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A Conversation With David Carradine

By William E. Marks

Before meeting David Carradine, I was well aware of his *Kung Fu* TV series. I also knew that he was a student and teacher of Eastern philosophy and various martial art styles. In addition, I had recently read his book *The Spirit of Shaolin*. In Chapter 9 of this book, a quote about healing caught my eye:

"We have seen that the Master needs to reach out to others to be helpful, and a force for good. This helpfulness can take many forms. With the power that comes with the teachings,

great things can be accomplished. The knowledge and techniques that put the warrior in the center of the flow can be used to do the same thing for others. The heightened awareness and sense of rightness which the student has developed can be activated to diagnose and adjust the out-of-sync aspects of people, animals, things, and even events, conditions and situations."

Your chi can absolutely reach into and heal bodies and minds and spirits. There is no doubt about it. The same

power that can defend and harm can soothe and rebuild. Certainly, this profound statement flows from ancient wisdom.

David Carradine is the son of legendary character actor John Carradine. He is an author of several books as well as a composer, editor, producer, director, sculptor, Kung Fu master, Tai Chi teacher, singer, poet, nature lover and loving father. In other words, Carradine is a complex man. His life story piqued my curiosity and raised two central

questions; Who is David Carradine? What does David Carradine truly believe in?

By fateful coincidence, a Burbank water friend of mine, Patricia Rude, was visiting Tarzana's Coffee Junction, when she struck up a conversation with co-owner, Sharon Benson. Sharon mentioned Carradine's interest in helping the world's water situation. Patricia mentioned my name as author of the spiritual/philosophical book, *The Holy Order of Water*.

Sharon called me and introduced herself. She told me that David had just returned from a world wide tour promoting the recent release of Tarantino's *Kill Bill: Vol. 2*. She suggested that David and I get together. He and I were vicariously aware of one another through Rashid Alimov, the enlightened United Nations ambassador from Tajikistan, who is responsible for ushering in the UN's "Year of Water," and the upcoming "Decade of Water." So, following this fateful flow, I left the comfort of my writer's cabin on Martha's Vineyard to visit with David Carradine in California.

The clear Ventura night surrounding Sharon Benson's home was hot and hazy. The room next to her living room was set up like a music studio — sound mixer, amplifiers, speakers, standing microphones, various instruments and other musical paraphernalia. In a visual sense, Sharon's home made a statement, "Music lives here."

Besides being the co-owner of the Coffee Junction, Sharon is lead member/founder of "Soul Dogs," the band that David Carradine likes to relax and tour with. Sharon is a noted musician, lyricist and vocalist whose music is featured in several movies. On occasion, Soul Dogs tours other countries, with occasional local performances at the Coffee Junction. According to Coffee Junction's co-owner, Linda Sherlis, "The Coffee Junction serves as a place of refuge. It's a place where people can come in and relax; eat healthy food and

smoothies, and take a break from the world."

As I stood in the Sharon's living room sipping chilled ice tea, Clynnell Jackson (C.J. III) arrives. CJ shook my hand and proceeded directly to setting up and tuning his bass guitar.

Before meeting David, I met his dog, Thunder, a Burmese Mountain Dog. Thunder thrust through the front door in a big loving kind of way, with wide eyes and wagging tail. While I hugged and said hello to Thunder face-to-face, Sharon's much smaller dog, a mutt named Jake, came scurrying from the kitchen. Suddenly, the two dogs raced out the door to play.

After the dogs exited, David walked in carrying his guitar in one hand and long bamboo flute in the other. His thinning hair was long and slipped across his face as he laid his instruments on the sofa beside me. After a quick handshake and deep eye contact, David walked over to the piano and began to play a tune, while singing a few lines. As David played and sang, band drummer and percussionist, Leslie Daniel, entered and began a soft warm up. As though on cue, Sharon picked up her violin and began tweaking it into tune. The musical evening had begun.

I sat in a soft chair and prepped my Canon digital video camera to record the evening's jam session as it swung into motion. For the next couple of hours, David sang a series of songs accompanied by his guitar or flute interludes. As the group rhythmically swayed back and forth, it is obvious these musicians are in sync. The music, the motions, the lyrics—flowed together like a stream of water.

After the jam session was over, everyone expressed pleasure about the evening's effort, especially the way their "closings" were working. After a brief break to say good-bye to the others, David and I walked outside to sit and talk. It was a little before midnight, and the cool Ventura air had lost much of its humidity. In the time that followed, I found Carradine to be a very complex individual. I recorded his comments for this article, and am happy to note that they are like him -- they represent the broad range of interests.

Miracles

"I believe miracles do happen. Even though I don't understand the mechanism of a miracle. I feel angels are more like a metaphor, and feel the same about Genesis."

Writing And Composing Songs

"When writing a song, I don't feel my education really enters into it. I feel that the words and concepts that are expressed in my songs come from somewhere other than my intelligence."

"In the old days when I played guitar in public, I worried about getting it right. Eventually, I arrived at a place where I don't worry any more and just have fun. I figured I would be pretty good at playing guitar by the time I was in a rocking chair on my front porch. Now I am good at playing guitar and I am not in a rocking chair. And, that's pretty good too."

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"As far as I am concerned, the law of harmonics is a real thing. Humans did not invent music; we just use something that already existed. The diatonic scale is something we did not invent; we just discovered it was there."

"When it comes to music, I got an idea about 40 years ago. I realized that by continually learning how to play the guitar better, I was basically examining the fabric of the universe through my fingertips."

"I find that music is so abstract that it helps lead you into a philosophical place through your hands. By using your hands to create music, you put it out there instead of doing it all in here." (Pointing to his chest.)

Making his own bamboo flute

"I either grow bamboo, or find it during my travels, for making my own flutes. I just look at a stand of living bamboo and get a feeling as to which one will make a good flute. When I was doing the *Kung Fu* series, I planted some bamboo behind the lot at Warner Brothers. It didn't take long to turn into a bamboo forest. To make a flute, I first immerse the weighted bamboo in a stream of clean running water. It usually takes about six months the cure the bamboo this way. What happens is the minerals in the water get absorbed and replace the soft cells inside the flute. I then take a long red-hot poker and ram it up through the center of the bamboo to take out the sections and clear the inside. You have to do this quickly or you can crack the bamboo. I then use a similar process to make the holes that bring it into tune. To do this, I use a silver concert flute as a template. I then polish, sand, and lacquer the flute. I like when the bamboo has a natural organic look to it. Some people sand the bamboo down so it is completely smooth, but I



Photo Courtesy of Marc Mangano

like to leave the surface natural."

In some of my movies, I used my bamboo flute as a weapon. In fact, one of my flutes got smashed during a fight scene. That was good flute. It had a flute on one end and a shakuhachi on the other. That's how I make a shakuhachi work, and this one worked well. I guess you can say it was strong musically but weak martially."

Relationships

"Even though acting makes up a big part of my life, relationships are of greater importance."

"The reason I believe my life focuses on relationships is I am just not happy when I don't have a woman in my life."

"In relationships, I really try to be totally truthful. But I seem to have an obsession about telling everything. Maybe I should keep a few secrets. But, then what's the point of being in a relationship? So, it is the ultimate test of a relationship if it can handle utter forthrightness."

"Affection means a lot to me. I don't know why, but affection is almost more important to me than anything else. For some reason, I really like to cuddle."

"Right now I live with four children and their beautiful mother, Annie. Each day I share with them is filled with many loving moments...moments when there is this loving being reaching out to me. This wonderful woman, which feels to me like the coolest part of my life."

"When I look at the children, I find myself attached to the idea that these are children who have yet to experience life. And, these children, as well as all children in this world, need to feel safe. I hope that my children have the opportunity to experience life like I have."

Despair

"I was in a state of deep despair when I came across a book called *In Search of the Miraculous* by P. D. Ouspensky. At the time, I was well over 30 years old. Each day I would open the book, only to read words relating to exactly what I was going through. In a way, the book was miraculous. One of the things Ouspensky writes about is if you really want to change, you have to liquefy yourself. And one very effective way of liquefying yourself is to be in a state of total despair -- a state where

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everything is falling apart. I was in such a place when I found Ouspensky's book. Because of its transformative impact on my life, I often tell people it is one of my favorite books."

Food and Diet

"Because of traveling, my food intake is always changing. But I keep certain principles in my head. And even though I don't always follow them every moment of every day—they are still there and have an effect on me. Left to my own devices, I basically would live off of fruit and nuts and an occasional home cooked meal."

"Right now I am living at home with four kids and their mother, and I sit and have dinner with them every chance I get. The kids like to eat chicken, spaghetti, rice, broccoli, and greens. So Annie and I join them."

"However, every morning I start

the day the same way. I start with a glass of hot water with a lemon squeezed into it, followed by a fruit salad seasoned with curry. I like curry. Afterwards, I allow myself to have a cup of coffee. This is my way of achieving balance."

"These are my own rules. And, certainly, my nutritionist would question the coffee. But, this is my way of being in balance. For instance, I take a lot of Chinese herbs instead of vitamins. There was a period when I took a lot of vitamins, but I have given that up now. Now I eat a lot of herbs and broccoli. At 67 years old, I have learned how to take care of myself and maintain an inner balance."

Water and the Environment

"Water is now becoming a major issue. I think something has to be done about the fact that some people don't have enough water. I think about half

the world is water deprived, which sounds weird because this is a water planet. And yet, water is a scarcity."

"When you go to the market to buy a pint of water for two dollars, you can almost buy a gallon of gasoline for the same price. And gasoline has to be pulled up out of the earth, and then refined, and transported to various markets. I mean, gasoline is a rare resource. And yet, depending on where you buy your bottled water, you can pay up to four times more than gasoline."

"What I find really strange is that New York City has good tap water, yet people go out and buy expensive bottled water. This reminds me of a program I recently read about. It is a program to educate immigrants from Central and South America that is safe to drink the tap water in America. Some of these financially strapped families are buying bottled water because of their history with unsafe water in their former country."

"There is also the example of the elite who simply won't drink any city water anywhere, which is more like a fashion statement."

"In the past ten months, I have been all over the world. In the past month alone I visited eighteen cities in eight different time zones. Wherever I went, I saw people drinking bottled water. It just seems like everybody's got it backwards and skewed away from what makes common sense. Which makes me think sometimes that common sense may not be that common."

David's dog, Thunder

"I have never seen Thunder unhappy in the eight years I've owned him. I have never seen him be anything but enjoying the moment. And, he's always ready for the next moment. If you take him for a ride in the car, he thinks that's the greatest thing. If he is returning home, that's the greatest

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thing. He thinks the veterinarian is a great person. He thinks a shot is some kind of weird petting. Thunder loves and trusts everybody he meets, including all other dogs. He's just open to relating to everything in the moment. Because of this, I feel Thunder lives in the Tao much more than I do."

"I've had dogs most of my life. There was a period when I had a lot of cats. I kept horses for twenty-six years. But, when it comes to Thunder, he is the dog I always dreamed of. He's a Burmese Mountain Dog, and it took me a little while to find a breeder and have him flown to me. I was waiting at the airport when he arrived as a little puppy. On the way home he just curled up in my lap. That's when I knew he was that special dog in my life."

The Human Experiment

"If there is any point to the human experiment it is this concept of justice, fairness, and compassion."

"I like the idea that there are many people who care whether or not the spotted owl becomes extinct. This aspect of humanity is a rare thing in the universe."

"This concept of 'justice' seems to be something we've invented. I mean this is a dog-eat-dog world. Everything consumes something else in order to stay alive, but we have developed this idea that there should be fairness. Not only does the wolf eat the innocent lamb, but black holes eat innocent galaxies. And yet, with all of our foibles, and with all of our viciousness, and these belief systems where people want to blow themselves up, and the wars, and the cheating and the lying that goes on in Congress — the fact remains that we have this one little thing that is unique in the universe — this idea of 'justice', which is a totally imaginary concept. Humanity has thought it up and we try to do it as best we can."

"There are certain individuals;

certain institutions; certain countries; certain philosophies, and certain whole movements that actually try to make things better for other people and other species. Some even worry about vegetables! All this is kind of remarkable. It seems to me that this sense of justice is a very important part of our humanity. Birds sing, ants build buildings, elephants dance — but only humans have this attitude about caring for justice. I mean, otherwise, why would you care that people half way around the world don't have enough water? Why should you? My dog, Thunder doesn't care, and, he's a nice guy!" (Carradine pets Thunder and laughs.)

"Maybe this sense of justice is a good enough reason to hope our species doesn't become extinct. Maybe we should try to keep things running in the hope that it will get better."

"But if people begin to run out of water, that could stop everything cold. It's easy to say, 'Well, I'm not going to run out of water. What do I care?' But, maybe I will."

"Maybe the brilliant little twist that's going to save humanity is in the mind of somebody who is running out of water right now. In my mind, that alone makes it worth the effort to help those who have less than we do." 🍄

For more information about David Carradine or the band Soul Dogs, please visit www.davidcarradine.org or www.souldogs.com.

William E. Marks is the author of the *The Holy Order of Water*. He has traveled the globe researching information about water and its mystical and healing properties, as has studied many Eastern philosophies. William is also a noted speaker relative to evolution; present crisis, and answers for the earth's future. In the late 70s, William lived outdoors while riding horseback across America on his "Ride For Nature" project. He may be contacted at williamemarks@aol.com.

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