

# PARACINEMA



\$7 ISSUE #1 / FALL 2007

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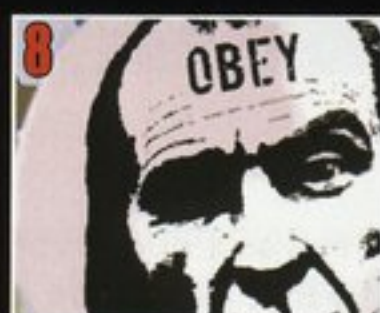
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**The following people helped Paracinema Issue 1 become a reality:**

Contributing Authors: Tim Mclean / John Irwin / Dan Burns / Christine Makepeace / Erin Wiegand / Matthew Monagle  
Brett Yates / Louis Fowler ([www.louisfowler.blogspot.com](http://www.louisfowler.blogspot.com))  
Contributing Artists: Alessandra Fusi ([www.alessandrafusi.carbonmade.com](http://www.alessandrafusi.carbonmade.com)) / Susana Stuwart ([www.vegas-lounge.net](http://www.vegas-lounge.net))  
Brendan Leach ([www.iknowashortcut.com](http://www.iknowashortcut.com)) / Michael C. Malbrough ([www.fireprovesiron.com](http://www.fireprovesiron.com))  
Eric Swartz ([Myspace.com/CannibalTendencies](http://Myspace.com/CannibalTendencies)) / Layout & Cover Design: [theindustrialrev.com](http://theindustrialrev.com)

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# BECOMING BRUCE

## AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY, OF SORTS

by Jon Irwin

January 15th

My quest is a simple one. I shall become Bruce Campbell. A cult actor known religiously by few, yet still outside the gaze of popular America, his situation in life was once similar to mine: twenty one years old, on the brink of manhood but hardly a man, living on the outskirts of a decimated city still reeling from its vast decline. A young actor could not burn up the screen in the early eighties while living just outside of Detroit, Michigan. Motown's pull was strong; although Bruce eventually moved out to L.A. and now spends his time in Oregon, a large part of him will always reside in Southeastern Michigan, amongst the suburban forests of his childhood. I, too, spent the majority of my early years in these same woods, growing up in a house several miles from his own. We attended the same high school, albeit twenty years apart, and were even born in the same hospital. Our bond, you see, even before this literally life-altering decision of mine, was a prenatal one.

Why has Bruce Campbell become an icon to thousands, while I wallow in my own post-graduate insecurities? I hope to learn the answer to that question, as I forego my own identity for his. This will not, however, be an overnight, Kafka-esque transformation. No essence is easily captured. I plan to go back home, to his and mine alike, and walk the path of Bruce's early existence—to find his remains, scattered throughout our shared childhood kingdom. From conception to high school commencement: this shall be my road traveled. I must search for the Bruce that was, to better know the Bruce that is, and the Bruce I shall become.

### Cult Fan Worship as Inane Justification

In summer of 2002, Bruce and the crew from *The Evil Dead* were back in town for a reunion of sorts. They rented out a theatre in Royal Oak, showed the film and took questions from their ravenous fans. The event commemorated the 20th anniversary of the film's release to an unsuspecting public, and drew a huge and loyal crowd. The first question for Bruce came from a young male, in his twenties: "Can I get a hug?" Bruce relented, with a disclaimer: This would be the only hug he gave out that night. Such is the love between a cult icon and his followers.

This love is why I have chosen to forsake my own identity for his. I have caring parents, two older siblings, a core of good friends, and a girl who loves me. What I do not have is a group of people waiting in line for upwards of three hours, wearing everything from black leather jackets to brown leather cowboy boots, just to shake my hand. Or ask me a question. Or have me sign one of their body parts.

Numerous excerpts from his memoirs, *If Chins Could Kill: Confessions of a B-Movie Actor*, illuminate this intangible, yet wholly important relationship between the man and his fans. The mere mention of his name makes a group of soldiers, stuck in a hole in the hot sand of Saudi Arabia with SCUD missiles coming their way, laugh out loud for the first time in a long time. A couple in Colorado, entertaining themselves by reading a book called *Questions for the Soul*, come across this one: "If you were to die, who would you want to give your eulogy?" They both immediately respond, in non-predetermined unison, with 'Bruce Campbell.' A cult figure directly impacts the lives of his fans. As Jonathan Irwin, I am merely an anecdote in the lives of a few.

As Bruce Campbell, I will make a difference.

### Recipe for Self-Modulation

To undertake this process, I must blur the lines of reality between Bruce and myself until reality itself cannot tell the difference. First, I will obtain Bruce's parents marriage license, the necessary seed for any further germination. From there, I shall learn the very beginnings of this identity I hope to attain. Only by understanding a man's childhood, can one begin to understand the man. Many tasks await. I shall find the house he grew up in. Wear his clothes. Eat his food. Speak to those who knew him best. All of these exercises will be for naught, however, if the final modulation procedure goes undone. Direct contact between the participant and his subject must be made, in order for the process to be complete. Without this essential component, all is lost.



## A Consummation of Love

I first saw his classic cult horror flick *The Evil Dead* when I was seventeen years old. Being a junior in high school, I thought I was invincible. That night, after watching Bruce battle hordes of the undead in a lonely cabin, I slept with the light on. Bruce showed me my own mortality. Now I meant to find who gave him his.

### January 17th

"No Firearms Allowed." I pass three of these signs on my way to the entrance into the Oakland County Courthouse. The entire building looks excessively cold. It is here where criminals, traffic offenders, and engaged couples go to do business. My business here is simple: I need Bruce's parents' marriage license. In order to do this, I have to fill out a sheet with various facts about the marriage. All I know is the father's name and a decade. I hand the clerk a sheet with "Charlie N. Campbell" under Name of Groom, along with the date of marriage as "1950s." Amazingly, she pulls up the correct document. Before I can look at the paper, however, I need to buy a copy of it. For Fifteen Dollars. Although no monumental sum, the fee still makes me second-guess my efforts to alter my own essence. One would presume such an endeavor could be made internally; this is not the case. The marriage license is key. Still, fifteen dollars is a high price to pay for just another go at mortality...I lean against the clerk's desk, my face wrought with consternation. Grandiose ideas have sprung into my mind before, but I never follow through. The metal detector goes off behind me; the threat of a pocketful of change is diverted. I make up my mind. I pay the fifteen dollars. The marriage license is mine. She hands me a white, waxy envelope with a gold seal announcing its contents—"Marriage License." I know what is really inside: the seed for a new beginning.

### The Miracle of Bruce

Nine months after Charles Newton Campbell sowed his own seed into Joanne Louise Hartwick, Bruce Lorne was born in the white halls of William Beaumont Hospital, in Royal Oak, Michigan, on June 22, 1958. My father once worked at that very same hospital. With this filial connection in place, I forged ahead.

### January 25

I am with my father at his restaurant of choice: Leo's Coney Island, a Greek diner. He orders his usual cup of chili and a Coney dog. I ask him if he can gain access to Bruce Campbell's birth certificate for me. He looks up from his chili, a concerned look on his face. I explain that knowing the exact weight of Bruce at birth might help me in my quest somehow. His face droops back to the chili. He then asks, "What quest?"

Explaining the truth could prove hazardous, so I answer, "Oh, I'm researching this hometown celebrity for a non-fiction writing project." The good doctor says no; apparently, one needs written permission of the certificate's subject, or the permission of his or her parents, before gaining access. This makes no sense to me, as I just handed over fifteen dollars to a random clerk and acquired some strangers' marriage license. I decide to negotiate.

"What will a crisp new Jackson get me?" I ask my father, pulling a twenty from my wallet. He stifles a laugh. Again, he looks up from his chili, gives me a funny look, and returns to the cup of beans and spices before him. I can only guess what went on in the delivery room that day.

### If I am Agamemnon, Cassandra is My Nose

On Wednesday, January 29, at approximately 10:53pm, Bruce Campbell gave me a bloody nose.

I sit down at my computer, about to send an email directly to Bruce himself. My subject heading flaunts connectedness, yet is subtle and non-intrusive: "fellow groves alum has a query." I tell him we grew up in the same area. I explain our shared experience, our connection, and let him know I plan on finding more. Right as I click the send button, it happens. My nose begins to bleed. I race into the bathroom. Attempts at ceasing the flow only seem to anger it, making the red, red kroovy come down faster, and with more confidence. Square after square of tissue paper gallantly soak up the oncoming blood, become saturated. I throw these bloody sponges into the toilet, which takes on the look of a frame of horror film footage. Soon my efforts are not nearly deft enough. Red splotches cover the black and white tiled floor. I have a vision of some screenwriter pitching his newest high concept film, based on this very incident: "It's sort of like *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* meets *101 Dalmatians*. We'll market it to animal lovers and haters alike, aged 18-35. PETA could be a problem, but I know some people." Cut to 10 minutes later: there I sit, typing away at the keyboard, a blood-soaked wad of tissue poking out of my right nostril. Perhaps Bruce does not want me doing this, I wonder. Is my nose only the first of many Campbell Plagues I will have to endure? The birthing pains of transition have begun. And my metaphorical cervix is getting wider by the minute.

### Jon and Bruce: A Juxtaposition

"You were simply a traitor if you ever abandoned Michigan." – Bruce Campbell, in his memoir *If Chins Could Kill*, on his initial hesitance to leave home for Hollywood. Bruce's identity will not be as slippery in his grasp as I had hoped. A man will not give up his essence without a fight; this I should have presumed earlier. But he does not deserve it any longer.

He disowned Michigan for the glossy glass ceilings of Hollywood. I remained here. My loyalty is my pass. His leaving Michigan was his initial exodus from himself. My taking of his identity is merely the final phase.



Aside from this self-imposed exile from his hometown, Bruce has stayed true to those closest to him, garnering a deep respect from his fans. He gives visitors to his website his personal email address, which he checks and responds to frequently. At conventions and book signings he turns away no man, woman or child, often staying many hours past his written commitment. At Q & A's, a sarcastic barb from Bruce is, to the questioner, a healer's extended palm. In the roles he chooses, he values story over money, often taking the less visible role because the character is more interesting or has better-written dialogue. A movie star seems untouchable, as if his skin was that of the sun's, burning hot. Bruce is different. His is a cold and fragile skin, like ours. Besides this outer layer, Bruce and I share many, more intimate, details of our life. We both grew up in the same neighborhood, in upper-middle class suburban homes with backyards surrounded by woods. Our love lives were meager at best, needing a single hand to count our adolescent dates. (Unrelated aside: Both of us were fascinated with wigs.) Our parents were both divorced after twenty-four years of marriage. We are both the baby of three children. I could go on.



Instead, I will go back, to the place where Bruce grew up some fifty years ago. All I have is a couple of nearby street names, a fuzzy picture, and a chunk of free time to drive around searching for a cult figure's childhood home. If I am to become him, I need to see his house, the origin from which he sprang. From these same roots, my own Bruceness will sprout.

### The First House on the Left

On June 23rd, 1958, the Campbell's brought little baby Bruce back to their home, in a quaint little wooded neighborhood about thirty miles north of Detroit. He grew up here, the youngest of three, sharing a room with his brother Don, one year his elder. The oldest brother, Mike, never shared the same bond as the younger boys. Being six years older and from their mother's first failed marriage, he never developed as close of ties with Bruce. That did not stop him from teaching his younger bro's a trick or two, resulting in projects so extravagant they teetered on the verge of parody. 400 lb. playtanks. Tree fortresses. An underground tunnel system. Their own brigade of homemade UFOs. Such projects were not mere flights of childhood fancy, but initiations for Bruce into the world of make-believe, a place where he could make anything possible. Even as he approaches his 50th birthday, this is where Bruce lives today.

### February 2nd

The house looms mysteriously on the slight uphill plot, the front of which is dotted by thick, tall trees. Oddly branchless until the very tops, and almost uniform in arrangement, the trees enclose the house like prison bars. I look down at the picture, and look back up at the house. So this is where he lived as a child...I've found it.

My find is a surprisingly ordinary one-story ranch home in Bloomfield Township, Michigan. As I walk up the inclined driveway, I notice the garage door is open, showing off a Harley Davidson amid a cluttered array of junk. I walk up to the adjacent side door and ring the doorbell. A potted plant hanging to my left withers inside the plastic casing, long since dead. No chime sounds at my push of the button. I strike again. Suddenly a dog begins to bark. Not sure whether the bark is one of curiosity or agitation, I peek through the door window and see the animal roaming the wood floors. I knock on the door; no answer.

Is this house abandoned? Could this dog be the lingering spirit of Child Bruce, manifested into a barking Yellow Lab, ceasing my advancement into his grown-up life? I wonder if anyone else hears the dog. I walk around the left side of the house, peering into the backyard. My shoes leave tracks in the previously undisturbed snow. Piles of dead leaves, saturated with months of moisture, have gathered along the perimeter of the house, as if someone has mistaken the house for a carpet and tried hastily sweeping the leaves underneath. I return to the driveway.

I try the doorbell again. No sound. The Spirit-of-Child-Bruce dog continues to bark, now hoarse from effort. I go to take a look at the right side of the house when a bright yellow Wrangler careens down the road, turns into the driveway and pulls up to the open garage. Equal parts relieved and horrified, I tramp over this man's front yard to explain my presence on his property.

"Hi there!" I call out.

"Hey," the man says. The rain begins to pick up, so I follow the man into his garage. He introduces himself as Steve. After the standard exchange of pleasantries, I ask him if he knew the previous owners. "You mean the Edelman's?"

"No," I say. "Do you know if the Campbell's have ever lived here?" In response to his ignorance, and to mask my true purpose of identity reconfiguration, I explain that I am a freelance writer, and merely researching a piece on an actor who grew up in the area.

"Have you heard of Bruce Campbell?" I ask him. He shakes his head. I thank him for his time, and apologize for the intrusion.

My new friend offers reassurance. "Pulling up to the house, I saw that I was bigger than ya, so I knew I could kick your ass if I needed to." Fearing injury, I quickly bid my farewell, and head back to my car. In the driver's seat, I look back up to the house. I'm here, I think to myself. I might as well give it a go. After another moment of second-guessing, I get out of the car, stick my chest out as far as I can, and approach Steve to see if I can look through his house. A minute later, I am out of the rain and inside Bruce Campbell's childhood home. I sense my own particles reconfiguring slightly, as if cells are making room for the newly acquired Bruceness about to be attained. It has begun.



## Steve's Inner Sanctum, and other Innuendos

"Childhood was coming to a halt and I didn't like it one bit." – Bruce Campbell, on the transition from pre- to post pubescence.

It seems fitting that the childhood home of Bruce Campbell, who in his roles exudes the childlike enthusiasm he never wanted to let go of, now houses a self-proclaimed man-child. A cabinet in the living room holds three miniature ukuleles behind glass. Large stereo speakers flank a big-screen TV. An electronic drum kit takes up the entire back corner of the room. In a sun room off the back of the house sits a Harley-Davidson Pinball machine, next to a six-person Indoor Hot Tub. As I gaze at the toys all around me, Steve explains how much of the house has changed since the Campbell's lived there in the 1960s. Walls have been knocked down, floors refinished, and rooms completely redone. I can't help being disappointed. All that remained untouched was the bathroom. The counter has two sinks, yet the room is so narrow and confining that only one person at a time could have moved around freely. A full-width mirror provides adequate reflection for a family of five. Green and brown tiles layer the floor, while a window looks out over the front yard. Just then I am hit with the sheer banal stupidity of my looking within a man's bathroom, expecting to unlock the secrets of a past age. This is just a house. This will not give me what I need.

I leave Bruce's home, understanding that it is no longer his, but Steve Matievich's. As I head back to the car, Steve, perhaps sensing my disappointment, calls out that most of the people living around here now are new. "But you should go and talk to that lady living over there," he says, pointing to an older looking house almost directly across the street. "She's been living there about a billion years. She'll be able to help you." I thank him again and amble off to my car. The rain starts up again. I grope for the door handle. Locked. Patting down my coat pocket I feel nothing. I reach down my pants pocket, expecting the familiar jangle of metal on metal, but instead feel tissue. The raindrops increase in both regularity and circumference. Fearing the worst, I cup my hands over both sides of my face and peer into the driver side window; my car keys are lounging in the cup holder.

No locusts are in sight, famine is unfathomable, and the precipitation is completely void of frogs. Yet here I am, incurring the wrath of the Second Campbell's Plague. The highs of the previous discovery come crashing down around me, much like the intermittent drizzle. I need a phone, but my cell battery died just hours before. I look back at the house. Steve would surely give up his gentle ways and call the cops upon receiving my ludicrous requests for a third time. I do not wish to be barred up, like his house, or locked up, like his ukuleles. One of the car-doors must be open. Passenger Side Door. Locked. Back-Left Door. Locked. Trunk. Locked. Back-Right Door...as I raise the handle I hear the familiar clink of a latch opening. Oh sweet merciful lord thank you. Take that, Bruce.

## The Francis Chronicles

### February 7th

The billion-year-old woman who lives across the street from the Campbell's old home is none other than Mrs. Evelyn Francis. According to Bruce's memoir, her old German Shepard, "Shadow," would always chase Bruce's pet rabbit "George," until finally the rabbit would duck underneath the Campbell's deck, letting the dog crash into the deck, blinded by his hot pursuit. With antagonist stories like that about their pets, I can hardly fathom what juicy tales she will have for me about little Bruce. There is just one little problem. I am afraid to call her. Why am I hindered by this anxiety? She's just an old woman. Her name is Evelyn, for goodness' sake. Worst-case scenario, she misunderstands my, "Hello, is Mrs. Francis there?" for some perverted reproach and dies of a heart attack. Best-case scenario, she invites me over for pie. I decide to call, risking her cardiac arrest for the possibility of apple crumb cake, or perhaps a lemon tart. I dial her number. No answer. I will try again tomorrow.

### February 8th

I call Evelyn Francis at 4:10pm. An older woman answers the phone. Apparently, she is merely a friend, and Mrs. Francis is not at home. The woman takes my number, while I tell her that I need some information for a "research paper" on one of Mrs. Francis' old neighbors. She says she will pass on the information and have Evelyn call me right back. End communiqué. Neither woman calls me back that evening.

### February 9th

Still no sign of Mrs. Francis.

### February 11th

I decide to take matters into my own hands. I call the Francis household at 2:25pm. The same older woman answers the phone. I ask for Mrs. Evelyn Francis, but get no immediate response. Instead, the receiver lingers in silence, broken only when a muted and slightly frantic voice says, "I'm babysitting, call back later!" The phone goes dead.

I stare at the phone in my hand. Is this mystery woman truly the friend she says she is? Or is she Mrs. Francis incognito, wary of my nefarious plot? Suddenly I understand everything. Bruce, knowing I would go for old Mrs. Francis next, called her first and let her know of my plan to take over his identity. Surely this is it! My frustration with Bruce mounts, overtaking any newly gained journalistic instincts, and I don't call back.



## **A Dream Detrimental to my Masculinity**

**February 13th**

I am lying in bed with my girlfriend. We are on the cusp of falling into our mediocre sleep, when she turns to me, smiling. "Last night I dreamt of Bruce Campbell," she says. In the dream, my girlfriend approached a stack of magazines, Bruce Campbell's face plastered on each of the covers. Lying on top was a National Geographic, Bruce smiling back at her. The last thing she remembers is her turning to me and shouting, "Jon, He's everywhere!" I do not know whether or not the confounding image of Bruce on National Geographic is what jarred her out of sleep, or if she failed to mention the rest of the dream due to some illicit encounter between her and the cover boy worthy of an NC-17 rating. What I do know is that Bruce has entered into the minds of those closest to me. Does he fear I am getting too close? What is it, Bruce, that you defend? What exactly are you hiding?

## **Who's the Grooviest of them All?**

**February 14th**

I wake up to the sounds of smooth jazz. As I walk over to the mirror, my face feels heavy. My reflection confirms it. I stare now at a face: not Jonathan Irwin's, not Bruce Campbell's, but a subtle amalgamation of the two. Baby blue eyes have become muddied by brown. Eyebrows are thick, ever so arched. And my chin hangs like a fruit. Happy Valentine's Day, Bruce. You will be mine soon.

## **Mergers & Acquisitions**

I will not be daunted by some whimsical dream and a persistently absent old woman. Bruce is going to be sorry he made this transformation so difficult on me. Because eventually, he will only be making it difficult for himself.

**February 17th**

Bruce went to Meadowlake Elementary, in the western suburbs of Detroit, from 1964 to 1969. I call Meadowlake to ask if old yearbooks were kept on location in storage. Maybe I'll be able to locate some of his old teachers. They'll have loads of good recess stories and laudable lunch tales from days of yore. Unfortunately, the building that used to house hundreds of ever-expanding child minds now occupies space for businesses, and leases out room for storage. No records of any kind remain.

Bruce then went on to West Maple Middle School. During my own middle school days, I attended Berkshire, and West Maple was our hated rival. I call West Maple, only to be informed of their merger with my very own alma mater, some eight years ago. At first, I feel somewhat reluctant to know my old middle school changed, but then I understand. Our two pasts have already begun intertwining into one.

## **Blue Jeans and Bruce: Like a Sweater-vest on a Tick**

"[Blue jeans] were for cowboys, and I didn't see any of them walking around suburban Detroit" – Bruce Campbell, on pants. Our lives were on a collision course for each other. I figured I better start dressing the part.

**February 20th**

Aesthetic qualities are often regarded with less importance in any transfiguration process than, say, physiological make-up or certain intangibles of spirituality. I believe this to be a mistake, and thus will clothe myself in the attire of Bruce, age 21, circa 1979: the Montgomery Ward work pants he grew so fond of as an alternative to the more en vogue blue jeans; the black, navy-issue shoes; the brown smoker's jacket. Collared shirts shall regularly poke out of my sweaters, and pants will paint a straight line down from waist to feet as I traipse through his then-regular hangouts.

Unfortunately, the Campbell plagues persist. My attempt at putting on the knit skin of another's persona falls short – I can't find the pants. Montgomery Ward's has gone out of business. Dammit, Bruce! Locking my keys in my car is one thing, but putting hundreds of people out of jobs is another. And for a simple pair of khakis, no less. His malevolence has gone on long enough. I now turn my predatory glance towards something less subjective, and more telling of the actual person. What is clothing, if not merely a veil hiding our naked truth of a body? To truly become Bruce Campbell, I need to look past this false outer layer, and peer inward. Specifically, down the esophagus. Unfortunately, no records of Bruce's childhood nutrition plan exist. A limited knowledge of his food intake does, however; it consists of blood, entrails, and demon vomit. Allow me to explain.

## **Aforementioned Explanation**

The initial budget of *The Evil Dead* was \$150,000. Today that sum buys a cup of coffee on a Jerry Bruckheimer film, no cream, no sugar. In 1979, it funded a now-classic horror film. The shallow cash pool on TED, however, made necessary some inventive special effects. Since a vast amount of real blood, innards, and bile were not readily available to the make-up crew, they often used food instead. During a particularly juicy scene in which Betsy Baker-turned-undead-monster attacks Ash, the script calls for her to spew





bile in her assailants face. Without sufficient control of her digestive system to do this, she instead spat out milk. Apparently, milk is an aesthetically similar liquid to bile. I moisten my cereal with water now. A combination of Karo syrup, non-dairy creamer, and red and blue food coloring was used in lieu of real blood, allowing the red stuff to ooze from the walls and out of gashes without excessive loss of plasma. When demons explode during the climactic scene, it is not chunks of pulpy zombie flesh, but dog food, that rain down upon our hero. Needless to say, after one meal of syrupy Alpo washed down by a glass of 2%, I am through trying to get a taste for Bruce's dietary needs. No matter: We will soon be me.

## **Nightmare on Evergreen Road**

**March 2nd**

I am home for the sole purpose of seeing my best friend, who still lives nearby. A bizarre feeling comes over me as I drive around my hometown. I can't escape thinking that this is where BRUCE grew up, I am passing HIS high school on the left, HE might have stopped at this very stoplight. The focus of my trip home was purely self-based, with no intention of gathering any research on Bruce's childhood, yet He is all I can think of.

I start to panic. Elated as I am to see the process of identity-change reaching the final stages of "thought-restructuring," I am still forlorn about the rapid dissemination of my self. I wonder whether this plan was not forged in haste, amid my growing anxiety of an uncertain future. Will becoming somebody else really change me all that much? The contradictory nature of this question lingers, posing a threat to my plan to become Bruce Campbell. Luckily I reach my friend Jim's house, breaking my own train of thought.

With an unnecessary pre-emptive knock, I let myself in.

"Hey Jim."

"Hi Bruce!"

I cock my head sideways. "What'd you just say?"

"I said, 'Hi Jon!' That is your name, right?"

Jim laughs, then takes my hand and begins the overly vigorous handshake we think is hilarious.

## **Moll and Me: With Bruce We Make Three**

"He's got that twinkle in his eye kind of a thing, when he wants you to think that he knows that you know that he knows that he's putting you on."- Campbell's High School Drama Teacher Jim Moll, on Bruce.

I was close. Everything was going to plan. To continue with this rebirth, I needed to speak to someone who had a distinct connection with the young Bruce. This was it—my last attempt at gaining insight to my future self's former self. I had to contact one of Bruce's teachers.

Jim Moll taught Bruce and classmate Sam Raimi during the mid-1970's at Wylie E. Groves High School, in Birmingham, Michigan. Raimi is now one of Hollywood's biggest big shots, directing the über-smash Spiderman trilogy. Before this rise to greatness, Sam and Bruce made films in high school, and together with friend Rob Tapert began their own production company, Renaissance Pictures, with which they would film and produce their initial and continued forays into cinema. Their high school years became their jumping off point; it shall prove to be mine as well.

**March 7th**

Upon my arrival Moll (pronounced Maul) is busy talking to a couple of students, so he introduces himself and asks me to wait outside his office while he finished up. He orders some kid to get me coffee. I am asked if I prefer cream or sugar. I feel important.

As I walk into his office I am greeted by a familiar face. On Mr. Moll's desk sits two action figures, still in their plastic container, of Bruce Campbell. The cult fan worship that enveloped Campbell since the first *Evil Dead* movie made the third in the trilogy, *Army of Darkness*, ripe for the merchandising picking. Even though the film was released fourteen years ago, these figures remain massively popular with Bruce's niche audience, leaving the toys in short supply. I put my jealousy aside, remain professional, and begin with the interview.

"Awesome! 'Ash versus Evil Ash' collector's edition! That's so cool."

Mr. Moll explains his daughter gave him the action figures for Christmas. I hope, one day, to have a daughter as prodigious as his. I first ask him if he has talked to Bruce much since their days as teacher and student. They haven't talked in years, Moll says, although talking



was the basis for one of his most lasting impressions of Bruce. Aside from being Bruce and Sam's Drama teacher, he was also their Radio Speech teacher, in which they would broadcast morning announcements over the school's P.A. system.

"We had this great radio show," Moll begins, his eyes gleaming. "I got to be their announcer for their ongoing radio series about this pirate 'Stumpo Wood-Eye.' The jokes were, ya know, wood eye jokes – 'Would I? Of course I would!' – that kind of thing. [Bruce and Sam] would write their little scripts, a little one minute radio drama that would happen once a week, and I would let them do it if I got to be the announcer for it." The two boys, however, did a lot more than just create an original pirate-themed radio serial.



"What I didn't know at the time," Moll recalls, "is that they loved playing with the tape decks, creating sounds and that sort of thing, so they'd hide. They would go into the actual broadcast studio and they'd hide under the desk. I'd go in, turn the lights off, close the doors, and they'd stay there until God knows when at night, playing with the tape decks and making different tape effects and playing around with sound effects."

The consequence of this tomfoolery can be heard in *The Evil Dead*, as Bruce and Sam did much of the post-production sound by themselves for the film. Moll does not seem surprised at their successful careers.

"When I first came [to Groves High School] I started directing plays for the first three or four years, and I was just blessed. I had Bruce and Sam at the same time, and it was nuts... the talent was amazing." I asked Moll if he knew at the time that these particular students were special. "Well, the thing was, I was a brand new teacher so I had nothing to compare it to, except for the rest of the kids in school, which were nowhere near as creative as these two guys were. Now that I've had some years behind me, I can see that. At the time, I just thought they were the most talented kids that I had." Bruce and Sam began spending more time together, making Super-8 movies with a group of friends, most of whom have continued on to productive film careers. This shared love of film quickly inspired a great friendship. "Sam and Bruce had a real close relationship; they had a lot of inside jokes that they'd tell each other," Moll said. Their friendship and theatrical talent fed into the character traits ultimately required to break into showbiz: stubbornness and persistence.

"What I remember about Bruce and Sam both is that they didn't like to take no for an answer. So if you do things like an audition and [try to cut it off] they'd want to continue on doing things or try something, fall down for you, act slapstick. They worshipped the Three Stooges at that point, so every time you'd see them do anything, it would have to involve a pratfall or somebody hitting somebody. It just had to happen." This bruising habit of theirs coincided with the serious drug usage of the era. It was the psychedelic 70s, with drugs being taken more frequently than pop quizzes in schools across the country. Wylie E. Groves was no exception. "It was drug-ville," Moll admits. "People were doin' a lot of drugs. Quaaludes came in, so we'd have a lot of people that were crashing during the day, and we'd have to pick them up and drag them into the office."

I find it curious that, while kids were falling to the ground as they came off their drug-inspired high, Bruce and his pal Sam were more interested in crashing to the floor in Three Stooges-inspired pratfalls, a preference quite telling of their unique nature. They never did anything just because it was the popular thing to do. For this, they were unjustly punished. "[Bruce] and Sam were pretty much loners," Moll says. "They didn't know about girls very much. They didn't let a lot of people into their little world." He sighs. "But then, not a lot of people wanted to go there."

I thank Mr. Moll for his time and tell him I will let him know how my "research paper" ends up. Little does he know his words have kindled inside me a veritable bonfire of Bruce. I rush to my car, jump inside and flip down the driver-side mirror. The face looking back at me grows saddened. I was not yet He. Why hasn't it worked?

I attained the license. I went to his house. I tried wearing his clothes. I ate his food. I talked to his teacher. Suddenly the realization hits... I still need some form of direct contact with Bruce himself to culminate the process. My tired Jon/Bruce eyes look wearily back at me, blink away a tear as I shut the mirror closed, and begin to burn as I drive off towards home.

#### **Allow myself to Introduce... Myself**

The Campbell plagues have ceased for the time being. In their place are signs, acknowledging my almost-new identity, as if taunting me. While walking home recently I saw, parked on the side of the road, a huge truck, the kind usually airbrushed with paintings of vegetables on the side, or some moving company logo. Instead of these usual facades was the word CAMPBELL in bold, block letters. Another instance, just days later: I came to the realization that, for the past ten years, my dentist's office has been on Campbell Street.



I found myself sitting in a coffee shop, leafing through pages of Bruce's memoir, in the hope of somehow completing my stunted transformation. The book was open to the section on his childhood, when he helped his big brother Mike build UFO's. The section was entitled "Ground Control to Major Mike," a reference to David Bowie's hit "Space Oddity" released in 1969, when Bruce was eleven. I sipped my coffee, perusing the pages, when that very song began playing on the in-store radio. Somewhere, Bruce was laughing.

A seemingly innocuous toy has been sitting on my computer desk for the duration of my transformation. I am looking at it now. My roommate gave it to me after finding it in the bottom of his Frosted Flakes cereal box, an offering of good faith and friendship in the form of molded plastic. The character from *Toy Story* bobs his head, as if in assurance, as I open my e-mail box. As I glance at the new, unopened mail, I quickly discard the penile enlargement plans, free credit card announcements and messages to homeowners. Then I see it. The address is unfamiliar, but the subject line is not: "RE: fellow groves alum has a query." I open the email. Here is what I see:

From: [xxxxxxx] To: irwinj@umich.edu

Jonathan,

Go there. Seek. Find. Drink. Renew. Go forward...

That's all I can share with you for now... =)

Best,

Bruce

I rub my eyes. I look back at the tiny bobblehead figure in front of me, about five inches high. The head is unproportionately large, befitting a plain view of the figure's characteristic facial features. Arched eyebrows point to the dark brown locks of hair. Knowing eyes slightly squint in a gesture of tease. A stoic chin juts from beneath the sturdy jaw. Up until this moment, I had seen the familiar face of Buzz Lightyear, Space Cadet. Only now do I realize what I am staring at, and have been intermittently throughout the course of writing this document. I am looking at a reflection of myself. I am looking at Bruce Campbell.

Man With The Screaming Brain (2005) - The film was originally supposed to be set in L. A., but Bulgaria was so cheap to film in that producers decided to film it there. Bruce Campbell had to rewrite the movie to fit the new location. *SOURCE: IMDB.COM*



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