He mostly he was like the Macaulay Culkin of Hong Kong he played orphans in comedies and melodrama and he played refined gentlemen and so he had an entire acting career before he took up the martial arts when he was 16 under IP Man and his life really as an adult was combining those two passions into one and trying to become the world's first martial arts movie star, megastar and that's who Bruce Lee was at the end and that's how we know him. You know, I've read things or people go well Bruce Lee only made four films, actually made 25 films, no one watches the early ones and so when you see the whole arc of his work as an actor you get a sense of you know Bruce Lee the actor first who becomes Bruce Lee the martial arts master.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Quite often were talking on the show to martial artists who has become actor's, but we we've had it I mentioned you before we started rolling that you know I've had other interviews today, one of them was with someone who the episode will come out later and we never drop names ahead of time but someone who is on a martial arts TV show it's a small body to work with so folks can probably guess what the show is, though a lot of those conversations center around how martial arts impacts their



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acting. I suspect that the more appropriate question here would be the opposite how acting impacted his martial arts?

**Matthew Polly:**

That's a great question one I'm never been asked for. In enter the Dragon he is a straight line where he at the very early part of the movies teaching the youngster having them do the sidekick and he says you need to attack with emotional content and that something he drew from acting, you're supposed to put emotional content into everything you do in order to get the emotional response from the audience and so I always thought that that was an interesting sort of actorly turn that he had invested into the martial arts that you should put anger or fear or rage or aggression into your martial arts that there's an emotional connection to the movements and that something as a lifelong martial arts have never heard anybody else say and I think that was very much from his acting background.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Yeah, in fact not only is it not something I've heard anyone say other than him, I've heard the exact opposite from any instructor that I've ever had who has spoken on the subject, they have spoken against including emotion in what you do.

**Matthew Polly:**

Right right which is interesting right, I have the same thing you're supposed to be like the Zen monk you know you're detached you're not supposed to get upset because you know, anger leads you to you know, your adrenaline rushes and then you crash afterwards but Bruce had this idea that you're supposed to invest your punch with emotion and It's a fascinating sort of take on it I'm not sure it's right but that it's something that I think as an actor on film what he was able to do that most martial artists who become actors to is that he already knew how to invest a fight scene with emotion and I think the hardest thing for martial artists because they been trained not to ever show a reaction and not to show pain is it's very hard for them to sell a move. Bob Wall talked about this that Bruce would try to teach them when you're in the ring and you get hit you're not supposed to show any reaction because then your opponent can't read you but when your on-screen someone faking the punch they're not actually hitting you and you have to convince the audience that they did. So you have to have this big reaction to it and so it's the exact opposite of the way you're training to be a fighter, what you're supposed to do as martial arts performer and I think that limits a lot of martial artist who started martial arts and then try to make it on screen is that they come off as kind of wooden because what works in the ring doesn't work on film.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**



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Interesting I had never thought of it that way but it makes complete sense. You said you spent seven years working on this book did I get that right?

**Matthew Polly:**

Yeah.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

So seven years working on a book in a, I don't know that we can call it a crowded subject, niche but certainly not the first person to write about Bruce Lee, so I suspect that this was a project of more than financial goals. That Bruce Lee must have represented something to you prior you jumping in and working on this book.

**Matthew Polly:**

Yeah I'm one of the sort of archetypal Bruce Lee fan. There are millions of us have a very similar origin story, I was a kind of skinny bullied 12-year-old kid when I first saw enter the Dragon, I'd never seen a martial arts movie before kung Fu movie I had no idea who Bruce Lee was but in that, those two hours of him sort of kicking and hacking and smashing his way across the screen he became my childhood hero and so I was one of those kids wanted to be like Bruce Lee and that's what got me in martial arts. And I went on and studied East Asian studies and religions to sort of follow some of his philosophical path and then dropped out of college for two years and went to the shaolin temple in China which is where kung Fu supposedly originated and studied with the monks and I wrote my first book about that and that's her launch my career as a martial arts author and then the second book was about mixed martial arts, I studied with Randy Couture and some of the mixed martial arts greats for my second book; tapped out and then for my third book my wife said to me you need to pick a project for you don't get punched in the face. So that's why I decided you know I wanted to do something that would just require research and not doing fighting in the ring and Bruce Lee was the perfect person because a, was my childhood hero but b, despite the fact that there are literally dozens and dozens of books written about him no one's ever done a proper authoritative biography. The last one that was written was 20 years ago, 25 almost and it didn't have any footnotes or endnotes them it was poorly researched and so I was kind of insulted on Bruce's behalf that no one thought you know Steve McQueen as half a dozen decent biographies, no one thought the Asian kung Fu guy deserved one and so I set out to correct that wrong and in the process sort of pay back what I feel my bet is to Bruce for changing my life for the better.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Now I'm not a biographer you know, here on the show were telling stories were bringing the stories of individuals and I guess in a sense the martial arts overall to listeners but I've never felt personal duty to bring anyone's story to light. That's almost what I'm hearing from you felt the sense of responsibility



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because it hadn't been done to properly present Bruce Lee accurately, is that accurate? Does that make it harder or easier to go into a project like this?

**Matthew Polly:**

Both. It makes it easier because you got proper motivation to do something for this long and I think it has to come from a place of love you know, no one would do this for financial reasons and so this was a passion project of mine and that's what kept me going because you know two or three years into it you feel like you're running a marathon in your side hurts and you don't know if you can keep going and so that was important. But the hard part is worrying constantly that you're getting it right, there are people, there are things out there that are very critical Bruce and there things that are like you know, over the top, over the moon about who he was and there a lot of stories that have collected over the years that have never been sorted properly investigated and so trying to get the true story as close as you can get you can never be hundred percent but trying to get as close to hundred percent as you can that was the challenge and that's what sort it would keep me up at night. Did I miss something? Am I misinterpreting wrong? Is there a different angle that I should take so wanting it to be as perfect as possible which is funny because Bruce Lee was a notorious perfectionist and that's one of the things that may have led to his demise was that he just was a workaholic who couldn't let go so I appreciate about his business project continued year after year.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

As you are doing research and talking to people and traveling for this, did you discover anything about Bruce that shocked you?

**Matthew Polly:**

No there were couple things that surprised me and it was until I sort of thought about them as a martial artist I'm sorry as an actor first and a martial artist second at least chronologically that it made sense. For example when you think of a Shaolin monk you don't think of a guy who has a full-length pink coat and drive the Porsche smokes a little pot and has a sling or two along the way, but for an actor in Hollywood in the 1960s [00:15:22.19] for the course. And so you know Bruce Lee and as an actor [00:15:30.03] some kind of the typical sort of behavior you would expect of celebrities back then. He was bit of a hippie you like nice cars good looking women so all these things initially I was like and then I went of course you know he was hanging out with Steve McQueen, this is what these guys did.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Have you caught any flack for this book? I would imagine if you're exposing the truth of something there will always be people that resisted?



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**Matthew Polly:**

Yeah so you know that's always a concern particularly with someone who's so well-regarded. I think Bruce is interesting because people don't just like him there's a certain almost worshipful quality because he inspired so many people to get into the martial arts in the martial arts in many ways is a kind of semi-spiritual journey. So far so good mostly the people see that it's coming from a place of love and that I'm not you know there's no active effort to harm Bruce it's just to say who he really was so thick everyone can appreciate what he was going through. In fact, some of the criticism I received is that a couple people thought I was too nice to them and I wasn't expecting that but apparently there is some people who were like no Bruce Lee was not nearly as good a martial artist as you make him out to be. So with Bruce Lee did opinions on both sides of the aisle.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Now of course when we think about Bruce Lee the martial artist there are certain moments in time that are kind of stuck and their constantly discussed and the two that I think of are the tournament with Mr. Moore and the fight with Wong Jack Man.

**Matthew Polly:**

Yeah

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

What did you find about either of those that listeners might be interested in?

**Matthew Polly:**

Well Wong Jack Man is fascinating to me because it's the most famous challenge match in the history of kung Fu. It played the central role in every Bruce Lee story ever told, in fact the most recent movie about the birth of the Dragon centers on that only the difference is its told from Wong jack Man's perspective. I found it interesting that in both sides also don't agree Wong jack man side has very specific views and Bruce Lee's side have very specific views and they don't they don't correspond. So the two of them essentially been fighting the fight over what the fight actually was for 45 years and so to me was like a mystery or like you know police procedural I had to solve the case and what I found was that the thing that was wrong on the Lee side of the aisle was the this belief or that's been propagated that Bruce Lee got into the challenge match because he was teaching kung Fu to white people. And that had offended the San Francisco Chinatown community and they sent Wong jack man is an enforcer with an ultimatum that he had to fight Wong Jack man and if he lost he would have to shut down the school and stop teaching white people. That's apparently totally made up, we don't know how that myth got started it may be that when Linda his wife asked Bruce why this was happening he said something to that effect



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and that's what led her to believe that but apparently it didn't occur that way what happened was he was giving a demonstration of his wing Chung style of kung fu in Chinatown, San Francisco's Chinatown, at the sunning theater and while he was doing it he was criticizing other traditional forms of martial arts and he said something to the effect that the old Tigers in Chinatown have no teeth and 90% of what they teach is bull and so up so for obvious reasons the old Masters and Chinatown were not happy about this and so Wong Jack man took up what he perceived as a challenge in order to teach Bruce some manners that they didn't care if he was teaching white people they care that he insulted them. And then what's wrong on the Wong Jack Man side is that he's always claimed that it was a tie or he probably won when in fact Bruce Lee won the fight. Wong jack man apparently was overwhelmed early on and turned his back and ran.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

That doesn't seem to be much room for interpretation in an outcome

**Matthew Polly:**

Yes there doesn't seem to be. Wong jack man's claim that he never turned around and ran and that it was split up and they both struck each other and it was evenly matched and I ended up interviewing one of Wong jack man's friends who was there to set up the fight and he was like no, Wong turns his back and ran and then he tripped over a stair and fell and Bruce jumped on top of him and then we had to pull Bruce off of Wong Jack man.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

That's sounds pretty concrete. Yeah I thought so fascinating. And how was the other incident that I mentioned it's one that we've talked about on the show a few times, the visit 1964 with Victor Moore. T

**Matthew Polly:**

Tell me Victor Moore again this is the Long Beach?

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Yes.

**Matthew Polly:**

So you're talking about Ed Parker's 1964 Long Beach tournament.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**



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Correct

**Matthew Polly:**

And Bruce give a demonstration, there wasn't, Bruce didn't fight at this tournament.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Not it was a fight but the, assuming that I have the dates, the year correct, this was the exchange where Bruce attempted to strike Victor Moore and Victor Moore was attempting to block it and the whole premise was that Bruce was faster than anybody else. And this is one with the really grainy video that gets passed around and it gets slowed down, you know like three, it's like a whopping 12 frames of footage that are actually relevant and people jump up and down about what it actually shows.

**Matthew Polly:**

That's so funny you know I didn't even write about that.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Okay well then that one can remain

**Matthew Polly:**

I do know about the controversy and the subject but I he added he had a couple different things, I think it was Castro another guy who claims that he blocked one of Bruce's punches when he did the when he did that jump across the island can you block my punch before I tap you on the forehead and so that's the kind of recurrent story that's told by martial artists year after year. The time that he blocked Bruce Lee.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Which Castro?

**Matthew Polly:**

I'm gonna have to blank on his first name but he taught in San Francisco.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Raul?



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**Matthew Polly:**

Yeah Raul.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

So the reason that I bring up

**Matthew Polly:**

He says that he blocked one of one of Bruce's punches as well and I just doing the side before you come back to this. One of the things I found in researching this is almost every mail that I interviewed would tell me something that they were better Bruce Lee. So Mike Stone was like oh yeah we used arm wrestle and I always beat him an even Roman Polanski he is a great martial artist but we went skiing and he was a terrible skier. So my feeling was that because Bruce Lee like the kind of be really macho and alpha male that all the guys secretly get that annoyed them and for years they've held onto one thing that they were better than Bruce Lee at and so by the time I called they all wanted to make sure they got in and told me the one thing that they had been bested Bruce Lee at.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

There's something incredibly surreal about the idea that Roman Polanski is going to go out of his way to say he was a better downhill skier than Bruce Lee. Those are two names in a sport that I never would've imagined would line up in the same sentence Bruce Lee, Roman Polanski downhill skiing.

**Matthew Polly:**

And that's where you have to understand them as an actor. I mean he was trying to get his carrier head he was teaching celebrity Roman Polanski was one of his celebrity students he invited him to Switzerland for like a one-week JKD training session and they would go out on the slopes and Bruce went out one day, it was a total disaster fell down the whole diamond refused ever ski Jim and Polansky very delightfully mentions this in his book.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

What a trip. The reason I bring up Victor Moore, he was a guest on episode 20 We're Going Way Way back for grandmaster and then Raul Castro, great grandmaster Raul Castro his senior student now senior Grand Master Rick Alameini has also been on the show so I've got to know some of these names indirectly, martial arts is a small world once you get a certain level and so.

**Matthew Polly:**



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It is and I just want to make the point types very well possible that these guys did block Bruce Lee's punch. I'm not saying it's not possible I just I am noting the fact that people enjoy telling. They've eaten off of that story for a long time, you know yeah I knew Bruce Lee I blocked his punch.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

We've talked on the show a few times about the position that Bruce Lee holds, his legacy, and the notion that there will never be anyone who rises to his status. Would you agree?

**Matthew Polly:**

No one has yet and they've had five decades to do it. I think there's a couple things one it's very hard to compete with somebody who dies young. In our culture someone dies young at the peak of their powers they have a special place so James Dean, Marilyn Monroe, even Elvis was slightly over but and so Bruce Lee we never got to see him have a movie sale or go through a messy divorce or do a comedy that was terrible when he tried to change of his career. We just saw him as this perfect you know these three you know at the time obviously they're dated now but perfect movies and so he has this kind of iconic position because of that. The second thing he has his it was because of him that the martial arts exploded in the West. It had been growing in popularity to the 50s and 60s but it was really his movies that launched the martial arts craze and before him there were maybe 500 studios and after him there were 20 million students studying martial arts and so all of us in this industry owe something the Bruce Lee that can, well, never be repaid but also can't be replicated because no one else will be the second person who explodes martial arts in the West. So I think I think he's unique in that way he's the kind of founder he dug a well they were all drinking the water from. And then it's you know it's interesting because he had, it's very hard to find somebody who was a solid sort of a child actor a solid acting background and then became an amazing martial artist and was able to combine those two on screen almost everybody starts off as a great martial artist who thinks he can act and usually can't or they start off as actors who going and take six months and they're pretty good but you know you can tell the difference between that and someone who's a genuine sort of genius or master at it. And so Bruce Lee combined two things are very hard to find one person I think probably Jackie Chan has come the closest, he's a he's a genuinely amazing martial artist and a credible sort of comedic performer on screen but you just see lots and lots of great martial artist try to become martial arts actors and never quite works, they can't add they can't put Emotion into it to return to something we said earlier they can invest their martial arts with the motion in the way that works on screen.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

We've become obsessed with Ip Man or Yip Man depending on how you choose to pronounce it really because of our obsession with Bruce Lee. I guess my question and then I kinda want you to just tell us a bit more about Ip Man and what you may have found, was he that good or have we Elevated him because he was Bruce Lee's first instructor?



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**Matthew Polly:**

So that's one of the great stories. A friend of mine Grady Hendrix who ran the Asian film Society tells me that you know they were trying to make a bunch of Bruce Lee movies but they couldn't get the rights from the estate and so they decided to shift to Ip Man. A funny sort of side anecdote I was in Hong Kong and I interviewed Ip Chun who is Ip Man's son and at the end of the interview I was like so what's it like that your father is become so famous and he's like it's great. He's more famous than Bruce Lee. I wouldn't go that far but he's definitely a big deal. I mean IP man in his own lifetime was a very minor martial arts instructor, he had a very small school Wing Chung people knew about it but it was not nearly as big as some of the other styles like Charlie fat and hung gar in Hong Kong and so if Bruce Lee had not been his student I don't think there, I think we can say for a fact that there would never be all these Ip Man movies but they found in his story a way to tell a lot of history, so his movies have a lot about you know the Chinese resistance against the Japanese and so he becomes a kind of vessel to go back and tell period piece movies. His students had great admiration for him so did Bruce Lee he really admired Ip Man I think is most important influence was to try to psychologically guide his students. They were a bunch of sort of street tough kids with bad tempers and he was the one who introduced him particularly Bruce to Dallas thought to be like water my friend which is briefly sort of tagline comes from Ip Man and so in that sense he was a true master. He wasn't just guiding them physically but he was also guiding them spiritually and so that I think it's quite remarkable. I have no idea how good he was as a martial artist but I do know from my research that the when first we went back in 1964 and did the crossing hands with Ip Man, one of his students was there and the student commented, one of Bruce's students was there and commented, it was the first time he'd ever seen Bruce Lee not able to dominate someone. So Ip Man was at least in crossing hands as good as Bruce Lee was in 1965.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Let's talk a bit more about you because you know, it's become really clear that you were I guess the right person to write this book because of your the place Bruce Lee occupied in your heart and you had this the skill disability to put this book together and were it not for your passion for martial arts, you would've been the right person, this book wouldn't have been written. So let's talk more about you and your martial arts, how you started, why you started, You know give us a bit of that.

**Matthew Polly:**

I started just because I was one of those bully kids and I felt like the martial arts were a way to stand up for myself. It's not that I got act on that bothered me is that I never would fight back, I was kind of I would just take it. And so I felt like if I became good at martial arts I would have the courage to come to stand up for myself. And you know I took I was with dojo Hopper, I took whatever was available so I think I started with tae kwon do and then I did some aikido and some Southern kung Fu but I didn't really get to be very good at the martial arts until I went to China and spent two years at the Shaolin Temple where there was nothing, there are no TV, there are no movies, there are no girls. All we did was kung Fu eight hours a day and I studied the Chinese, I studied all they had to offer but I focused on



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Chinese kickboxing son sho or Sunda. And I got to be pretty good at that and I thought the tournament took second place actually fought my own kung Fu challenge match against the master from the north who came to the shaolin Temple and he said you know I challenge anyone here and the monks are sitting around sort of debating who should fight him, and I was like I'll fighting not thinking they would take me up on it and the monks are like yeah let's have the foreigner fight him. Because if he loses we won't lose any face because no one thinks that foreigners are any good at kung Fu and if he wins we will really shame this guy because no one thinks foreigners are any good at kung Fu and so I was sort of their mascot for a couple years and that really set me on the sort of higher end of my martial arts journey and then I got back to the states and I gave it up for a bit and I was working in New York and you know, didn't have the time and blah blah. And then I started writing about martial arts and getting back into it and I spent time for my second book learning all of the whole totally different styles for MMA. My first time doing Brazilian jujitsu and grappling so that was like going back to being a white belt again, where you know the 80 pound girl in the class can wrap you up into a ball and feel humiliated. And then Muay Thai and boxing and wrestling with the four major arts that make up mixed martial arts. And so I would say is a martial artist my focus is been on sort of sports combat and ring fighting and less so on the performative aspects.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

What was it like going from training eight hours a day to not training. I imagine that that's gotta mess with your head.

**Matthew Polly:**

It did. It was one of those, it was hard after I left because there is nowhere else on earth you could get exactly that same environment obviously. There was no TV, there is no nothing there was just kung Fu and so when I came back, I was a little kind of depressed but I couldn't find a similar sort of obsessive outlet and that's part of the reason I slow down with it. But then you know life goes on and you realize that martial arts are important part of, it was important part of my life but that it was a that writing was my true calling and martial arts is my subject as opposed to my artform and so that's something I took from the shaolin Temple which is I think there's something to be said I met Manor made better by being able to master a particular artform and it doesn't really matter which one it is as long as they have a kind of passion that they can focus their energy towards.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

They talk about the first book you talked about the second book in your wife found it important for you to not be punched in the face for your third book but I wonder if after seven years she still thought that that was the right outcome. Getting punched in the face is fast it's over quickly doesn't take seven years to recover.



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**Matthew Polly:**

I think after seven years of me not doing childcare very often she wanted me to punch in the face again. She was like you're gonna look out for the kids, like I'm working on my Bruce Lee book and she's like I hate Bruce Lee! I think in general my the advice I give to other young fighters is the key to a fighters life is knowing when to retire and so I consider myself a kind of semiretired martial arts fighter who goes around and bangs a bag and works out a little bit doesn't get in the ring anymore. I think that's probably right you know, I'm 47 now. But the worst thing you can do is continue past her prime particularly when it comes to something that involves your brain.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Tell us little bit about that second book I'm curious.

**Matthew Polly:**

Yeah I'm tapped out. So tapped out was in my adventures and mixed martial arts, it was sort of the sequel to American shaolin and this was as mixed martial arts was becoming sort of a craze. I started it and so I trained with Enzo Gracie in New York City, I have got to meet Fedor Emelianenko in St. Petersburg which was awesome and learn little Sambo. I went to Thailand to learn little Muay Thai and I ended up in Las Vegas for six months training at Randy Couture's gym, extreme Couture. And it was interesting to me coming from a traditional martial arts background to see this new modern mixed martial arts and the way that it differs and also continues the tradition. What I think it differs from is that it's focused exclusively on the sports aspect the competitive aspect of martial arts and so it's all about winning and the rewards you get from winning like you want to be a pro fighter and you want to have you know, hot women and the fancy car and lots of ring money and I think martial arts, traditional martial arts at their best or is about the spiritual journey and that's been lost with the mixed martial arts and the focus on it. On the other hand traditional martial arts and this is something Bruce Lee criticized can get too attached to the way things were done in the past and obsessed with sort of lineage. You know, you often hear the martial artist be like my master studied under, that master studied under that master who ... To the Shaolin Temple. And you're like why does that matter like is your martial arts any good or not? And so I think the one in one great benefit mixed martial arts has given is that allowed an environment where people can test out things and see if they genuinely work or not in a mostly safe environment not totally but mostly. And so that's produced a great evolution and our understanding of different techniques and what's effective and what's less effective.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

If people want to grab this book and I hope that they do, just the pictures themselves, there are some pictures in the center that I haven't seen before, I'm sure if I really really dug I could find them but you



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know, great quality photos you know and and it's a thick book I mean it doubles as a weapon if you would take it your nightstand

**Matthew Polly:**

It does, a shield

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

A shield, you know you could use it to flatten dough, there are just so many nontraditional uses for this book that it needs to be on everyone's bookshelf I think. And if people are interested in doing that where would they get it?

**Matthew Polly:**

So you can pick up Bruce Lee: A life from Amazon, Barnes & Noble, any independent bookstore its available everywhere I was very happy that Simon & Schuster one of the best publishers in the country signed it on because that meant it would get as wide a distribution as possible and it also meant a kind of traditional New York publishing support for Bruce Lee in martial arts. And one of the reasons I think martial arts often is held in high regard is because a lot of sort of poor quality products are put out there and we wanted to make this the kind of biography that you would see about you know John Wayne or you know Abraham Lincoln like any major figure would have be treated with this kind of level respect which I think Bruce Lee deserves for his cultural impact and so it's got great photos it's a big thick biography it's got 100 pages of notes. So if you don't agree with something you can see where I got the reference from and there's an index you know all the things that you expect of a high quality product.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

What's your next book?

**Matthew Polly:**

that's a tough one. I never know until the publicity is done for the last one but I was thinking on someone doing something unlike the narrative history martial arts and do a kind of big sweeping book about where it started and the various tributaries and and where it's going. So that's probably too ambitious I'll narrow that down for that's what I've been toying around in my head right now.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

There's something I find fascinating and by all means if you take this and run with it or if this becomes part of the narrative I'll just smile and be happy that I was able to contribute. When we talk about the



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most pervasive sarcastically implemented martial arts movement in the United States it is the judo chop. Why is it judo? Why is it a judo chop? Why is it not a karate chop? There's something there that I don't know what it is.

**Matthew Polly:**

Do you want me to tell you?

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

If you know please

**Matthew Polly:**

Yes I do. So judo was the first art that was brought to America, the Japanese came over obviously and the teens were showing off their judo and so anything martial arts related was judo and karate didn't come over until American soldiers were stationed in Okinawa after World War II and so anything up until about 1950 and in the movies you will see a couple judo moves done by white guys that's because judo came here first and so it was a ubiquitous term for anything a station and then karate became the ubiquitous term and this drew all the Chinese guys crazy because they would say Bruce Lee he's a black belt in karate. He's like we don't have belts, I don't do karate so, it's just the effect of Americans taking one term to mean essentially all of martial arts.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Okay well I would something today is nothing else and in listeners is you ever doubted if the show is scripted or anything there's your proof. I don't generally embarrass myself live on the air with the guest.

**Matthew Polly:**

[00:44:25.03] you can edit this out.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

You did. No! Authenticity is key my ego is still intact and I now have the answer, education is key this has been great having you and I really appreciate it.

**Matthew Polly:**

Thank you it's a lot of fun I appreciate doing it.



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**Jeremy Lesniak:**

See normally on a conversation episode, I'm trying to flip this a little bit, normally and it is a interview of you I would say send this out with some kinda words of wisdom but you're probably the best person to say if Bruce Lee was going to send the show out with some words of wisdom for the people listening, what would it be?

**Matthew Polly:**

Bruce Lee's most important quote was adapt what is useful reject what is useless, add what is specifically your own, that was the essence of his philosophy which was tradition is valuable but you need to take what is good for you and make it your own because the individual is more important than the style. So that's what Bruce Lee would say and then he finished by saying be water my friend.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Hopefully after listening to that conversation you can agree with me there's probably no one knows Bruce Lee better the Mr. Polly at least not before you read this book. If you want, you can head on over to [whistlekickmartialartsradio.com](http://whistlekickmartialartsradio.com) you can find the link to Amazon where you grab the book for yourself and you should check it out it should be something on your radar even if you're not gonna buy it because it does have an impact on you as a martial artist, because Bruce Lee has an impact on you as a martial artist. Again our standard disclaimer whenever someone is on the show and they have something to sell, we receive no funds, no kickback, no benefits, other than I received a free copy of the book and no that's not why I to this because let's be honest, I receive a lot of books I don't read most of them and the majority of authors never come on the show but Mr. Polly struck me as a great guy and he wrote a book what more reason that I need than to say yes. I want to thank you for your time today. Thanks for tuning in. You can find us on social media we are @whistlekick, you can email me [jeremy@whistlekick.com](mailto:jeremy@whistlekick.com) check out everything we offer at [whistlekick.com](http://whistlekick.com). A lot whistlekick isn't it? Alright here we go I'm done until next time, train hard, smile and have a great day.