

## BRANDON LEE —

### *The Ideal Scamp*

Did you ever hear the story about John Wayne when he was in *The Greatest Story Ever Told*? Well, there he is at the bottom of the cross; Christ is dying and I believe his line was, "Truly he was the Son of God." So he said the line and the director came over to him and said, "You think you could do that with a little more awe?" He said, "Sure!" And so they roll the cameras for a second take and he says, "Awwwwww, truly he is the Son of God."

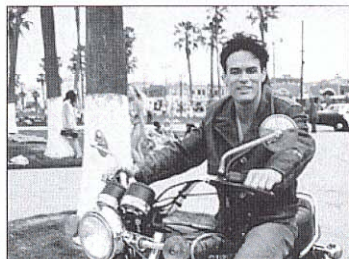
— Brandon Lee

In reading the great Chinese philosopher Lin Yutang, I happened upon a passage in which he held up the image of what we in the West would call a "scamp" or rascal as the ideal man. According to Yutang:

To me, spiritually, a child of the East and the West, man's dignity consists in the following facts which distinguish man from animals. First, that he has a playful curiosity and a natural genius for exploring knowledge; second, that he has dreams and a lofty idealism (often vague, or confused, or cocky, it is true, but nevertheless worthwhile); third, and still more important, that he is able to correct his dreams by a sense of humor, and thus restrain his idealism by a more robust and healthy realism; and finally, that he does not react to surroundings mechanically and uniformly as animals do, but possesses the ability and the freedom to determine his own reactions and to change surroundings at his will.... In short, my faith in human dignity consists in the belief that man is the greatest scamp on earth.

I couldn't help when reading this passage to think of Brandon Lee; a young man whose path I crossed but once in our respective lifetimes, but who literally changed the course of my life by the encounter.

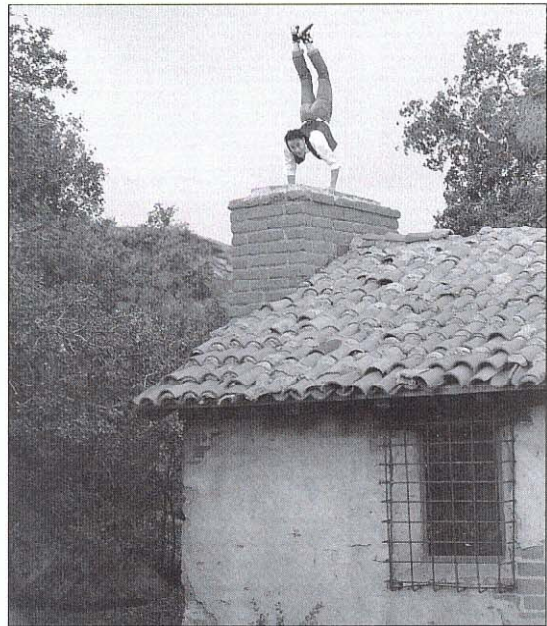
Brandon was most certainly a scamp; photos abound in the family's collection of Brandon doing a handstand on a skateboard - while it was rolling down the street! Photos of Brandon jumping his mountain bike



(unsuccessfully, I might add) over a ravine and landing in a mountain stream; Brandon doing a handstand on the chimney of his home in California; Brandon lying in the sun in a designer outfit and wearing two bottle caps over his eyes. And then there are the stories: Brandon posing as a driving instructor, Brandon taking a bunch of his friends up to the family cabin in northern California for a weekend (one can only imagine the clean up required afterwards); Brandon laying down his motorcycle at 60 miles-per-hour on a major Los

Angeles highway and commenting on it as if it were nothing more than if he had slipped while coming out of the shower; and Brandon single-handedly dispatching an armed robber who foolishly thought to break into his home.

But Brandon was also a scamp in the higher sense of what Lin Yutang indicated; he was a young man with a playful curiosity about life and who was also possessed of a "natural



genius for exploring knowledge." I recall Brandon's interest in the work of the late Joseph Campbell and of Brandon's equation of the spirit with the inner self - what Campbell would call the "Buddha or Christ-consciousness" we all possess (the deeper you, in other words). Brandon was also a man who dared to dream and who, in seeking to make movies that actually stood for something beyond simply fighting or farce, in his own way pursued a lofty idealism; in turn, creating his own platforms such as *Rapid Fire* in which he also took over the reigns of fight choreographer in addition to the lead role in the film. Even his last film, *The Crow*, contained a multi-level quality to it; on the one hand a tale of violent retribution, on the other, the tenderest of love stories, revealing the longing of the soul that comes from violent separation from a beloved (it is this last quality, in fact, that has proven to have struck the most enduring chord among young people the world over).

Moreover, he was also "able to correct his dreams by a sense of humor, and thus restrain his idealism by a more robust and healthy realism;" I often recalled Brandon's wry statement "Well, they don't call it *show-art*," spoken in reference to frustrations one encounters in the world of *show-business*," when I was dealing with certain production companies myself this past year. His call to strike a balance, while never losing sight of the ideal