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MR. JOHN STORK > EPISODE 210

Jeremy Lesniak:

Mr. Stork, welcome to whistlekick martial arts radio

John Stork:

Thank you.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Thanks for being here. Thanks for coming on. Listeners we're going to get into some connections today and I'm not going to spoil the story but Mr. Stork here has trained directly under two previous guests and if you were to chart out geographically where all of our guests had come from, you might think that there would be some similarity. Oh ok, Jeremy you're from Vermont and Mr. Stork is from Vermont so you're just going to name off two names from Vermont, nope. That's not what's going to happen. And you have to listen to find out what that is. So, a little bit of a teaser, a cliffhanger if you will. Obviously, we're a martial arts show, you're out here to talk about martial arts because you're a martial artist.

John Stork:



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Sure.

Jeremy Lesniak:

But there's more to it than that, I mean, that we can, your introduction can't be the back of a post-it note. Why don't we roll back time, you know, hop in our DeLorean and see what we can find out about how you got started in the martial arts.

John Stork:

Sure. I mean, that for me, that's a pretty simple answer. I guess my real start was when I saw the ninja turtle as a kid and that got me pretty much more jazzed than anything else I'd seen in my life at that point. But, I guess I was also used to the things I saw on tv not being real. So, I probably saw ninja turtles when I was four, and I didn't take a martial arts class until I was seven. I think I was kind of surprised that martial arts were actually a real thing. I was used to things that would be that cool on tv, it would be made up or fictional. So, I was pretty thrilled when I found out that martial arts actually existed.

Jeremy Lesniak:

What happened in between four and seven? So, if you were a four-year-old watching the ninja turtles you were probably, you know, jumping up trying to imitate the movements in your living room

John Stork:

Of course, I have a lot of the plastic ninja weaponry like sais, nunchucks and throwing stars. Yeah, that's what I wanted to be.

Jeremy Lesniak:

And then you got going in seven and actually training. What happened in between? Why the delay?

John Stork:

I don't know. I mean, my parents had just moved from Manhattan to rural Vermont. So, I think they were probably trying to get their footing with their business. They make mouthpieces for brass instruments, Stork custom mouthpieces and that's kind of a crazy thing they did to move from, I mean, they were right off Times Square and you know, a machine shop where they were doing that kind of work and then to head in to the green hills of Vermont. I mean, that's probably what was going



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on. I mean, they were attentive parents but I think they were also very focused on making sure their business is going to stay afloat at that point with such change. So yeah, I spent a lot of time outside playing with my plastic weaponry. At that point in time in my life I'd say I was really into Godzilla at that time as well. I often joke with people that if I've been born in Japan I probably would've been a normal kid, but here in America, I was kind of a misfit for sure at that age especially. I mean, Ninja Turtles were a mainstream thing but, not necessarily martial arts or just you know, Asian culture, I didn't fit in too great actually.

Jeremy Lesniak:

What do you mean by that?

John Stork:

(inaudible) So, maybe that was good, maybe that was bad. I don't know.

Jeremy Lesniak:

What do you mean you didn't fit in?

John Stork:

I was really awkward at school. I guess maybe, I didn't socialize enough with the kids my age before I went to school. You know, kindergarten like I was instantly alienated, just got picked on a lot and I think that's also what maybe drew me to martial arts, it's like oh if you learn martial arts they won't pick on you which ended up being true but, in ways that were deeper than I guess I thought initially. It's like oh if they pick on me, I'll kick their butts but it's a lot more than that once you start training. Which is great, I mean it kind of, for me it feels like it turned my life around not that my life is could've been going that bad at age seven. Great parents, I lived in a nice place but, I don't know, it kind of just lit a fire that have not been lit yet for me.

Jeremy Lesniak:

So, eight, seven rolls around and your parents put you in martial arts classes. How did that go?

John Stork:

Back then you know, I was part of this thing called tiger scouts or something it's like the precursor to boy scouts. One week and were making apple cider, the next weekend we went to Fred Lapan's karate class in Barre, Vermont. I can't believe this is real. This is the coolest thing I've ever done and then it



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was like, I think it was in the winter. I didn't start classes until like June or July. I don't know what year that would've been, I wasn't keeping track back then but I don't know why my parents waited so long because I was, you know, super thrilled about it. I wanted to do it so badly.

Jeremy Lesniak:

So, you get in there. You get some exposure from being in tiger scouts and then you go home and you say I want to do this and eventually they say yes and they put you in classes, then what happens?

John Stork:

I remember coming home after the first class and practicing in our living room and I tried to kick as high as I could and I kneed myself in the face really hard and I fell over. That was like my first practice session after class. And I don't know, I mean, you know Freddie, you've done an interview with him, he's like the most charismatic guy ever. Back then, I mean, his prime kind of lasted for like decades at this point but he was really in his prime back then. I mean, just so young, so enthusiastic, he was so contagious. And I mean, there's a generation of us from that time that are at least still loosely connected with the dojo in Barrie if not totally involved still. You know, Dylan Aber is one of those guys, Scott Graner is another one of those guys. My mom, it was such an exciting time to be involved with Freddie at the studio. It was like plugging into a really, really huge outlet. It was like a family thing too like it was such a tight-knit community it felt like, finding a new family. And my family was involved too like three weeks after I started taking martial arts, my mom thought it looked so fun and like I said, Freddie was so charismatic and contagious with that, she ended up signing up and you know, she in many ways has continued with a lot farther than I have in you know, traditional martial arts training. My brother ended up taking classes as well, my little brother. The dojo really felt like an extension of my family.

Jeremy Lesniak:

And just kind of reading between the lines, maybe a place that you felt that you belong early on.

John Stork:

Yeah. I guess I didn't really feel that way in school at all. School is really awkward for me and then all of a sudden, I was like one of the normal kids at karate and I loved it there it was way cooler than school for me. School was always strange to me I guess. But the dojo made so much sense I was just so excited.

Jeremy Lesniak:



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What was it that made sense? Are you able to articulate that as you look back?

John Stork:

You know, I think in school, I never really knew where we were going which maybe I was just dumb but like, you know, you walk into the dojo and there are the belts and there is Freddie. He's a black belt and you see all the different belts. You can instantly see kind of what's going on or I could anyway. And it's like, okay there is a progression here and furthermore I'm like I want to make that progression. I see the difference in the lower belts and the upper belts and it's so cool I want to get there and I felt instantly plugged in and I wanted to be there and I want to keep going. Whereas maybe at school it's like, why are we doing this? I don't get it right now. It doesn't make sense to me, I'm not interested in these stuff, I don't know. Maybe I'm just a bad student academically.

Jeremy Lesniak:

I believe that everyone has their ideal way of learning. And for a lot of people sitting in a desk and having information thrown at your face for five-six-eight hours a day. Not everybody learns that way.

John Stork:

Yeah. And that's one of the problems I think with public school, not that I want to get into that too much here and you probably don't either but you know, it's definitely often times a cookie cutter situation. Not everyone is the same cookie and that sucks if you're getting you know, mashed up every day.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah, well. To try to graduate with a degree in chocolate chips when you are a brownie is not going to work out so well is it? I think we all have our moments with that through school.

John Stork:

Yeah.

Jeremy Lesniak:

We've got a pretty idea of who you are, I think now at least, you know, the why. I think we understand the why and that has probably sparked you to continue on your journey. I have no doubt with those names that you've mentioned and the passion that you were just speaking with, that you've got some stories. I'd like you to take a moment and tell us your best martial arts story.



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John Stork:

Yeah. You know, I thought about this trying to prepare for the interview. I don't know if anyone will think that it's such a great story but it kind of connects your interview to another one of my teachers, Mike Chat, and he talked about training with Sammo hung. And for me, you know, I kind of, I started to lose momentum in martial arts actually after probably about four or five years of training, I got my black belt at that point but I don't know, it was kind of just becoming a routine for me. But then, what really, really inspired me and I'm still inspired by up to this day is Jackie Chan. When I saw Jackie Chan, it was a whole new world for me because he wasn't just doing martial arts he was doing comedy acrobatics and prop manipulation and stunts and he was writing and directing his own movies. I don't know it just it totally engaged with me in a way. Of course I was thrilled about Bruce Lee, and you know van damme, and chuck Norris back in the day but it kind of faded out for a while whereas Jackie Chan was just, it engaged me on so many more levels so anyway getting back to the best story you know Jackie Chan, he trained in the Peking opera with Sammo hung and yuen biao a bunch of other, you know people who went to do huge things in the Hong kong movie industry and coincidentally I just feel the Hong kong movie industry totally influenced action films worldwide and then I think they don't get enough credit for how much they innovated you know high paced action packed film making and action sequences. Anyway, when I was training with Mike Chat I mean that's where all college money my parents might have saved up at least fly me out to train with MC and LA once a month for 2 or 3 years and I was very young I was like between 12 and 15 is when I was doing that. And I mean, coming from rural Vermont where you know, I have a couple of trees and some cows to look at which has its charm I appreciate that the older I get but going from rural Vermont to LA training with Mike Chat who was a superstar in the sport karate world at the time and then he knew all this people too like he just got done working on martial law with Sammo Hung who I've been reading about and watching movies about. I just couldn't, I think that it was so much it was almost overloaded it was like dying and going to heaven and I remember one day we went down to this area it was called Monterey park in LA and it's like this park where if you go out there on a Sunday, it was like multiple different groups of Chinese people practicing tai chi with like their Master and mike would take us there to work with Ming Lu, I think she's Ming chu now, she got her name changed but she was national china wushu champion. And she really kicked butt on the circuit here for a while. She was on team Paul Mitchell. You know, I remember seeing her at ocean state nationals at Rhode Island I think is where that tournament is. For the first time as a little kid, in America for me anyways, you'd never seen anything like that. That time of form, that type of kata. The stuff that she was doing was so mind blowing and then here's a few years later, fast forward, training with mike chat, he takes us to this park in LA and he had us take Ming lu's wushu class. That was really cool for me because you know, the stuff I was doing with mike was awesome but Ming lu is teaching us wushu which is exactly what was Jackie Chan and jet li are doing in their movies so it's closer to what I was really, really passionate about. But anyway, we go out to a dim sum place after class which is another mind-blowing experience like an authentic dim sum restaurant. And then, who is in the back room? It's



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Sammo Hung and he's got like this huge entourage with him and they were having a feast and he's like come on come back here I know you Mike, you are one of my students and he brings us. That was like nirvana for me, martial arts nirvana when I reached that point and maybe I peaked young. I was probably like thirteen or fourteen at that point but if I had to think about like my most rapturous moment in the martial arts that's probably it. Maybe it's not like an inspiring story that's what you are probably for on the show but when I think about my favorite story in martial arts that's probably it.

Jeremy Lesniak:

I'm not going for anything, you know. The long-time listeners know it and you know from the format of the questions I sent you, this is meant to be vague, this is meant to give you a framework to talk about what's important to you and clearly that's story is important to you and we can glean a lot about you from it. You know, first thing...

John Stork:

It's kind of a selfish story I guess. I don't see how to be helpful for other people and I wish I had one that's more helpful or inspiring.

Jeremy Lesniak:

I don't think expressing a moment in your martial arts path that was significant to you could not be inspiring, right? Because of your dedication, because of your training, because of embracing that side of you, you got to meet Sammo Hung. It wasn't because you were out to dinner, it was because you were a martial artist putting in a lot of money training and then you got to meet him. Listeners, if you don't know who Sammo Hung is, I would have to say he is one of the most underrated martial arts actors ever. Would you agree?

John Stork:

Of course. He is also an excellent choreographer and director.

Jeremy Lesniak:

He is utterly fantastic and far too few people who he is cause if you watch his stuff, it's legit stuff. I mean, the man was able to bring real skill to the camera in a way that not a lot of people had during his time.

John Stork:



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A lot of it goes back to the Peking opera. You know, the school that him, Jackie Chan and yuen biao trained at. It was just, it was a factory for extreme talent. I mean I think it was brutal and probably, you know, it would definitely get shut down if it's happening in America in this day and age but, there's no denying that it produced unreal talent and you know, people who made and revolutionized at least the entertainment side of martial arts if not other aspects as well.

Jeremy Lesniak:

What else do you have going on in your life. You know, other than martial arts, if you had any passion that you spend time with?

John Stork:

You know, when I was about thirteen I started getting involved with a, there's a circus in Vermont for kids called circus smircus. It's an international youth circus, they get kids from all over the world to come and train and rehearse in Greensboro Vermont for about three weeks in June. And then for the rest of the summer, they take a real circus tent and they pitch it all over new England. They do a show; a real circus show but most of the performers in it are kids. But as kids in that show, you are getting to work with world class circus coaches from all over the world. You know, Russia, Mongolia, china and it's basically right in my backyard in Greensboro. I grew up in Plainfield, Vermont and Greensboro is about forty-five minutes away, it's part of what Vermonters call the northeast kingdom. I mean, Vermont is already so rural and has this special quality about it and the northeast kingdom feels even more removed, even more special. It's a weird kind of mystical place if you know it. Anyway, that was the kind of the next major turn my life took but it was totally an extension of my martial arts training. The reason I started doing circus is because I wanted to learn more acrobatics to be more like Jackie Chan. I wanted to learn how to flip a broom and catch it on my nose or balance it. Jackie Chan's skills are so off the charts, so well rounded and you know, doing martial arts training alone even with someone like mike chat was having you train with his guest instructor who happen to be Ming lu or Sammo hung. I don't know but there is more to learn and I felt like circus is the way to do that. So, I got pretty heavily involved in circus smircus for many years and it was good for me too because I was competing internationally at that point with mike chat on his team but I really wanted to perform. I really enjoyed when we do a demonstration. That goes back to training with Freddie in Barrie too. Tournaments, they had their charm and I got into it pretty heavily but, what I really loved were demonstrations and performing whenever there's a show. I guess that's the next step of my life was getting involved with circus smircus.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Do you think that would've been as interesting to you had you not had the martial arts beforehand?



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John Stork:

I thought about that and I wonder, that's a great question. I couldn't begin to answer it but my first real love is martial arts and I don't think if I'd seen a juggler, I mean not to put down juggling but, I don't think it would've grabbed me quite the same, absolutely not. I mean there's something so cool to me about martial arts specifically. And to really hone in on it is probably you know, the Chinese martial arts. They're so old and they're so refined. There so intricate, the orney 18:40 I really, I'm into that. I'm also into practical application like I'm taking Brazilian Jiu Jitsu now and that something I've always been into but never really got the chance to train and now, I'm actually doing it. I love it but I think the artistic part of me and the part of me that I try to focus on more for whatever reason is really drawn to those old shaolin based Chinese styles the animal forms the weapon forms and we're so into that stuff and I'm not that into juggling (chuckles) juggling means you know to supplement my martial arts training and maybe a better performer could be more rounded physical skills I mean I guess for me that's something I always talk to my friends about or rather performers what I love is the combination of skill and comedy I just think that's such a I don't know for me that's the ultimate if you can be funny and be skillful I think that's so entertaining.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Had you spoken quite a bit about your passion and reverence for Chinese martial arts for wushu and those pursuit, was that something that escalated? I'm trying to do the timetable in my head obviously you had some affinity for those before circus smircus but did your time with the circus change your perspective on those? Did they become more interesting to you?

John Stork:

I'm not sure it's possible for them to become more interesting to me because they're already about as interesting as anything could possibly be. For me, but it was always kind of something that's had to be on the back burner little bit for me in my life for whatever reason. I mean training with Ming lu once I was with mike chat like secretly that kind of ended up being my favorite part of training with mark don't tell him that. But that was later towards the time I was training with mike. And I mean I lived in Vermont and at that time I was getting old enough to realize how much money my parents were spending on my training and it made me kind of uncomfortable to be honest. And circus smircus, it was right there it didn't really cost my parents hardly anything for me to go training with my 2 Russian former soviet circus acrobat coaches at the gymnastics gym around the corner or go up to Greensboro to you know go on the tour. So, I think that's part of a, it was a logistical thing for me at that point it felt more responsible and more accessible but it was so new at that time too I didn't feel like I was sacrificing anything of course if I had appropriate world id be doing circus and wushu like right there together. But at that time, it just it didn't seem feasible.



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Jeremy Lesniak:

You seem like a pretty happy guy, sound like there's quite a bit of smile going on the other side of the microphone.

John Stork:

I just like talking about myself

Jeremy Lesniak:

Ok (chuckles). Well let's take in a little bit different direction.

John Stork:

Ok.

Jeremy Lesniak:

You've moved, you know you've started in Vermont, you're not here anymore, you're doing a bunch of different stuffs, somehow somewhere in there something's must not have gone well. And I'm not saying that's why you moved, I'm just saying we all have stuff pop up sometimes it creates transitions

John Stork:

I've had a lot of obstacles I feel like I just I mean for a starter is, I just wasn't very athletic. Naturally I was not a coordinated kid I wasn't the strong kid, I was kind of pudgy. So right off the bat with martial arts training like I get along walls but I don't know there's something interesting about that type of path that they keep getting a lot of obstacles it forces you to become more resourceful and more unique in a way because you have to come up with your own spit on things which is not going to work for you. So, if you start of not especially gifted in one way or another, it feels... It can feel like a curse but sometimes looking back I'm like well you know, that was very character developing that was very you know it forces you to think outside of the box so I don't know there's been a lot of gnashing of teeth in my martial arts training but then there's been a lot of breakthroughs I guess and elation that comes with that.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Tell us about one of those breakthroughs



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John Stork:

You know that's kind of the weird thing about working with Mike that I mean he's such an excellent coach it feels like pretty much every day of training that we were having breakthrough like if I'd I can't really pick one breakthrough because they felt so constant with Mike and it was that was kind of a miracle of working with him it was like holy mackerel these things I thought I couldn't do I can do even if I can't get into I thought I could do them like he's helping me figure out a way that I can do them given my limitations but also my strengths that he's helping me figure out I don't know it was it was so much really can't thank him enough we had our differences later on in our training and working together but he really I can't state enough how much he made me who I am.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Certainly, a legendary martial artist and of course somebody that we've had on the show. As you said we've had both of your instructors

John Stork:

Yeah, I mean it's like I don't know I feel like I had in a lot of ways if I wasn't charmed in some ways I was being charmed in other ways and the people I've gotten to train with is one of the ways in which I'm very, very charmed. I don't know what charmed means but that's like hitting it but, it seems like the right word for some reason.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah, I'll support your use for that word for sure. I'd like you to tell us about somebody other than those two other than Freddie other than Mike Chat who were instrumental/influential however you want to phrase that in the martial arts

John Stork:

Yeah you know, there's a guy in that circus and he's like an older brother to me and he's never done martial arts but in the circus, he was phenomenal. We both had the same, we were, he was kind of, I had two circus coaches Zena and Valodia, who I worked with mostly working at Smircus and they were like I said former Soviet acrobats before the Soviet system collapsed and then they ended up here in America working for circus Smircus but that just goes to show you know the awesome coaches that Smircus somehow got to come and work for them I think it's a charm thing once again circus Smircus just has this magical thing about that you go up there in Greensboro and it's like different world it's like circus Hogwarts or something I mean he was kind of their main student and then he



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was older and kind of going up and doing his own thing when I came around and I kind of became their focus and I never ever came close to living up to what Sam did but I always looked up to him and admired him and I mean he could do one hand stands no problem his specialty though is the slack wire he was just, he was such of a different level than other kids in circus smircus who had the same kind of back on us you know kids living in rural Vermont or he was from Maine as the case was living in the middle of nowhere he would set up his slack wire you know, in his parents living room and practice and the other kids who were doing that kind of thing, they were ok but Sam was you know world class stuff and it was just his discipline and his mindset and the way he wanted to go about things that I think allowed him to master those type of skills like he would ride a unicycle [26:50](#) standing on a slack wire looks crazy. You see someone getting up on a slack wire for the first time you're like whoa how do you do this so unstable. He would ride a unicycle on a slack wire while juggling five, juggling clubs he learned that in his parents living room and he could do one hand stand no problem. He eventually learned how to ride a unicycle in a hand stand which is an unheard-of trick because he wanted to learn that on the slack wire. Like he just had a different work ethic a different way of practicing and it helped me with working with Mike that he's kind of obsessive compulsive and so am I and in some ways, it wasn't a good combination. Like if you're analyzing everything sometimes you can become paralyzed. And Freddie talked about that in his interviews he said you know too many minds and he's quoting the last samurai. And that that's something I think I had a tendency to do anyway and sometimes with me and Mike together like Mike picking every little thing it wasn't necessarily, in a lot of ways we had a great chemistry in some ways we had terrible chemistry and that's an example of where maybe our training together was a little bit dysfunctional and Sam Johnson this other guy this circus guy, he had such interesting and different ways of practicing and the thing about practicing with Mike had, he's like what do you want to learn, I was like well I want to learn this but I should do this physical conditioning and this cross training and this and that like come around to this one thing I want to learn he was like John just practice that one thing you want to learn for hours a day for months and it was so different I don't know it and it was I saw it'd get results for him and that wasn't necessarily the right way for me to practice either but it was nice to have 2 totally different view points and then come about some combination of those 2 viewpoints that worked for myself

Jeremy Lesniak:

Is your current approach to training somewhere in the middle then?

John Stork:

Yeah, I'd say it is but I mean there's so many more influences that have affected my I guess my philosophy at this point, or philosophies when it comes to training I mean for me now the big question is why am I doing this in the first place. Should I be doing it, do I really want to be doing it. Time is precious and I've seen the results I get when I commit to something before fully examining whether



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I should be committed to it and then a couple of years go by and wait you know I really shouldn't be doing that at all. I didn't like do enough soul searching before I set out to realize to realize that that wasn't really I was passionate about maybe I was doing it because I sometimes there are things in your life that are built on false pretenses and that's one thing that Sam really helped me with I mean he's kind of a guru in my life and it's just like he doesn't like take any bs like he won't do things unless he wants to do it. It's that simple, it's like sometimes you can appear lazy on the outside but he's actually the most disciplined person you'll ever meet but he's really good at you know siphoning through falsehoods and latching on to his own personal truths and that's probably the most valuable skill.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Interesting.

John Stork:

You can learn maybe in life let alone, martial arts.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah, one of the things that as an entrepreneur and hanging around other entrepreneurs one of the bits of advice that I've really latched on to over the last probably six months is being if it's not a yes, if it's not a heck yes, some people throw an expletive in there. It's not a really strong resounding yes then it's a no, because you do only have that 24hrs in the day.

John Stork:

Right

Jeremy Lesniak:

And rather than do something that kind of gets you towards your path, throw something you never did definitely moves you towards that. If you had the opportunity to work with someone else, somebody you haven't, you know someone alive someone who's passed, who would you want to train with?

John Stork:

I'm going to go and be in the same class the same group that Jackie Chan, yuen biao and Sammo hung were in at the Peking opera and see if I could hang I guess. Like they used to start their day with a half-hour hand stand. On my best day, I think I've done a two-minute hand stand and I felt like I was



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going to die. I just don't get how that was possible. Maybe it was starting that young or being that consistent. I think the sifu there, the guys who was in charge of the whole thing, was yu jian lian or something. I looked up his name online last night, I probably knew him when I was a kid because I used to read every book on Jackie Chan, I was part of the fan club. Anyway, I'd like to work with him and those guys in that class that they grew up in in the Peking opera. I mean, I don't know if I would survive to be honest, like I think it was pretty brutal. I don't know if I could've hacked it but that I would like to try.

Jeremy Lesniak:

It's an interesting answer. We haven't had anybody that has come out from that side and I like that. It's completely consistent with everything else we've heard about you.

Yeah. It's pretty kind of a one track record I guess in some ways.

Jeremy Lesniak:

How about competition? Is that ever been part of your life.[32:21](#)

John Stork:

Yeah, I mean that's pretty much all I did from like 11 to 15 until I started doing, you know, performing in smircus. Even before I probably went to my first tournament when I was nine or ten, it was hard not to go on tournaments even if you hated them, if you are training at Freddie's school because Freddie lived for those tournaments. So yeah, I mean, I guess I was never, I got into them through the influence of the people I was around. My mom is a very competitive woman. Freddy mentions her a lot in his podcasts, feliz stork. Freddy is an extremely competitive person, the group that I was coming up with Dylan haber[33:07](#), scott craner, we all kind of pushed each other codin blanch is another name that comes to mind from that time. Josh Dickinson. It was just a group of kids at Freddie's school, Freddie just, it was part of how he ran his class I guess. We were all really close friends, we were brothers but we were also constantly competing with each other. And of course, that extended even in the tournaments that's like, holy mackerels, not just us, there's all these other kids out there we have to try and outdo. So yeah, I mean, looking back on it now, maybe I kind of see around it like it's not about being better than other people, it's about honing yourself, Fred said that on his podcast as well. I guess I have mixed feelings about my competition career, I mean career, I never got paid for it but my time competing, because I was very entrenched in it while I was doing it, but I'm not sure I was the best fit knowing who I really am now. I don't think that's the best way for me to actualize myself is going to tournaments but I'm sure I gained a lot from it. Sorry that was probably really a round a bout long.



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Jeremy Lesniak:

No. Those are the best. I have a saying and you and I didn't talk about this piece before we started recording but I've said this to a number of guest before we start "rolling tape". The best stuff comes in the edges. It's when the guest wander and get deep into a tangent, that's where, personally, I'm the most entertained. And listeners, I love you all and I'm glad that you're here so I'm not just a crazy guy talking to people and recording it, but we will always do the show in the format that I like. Because I'm the one that's got to be here for every single one. So, I need to enjoy it. And I love that you circled with that and it leads me to a follow up, what is a better way for you to, you used the word actualized, what you're doing now. What methodology works better for who you are today?

John Stork:

I guess I'm still working on that but I would say in regards to competition specifically looking back on it I think I probably should've moved on sooner than I did. Cause I was ready to move on and I had new interest and I think I'd learned what I needed to learn from competition and I was just going through the motions and that's when it became stale from like I'm showing what this tournament even though I don't want to be here just because you know my teachers says I should or I know it's the quote unquote right thing. I shouldn't be quote unquote lazy and not go to this tournament but you know looking back on it I think I had the right impulse to move on and start doing other things like not abandoned what I'd learned in any sense but I had new interests I had new passions I was learning new things and my impulse was to go with that. I wish I'd followed the passion more and not try to be so like I say quote unquote disciplined. Which is a weird thing to say because you know discipline is a good thing but when it becomes mindless, that's bad. You're a robot and you're not learning or growing. So, I think discipline can be a double ended sword, you need to be disciplined but you have to keep thinking and you have to keep reflecting and you have to keep being honest with yourself. And I think it's a weird mixture you know you have to employ discipline but you also have to employ passion and if passion is dead you really need to examine that I think for myself. And there's usually a way to rekindle it but you have to find that way doing the same thing that you're doing often times isn't the way to rekindle the passion.

Jeremy Lesniak:

It's right interesting way to phrase that I think you just coalesce something from me that I've never been able to articulate. I'm envisioning cause I'm a different kind of nerd and then maybe you are I'm envisioning a Venn diagram you know with one circle being passion and the other circle being discipline and you're got that inner section point and I think most people over correct. You know they may recognize it they're out of that balance but they stir to one side or the other because I think inherently one side or the other is more comfortable for us. I, anyone that knows me personally



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knows I'm going to air to the side of discipline. If you look at my calendar, I schedule when I'm going to eat lunch. I schedule when I'm going to clean my desk I guess it's horrendously structured. And I know other people who seem to from my vantage wander through life you know they're passionate you know they go from the thing that they love to the thing that they love. And you've seen enough success to know what it's like to ride that middle.

John Stork:

You know I think, for me personally if I stay in one or the other for too long I'll wear it out and it becomes dead or it just it loses its efficacy after a while and I think it's good to spend time with both otherwise it becomes, you become numb to it either way. I've gone through periods in life but there's nothing but discipline. I've gone through periods in my life where I let myself be completely in structure and just be passionate with all my passions. And either one if I stay in that mode too long, it becomes ineffective for me. But everyone's different, but I think that's maybe one of the most important lessons learned too is like you know yes there's people out there you can learn from, there's people out there you can emulate but in the end you have to write your own story you have to create your own version of yourself, you have to write your own plan and you can use inspiration from other people but if you're just copying and pasting in the end that's going to end up being a recipe for disaster which is scary cause it's easy it's lazy in a way and it's ***39:20 that's working for them I'll just do it too and that will work for a while, you can learn a lot from doing that for a bit but in the end you have to just take what works for you from that and move on and leave behind like identify the things that don't work for you and it's a purification process that requires constant ***39:40 and that's a bad thing to say too. If you're constantly examining something, you're focused on you know too few things there's a bunch of things going on behind you that you're missing at that point, like once again like I was saying earlier when I get to variate really intense examination of things with giving yourself a break and letting your subconscious work or letting outside influences come into play. If you put on your own blinders, that's bad too I mean there's time and place for that but I don't know I think variety is important and I think a lot of martial arts training is very structured and very rigid and that's the discipline is important, the key component of martial arts but it's not the only component and you need to mix with other things and Freddie was talking about that with Bruce lee. He was so creative and a lot of that comes from taking off the blinders.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Well said. We've talked a bit about movies, certainly with your training with Mr. Chat. You know, we know that the dramatic flair I mean circus. The things that a lot of us love about the choreography in martial arts movies I'm sure is right up your alley. Something that you enjoy so I'm curious, what martial arts movies to you with someone who has taken their martial arts training to that level what ones do you look at and enjoy?



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John Stork:

Well, and I knew this question was going to be part of the interview and my answer is an ok. So, my favorite martial arts movie is not a straight up martial arts movie it's Project A by Jackie Chan and I think that was when he hit his peak, his prime. It's more of an action adventure with a lot of martial arts but Sammo hung is in it, yuen biao was in it. It's so, it's such a fun movie. It's very Indiana Jones as for me in that, it's just a very squash buckling adventure with phenomenal stunts, phenomenal fights, great comedy. That's my favorite martial arts movie even though it's not necessarily a straight up martial arts movie. If we're going to talk about straight up martial arts I think for me you have to look at Drunken Master, and Drunken Master 2, those are both amazing just pure martial arts movies and the thing is in America, Drunken Master 2 is released as Legend of the Drunken Master but that's actually Drunken Master 2 and it was made like ten or fifteen years after the original Drunken Master. But try to seek out the original Drunken Master if you can it was made in the 70s it was a JACKIE CHAN real break out hit is Snake in the Eagle's Shadow and Drunken Master is pretty much a shop for shop remake. The Snake in the Eagle's Shadow same director, same actors just the different style it's drunken fists instead of snake fists. They're both excellent but really try to see Drunken Master I, Fist of Legend is another straight up martial arts movie that I think is so excellent, a lot of those are early JACKIE CHAN, not too early JACKIE CHAN had a weird career. His first movie is kind of crap, he's working lo wei [42:47](#) who was the same guy who worked with Bruce Lee. And you know he was trying to turn JACKIE CHAN into another Bruce Lee which clearly JS was not. But I think that's an interesting lesson for martial artists too like you're trying to follow the footsteps of this legend and there's no denying that that guy was amazing - Bruce Lee. But this other director is trying to force you to be that guy and you're not that guy so yeah you were making movies, ostensibly you're successful but you're not really successful until you find your own way and that's when JACKIE CHAN really achieved success. Even though he didn't make any movies before, he had to become his own person, invent his own style to really take off.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Good advice for all of us, isn't it?

John Stork:

I hope so

Jeremy Lesniak:

And you I'm sure that we can already answer this question but I'm going to ask it out of courtesy, your favorite martial arts actor?



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John Stork:

Yeah of course it's JACKIE CHAN.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Alright, let's flip out of movies, let's talk about books. Are you at all a reader? Are there martial arts books that have come into your circle?

John Stork:

Martial arts books specifically, I would say no I mean I read a lot of biographies when I was younger I guess, Bruce Lee and JACKIE CHAN but no I don't seek out books specifically about martial arts. But I do read, I think reading is, I mean I'm not going to say reading is important for everyone but reading is a way that I interface with information well.

Jeremy Lesniak:

What are your goals? What's keeping you going? You know you mentioned that you've transitioned you training BJJ now. You know, you've been doing martial arts a long time like nearly all of our guests, something that's really become part of who you are. And I find it for everyone, I'd say without exception, those folks that are continuing to train years later have goals. There are things that they're striving for. What are yours?

John Stork:

I mean. I guess I have a lot of vague like, overarching goals that maybe anyone has like, you know, I want to be a good person, I want to take advantage of my life. You know, I don't want to waste it. Specifically, for martial arts training, I'd like to get my blue belt in Jiu jiu'su. I know that's not terribly ambitious but I'll be really happy if I get my blue belt. I have goals in my career. I think growing up in martial arts, pretty much without fail, makes you become a goal oriented person and it's almost subconscious at this point like I don't think about my goals consciously because I'm constantly thinking about them subconsciously like it's just it's almost invisible to me because it's so automatic. But yeah, I can give you a list of goals a mile long but that would be boring.

Jeremy Lesniak:



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Fair enough. Let's talk about what you're doing right now. Give us the highlights, what are you doing professionally, what are you doing personally if people want to reach out to you, if you do the social media thing, you know. Tell us about you in that way, commercial time we generally call it.

John Stork:

Okay. Yeah, not very good at selling myself but I live in boulder Colorado now. I pretty much make almost all of my living as a street performer. I work on the street now performing a circus style show. I stack up a bunch of chairs and juggle fire, breathe fire, do handstand on top of the chairs. I wear stripes and a top hat if you see me, you'll know it's me but you probably won't see me unless you're in boulder cause that pretty much where I stay now. I used to go down and perform in keywest in the winters because it's too cold to perform here or in Vermont. I did hundreds of shows on church street on Burlington Vermont, it's kind of where I cut my teeth, street performing-wise there in keywest but I've also street performed in Boston at Daniel hall, it's part of that program for a summer. And my favorite part of Boston was working, I can't actually look up the name, I worked with a great wushu instructor. I got a class, that's embarrassing, I don't remember the name but that was the thing I miss most about leaving Boston because otherwise I didn't really care for Boston, it's too much traffic. I like the country I grew up in the woods, and that's what's nice about boulder for me now is you know, we're surrounded by beautiful nature. It doesn't really feel like too much of a city. Anyway, I'm a street performer now. I started street performing because I wanted to, you know, like Sam, the guy I was talking about earlier. He started street performing and he told me he was making pretty darn good money. I was surprised how good the money was he was making as a street performer and what I really wanted to do back in the day when I started street performing was you know, direct and produce and perform in my own circus act that I could create exactly the way I want to create it and I needed money for that. But it took me years and years to finally start making decent money as a street performer. It was a real brutal process for me. Actually, I was very stubborn. I wanted to do this my way but, a lot of street performing is about listening to your audience rather than yourself. You don't get to be the dictator I know I'm not talented enough to be the dictator as a street performer but, through that process I realized what I was most passionate about in my life at this stage was, you know I grew up obsessed with anime and manga and video games. You know, dragonball z was like everything to me and maybe it still is and the funny thing is that, akira toriyama, the manga artist who created dragon ball and did the original comics and it's all based on, he was inspired after watching Jackie Chan in drunken master. So, it's kind of weird how pretty much everything in my life comes back to Jackie Chan and it's kind of creepy actually. But anyway, I started to learn, I've been studying screenwriting, I really want to write and direct for animation someday. Hayomi azaki is another huge inspiration of mine and does the studio ghibli films like princess watanoke and spirit away, house moving castle, you name it. He's just a master film-maker and animator. Anyway, I would love to have my own animation studio someday and I'll be amazed if it actually happens but, that's what I really want to do and towards that end, I've been studying screenwriting. I've written a couple of screenplays and turning one of them into a comic book which



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hopefully help sell the screenplay but even if it doesn't, I don't care cause I'm very passionate about comics and making it into a comic book has been a really fun process but I personally can't draw and to save my life so I have to hire an artist to work for me and that's where most of my money goes I'd say. I've spend half of every dollar I earned on paying an artist to turn the screenplay into a comic book. So, please if you're interested in comics at all, check out my comic book it's called tomb busters. You can find it at tombbusters.com. It's about a treasure hunting tournament in space, it's very action adventury. There's going to be some martial arts in it. Yeah, I don't know what else to say.

Jeremy Lesniak:

That's good stuff. We'll certainly link that and all the other stuff that we've talked about for anyone that might be new. Whistlekickmartialartsradio.com is the place that we do that. You can see everything, you know, get some photos over there so you can see who were talking to and everything. And that's good stuff, you know. I think that multimedia approach, it's not really the words I'm looking for. It does not surprise me that you are a performer with aspirations for directing and you're doing writing and you're trying to express that inner passion in so many different ways. You know, as we kind of roll back to the beginning of the episode, it was clear to me as you talked about the very first anecdote you gave us, you practiced kicking in your living room after your first martial arts class and hit yourself in the chin with your knee. I mean, that requires a lot of effort. That's not something most people can do even if they try. So, I think that for me that book ends what we've been talking about here today. I really appreciate it.

John Stork:

That's my pleasure. A lot of the stuff I haven't talked about in a long time or even necessarily thought about. It's kind of, in some ways it's a past life but, I don't know. Doing Brazilian Jiu jit'su again now putting on a white belt and putting on a gear again for the first time basically since I was a kid. I mean, I've been taking martial arts on and off the whole time but this is the most formal classes I've taken since being a kid. It really is like time travel and it's almost like reincarnation but you know things from your past still and you get to learn from those mistakes and learn from the successes as well. It's so interesting. Life is longer than you think it is. It short but it's also longer than you think it is and you get to relive things. I don't know. Sorry.

Jeremy Lesniak:

No worries and certainly no need for an apology. I'm not even going to accept that because you didn't do anything wrong. Well I appreciate your time here today and id love for you to leave us with one last bit of advice.

John Stork:



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Yeah. I feel like after my uninspiring, unhelpful best martial arts story I kind of trying to hand out advice the whole time now. I'd like to make up for that, compensate. So yeah, I guess to try and sum it all up, I'd say you have to try to, it's like a ralph waldo emerson quote I think he says, you have to write your own bible. And I think that's true in martial arts and in life. You know, you have to learn from other people but in the end, you need to make something that works for you and is suited uniquely to you because you're unique and you can go through that cookie cutter and it's a harder path in some ways but I think it's what you have to do. You have to be vigilant, you can't just ride the same train everyone else is writing. At points, you can do that, it's fine but in the end, you have to build your own train, your own vehicle to get you where you're destined to go.