



Episode 224 – Grandmaster James Faralli | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com



Jeremy Lesniak:

Hey how is it going everyone? Welcome to whistlekickMartialArtsRadio episode 224. Today we're here with Grandmaster James Faralli, this is going to be a good one. I want you to stick around, I want you to listen to everything we're going to learn today from this man but first let me tell you who I am. My name is Jeremy Lesniak I'm the founder here at whistlekick sparring gear and apparel and I'm your host on the show. I'm the lucky guy that gets to interview all of these wonderful folks and I'm an even luckier guy because my job is around running this great company where we build products and offer services to the traditional martial artists of the world. If you're new to the show you can check out all the show notes and all the 223 other episodes that we have at whistlekickmartialartsradio.com. You can check out the products we make at whistlekick.com. I'm really excited to announce a new project, we've been working on this behind the scenes and its finally time to let you know about it, martialjournal.com. What's martial journal? Martial Journal is the only place where we are bringing together all of the folks that we've been able to connect with through the last few years of this company through this show to produce some of the best writing on the traditional martial arts, we're putting it all in one place. There's no fee, nobody's getting paid, this entire project is just a labor of love if you will. I like to write about martial arts and we've talked to quite a few other people on this show that also love to write about martial arts. We've been working behind the scenes, the first few pieces went up and we continue to work on it and revise it and now it's ready, martialjournal.com. Check it out, if you're interested in



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contributing something? Head on over there we have the submission instructions, we're trying to make this the number one place for people to check out the writing from some of the most prominent or insightful or passionate martial artists around the world. Hope you check it out, hope you'll like it and that's that, if you don't hey it's free and I'll refund the cost of admission. On today's show, we have Grandmaster James Faralli. If you experience a life threatening or career ending situation whether that's work or in military of service, you're probably going to take it easy. If you're training into martial arts, it's not unlikely that you'd stop completely. Grandmaster Faralli is not that man, he continued in his art of hapkido and formed a passion for passing on his knowledge. Grandmaster Faralli's story is nothing short of inspiring. It is origin story seems like it's straight out of a comic book, but it's not my job to tell his story, it's our opportunity to hear him tell it himself. Let's welcome him to the show, Grandmaster Faralli welcome to whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.

James Faralli:

Thank you so very much for having me.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Well thank you for joining me here, this is an honor, it's fun you know listeners we won't get into the background of how this all got set up but this one's going to be fun. I'll say no more there, we're here to find out about you and we start at the beginning because I'm a logical left brained person that's why I like to start things, how did you become a martial artist?

James Faralli:

Makes perfect sense.

Jeremy Lesniak:

How did you become a martial artist? What was your origin story if you will?

James Faralli:

I am emigrated to United States from Germany in 1971 when I was 10-year-old. I was born a German citizen, my mother later married an American who was an American soldier who was very, very abusive and when I was 10 we got to stationed in the United States at Fort Bragg. Two months after I got here I started training with my instructor Grandmaster Jimmy Brown who has been my life long instructor until it's been, it's coming up now on 10 years into past but he literally saved me. He personally put a stop to the abuse, he eventually ended up taking me in and raising me as his own. So, I'm sure you can understand that you know that the impact he had on my life was profound. I would have, with no



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positive male influence in my life I would probably would have gone down to a much different road. I have an addictive personality which translates as whatever happens to be that I'm in to, I have to be 110% so if I had taken a different course, that would have been drugs or prison or whatever but fortunately you know God smiled on me and put him in my life and he was, he was an amazing man and taken him from us much too soon you know by cancer at the young age of 63 so it is, it was profound but he is, although I worked out with some great martial artists over the years and some very famous and infamous ones he was my father and my instructor and everything else and everyone else would come second to that. So, he you know he was very he's a great impact in my life.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah, I can hear it in your voice, I can hear the emotion certainly many of us know the bond that we build with a good instructor and anyone that's been an instructor likely knows what the other side of that bond feels like, but you had something a lot deeper, something you know I used the term origin story sort of tongue in cheek kind of evokes this imagery of being in a comic book or you know some kind of fantasy story but yours was almost a comic book cliché you know.

James Faralli:

Almost, almost.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Taken in and raised not only as a person but as a martial artist by the same man. But I'm curious about before that you know was this some complete fluke, how did you find him? or how did he find you?

James Faralli:

It was actually a complete fluke, right behind our housing area we lived on base. Right behind our housing area Fort Bragg had just built 06:19 1971 had just built a brand new hospital a high rise, 10 story hospital called Womack Army Hospital subsequently that left what was called the old hospital area abandoned most large bases, I was never under, never quite sure why they did this but most large bases, the hospitals they built in the world war II era were all one-story and they covered huge expanses of land connected by corridors, they were all one story building and they just had this huge maze of corridors well since they build a new hospital that was a place for you know little kids to hang out and I didn't have a lot of supervision and although most of the buildings didn't have any power it was March 6 when I started training and we were you know throwing rocks and busting windows out of these old building and but in the distance there was power in the building, there were lights on and then I saw the little kid went looked in the window and it was a martial arts school and we walked in and sat and watched a class and we were quite enamored with it and at that point there wasn't a single child in the



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school, they were all adult soldiers and a couple of wives and of course we went home wanted to start training. My stepfather like every little boy I had done everything started football, soccer, everything and quit everything like a lot of little boys do and he said you know 07:41 this you will not quit, no no no I won't quit. So, me and the little kid started training and the little kid was very heavy, well training was very, very difficult, it was freezing it was March and my instructor he didn't use heat, had the windows up so the cold air was coming in and two weeks later the other little kid quit and so of course I quit too. Well that got me quite the beating and the sickest part of that was after the beating which broke my 2 front teeth out at the age of 10, he sent me to class like that so I'm sitting there in front of the school waiting for everybody to get there. I have my little uniform on blood dripping on it and my instructor and coincidentally who was the assistant instructor at the time it was Grandmaster Jim McMurray who is in Texas with the House of Discipline Martial Arts Federation but he was the assistant at that time he was only 21 years old and he has come from Vietnam. Well my instructor Grandmaster Brown saw me, saw what happened and put me in the car, took me home yet never met my parents. Took me home, walked in to my stepfather out ranked him militarily by a substantial amount but he could have gotten himself in a lot of trouble but he walked in to our house without knocking and he was like very, very big black man, big like incredible hulk size big and he grabbed my stepfather and tossed him around a little bit and told him if he ever touch me again he would kill him and I didn't even know he knew I existed, I had only been training two weeks you know but so he got my mother and we went to the hospital they capped my teeth and it took all night to do that. The next morning at the whole night I'm thinking that's, this is great that he tossed him around but I had to go home and face this man so I'm dead well the next morning came and he asked my mother, could I go home with him for the weekend and she said yeah and that weekend turned in to the next 7 years basically. That was it.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Wow

James Faralli:

And then we started and training was incredibly difficult because my instructor both art simultaneously hapkido and taekwondo so when you tested, you tested for the ranks in both so tests were doubly as hard. And eventually he made the switch basically at the same time as we would made the switch to adjust to hapkido, I had won the United States Taekwondo Championship in 1979 and 1980 in the super lightweight division and then but I was in an explosion on the Middle East that had me in the hospital for 17 months I was in military at this time and that's when I realized my competitive career was over and so I had 5 black belts at the time I got with him they'd also tested in both arts asked them do they want to continue, do they want just taekwondo, just hapkido, what do they want? And all 5 of them in about 2 seconds blurted they wanted hapkido so since 1983 I had taught only hapkido and then in my and 2 thou I'm sorry in 1993 that was 83, in 93 we decided to create the American Hapkido Alliance a non-



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profit organization and that was because pressure we had gotten from the Korea Hapkido Association it was financial pressure, this amount of money they wanted from us so and just so you know that as a side note my instructor had never charged a dime for training and I have never charged a student with one cent, ever or my students paid no tuition of any kind, nothing and so we founded this organization in 1993 as a non-profit organization with the focus on the American student you know hapkido has been here long enough like a lot of the martial arts are that we don't necessarily have to have the 11:18 and hero worship of the Koreans that we used to have. We've taken the martial arts and developed them as evidence to when Taekwondo was admitted in the Olympics in 1988 you know virtually every gold medal in every weight class male and female were won by Americans which was quite a shock because it took place in Seoul Korea so it was a bit of an embarrassment to them but it just shows that Americans have taken the martial arts and developed them maybe further than they had been previously.

Jeremy Lesniak:

There's a lot in there.

James Faralli:

Sorry to make that long answer.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah, no, no I love the long answers and I love the detours but I'm just not quite sure which piece to go back to first because there are quite a few things that you shared with us there, I think you know rather than spending a lot of time talking about something that you know started out really negative but clearly turned into something so positive and transformative I think I just want to kind of underscore this idea that, that your instructor who I believe you also referred to as your father...

James Faralli:

Yes

Jeremy Lesniak:

He changed your life and I think a lot of times we get bogged down in whether it we're looking through the lens of martial arts or just being a human being on earth that there's so much that we would like to do and it can be so overwhelming that we can't do it all well here's someone who I'm sure made tremendous sacrifice and as you said put himself at quite a bit of risk but saved potentially literally your life.



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James Faralli:

He definitely, there is no doubt in my mind that he saved my life, it would have probably taken an even worse turn at some point down the road but he definitely saved my life and I've tried the our school is run, he was a very strict disciplinarian although not physical he was very, there was no tolerance if I had ever tried a drug and he found out about it there would have been no second chance and there's just no you know it was absolute black and white with him and so of course that made me that way too which is not always necessary a good thing but I try to our school is run very, very much like a family we socialize together every birthday is celebrated it's a family because it's the only family I've ever known. I only have one, Nicolai is my biological son and he's also a master instructor in the school, that ranks up there with the proudest achievements in my life within you know reaching master level. My wife is a master instructor, so we're very, very tight knit group, very, very, very family oriented, very, very focused. We call each other our family, we like I said we celebrate birthdays and Christmases and everything together. I have a group of black belts, I'm a very, very, I'm a very demanding instructor I mean I expect a phone call if you're going to miss class from every student every time, it's very, very strict. I'm a strict disciplinarian and he was but, he was a very loving man at the same time and it was the first time in my life I had experienced that for someone to be that strict and loving at the same time.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah, I'm sure we have some of the old guard out there nodding along as you're talking about that level of respect and discipline in just that kind of structure. I consider myself one of the younger members of the old school. I was raised in a very similar way so I understand I get it and I think there's a lot of value in there for sure. That's a good origin story, certainly one of the best that we've had, clearly you could've gone a lot of different ways but you ended up as this martial artist who's having an impact yourself. Outside of that story I know you've got a bunch of other stories I can imagine with that beginning that life became boring and drab. So, if I was to ask you your favorite martial arts story, what would that be?

James Faralli:

There's a couple but there's one that really stands out because it taught me the value of realism in training and close quarter combat. In 1976, I had just right after I got my first 15:37 black belt I was 15. Michael Echanis was stationed at Fort Bragg and he came to the school and talked to my father about sharing the literally sharing the building on off class days. He wanted to started teaching he was this, he was a driven man his whole focus was to get 15:54 accepted into the military as a curriculum. So that's what he's trying to do at that time and my father thought, the technique was good but he thought that he introduced some very, very lethal things too early in people's training. You know putting knives in the hands of white belts that kind of thing. So, he would not let him share the building but I trained for a year with Michael Echanis on the opposite days and one of my favorite stories is in one of those quite a



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painful lesson I'm looking at the scars on my hands right now. He loved, a single stick, double stick, cane and knife fighting and I had been exposed to the cane and the double stick but not actual knife fighting and here I was at 15 and we were training with live blades and they were probably, I don't think they would cut your arm off so they probably weren't razor sharp but they were live metal blades and like I said looking down at the end of that first session I had a couple of knife's wounds. One that I look at right now on my wrist that I was bleeding you know pretty profusely and it did teach me a lot about close quarter combat and that was a driving force in my martial arts career from then on which was one of the things that made me leave the Taekwondo behind cause it's a wonderful sport whether that's a sport and pursue the hapkido because hapkido although is a very old martial art it's a very adaptive martial art a very effective martial art and it's constantly adapting and reinventing itself and when it comes out to weaponry and things like that it's very, very practical. We do a great deal of knife fighting, knife versus knife because it's a weapon that anyone can carry doesn't require a license and when you have a relatively good skill level with it, you can be very effective in self-defense it's also a great equalizer against multiple opponents. So that was one of my favorite stories, he was I have some interesting pictures that you know of me and Echanis hanging in the school and he was an interesting character it was a shame that he died so young and so unexpectedly. It would have been interesting to see where his future would've gone.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah, well I'm just, I'm imagining you at 15 after that session with the blood running in your arms.

James Faralli:

It was me and my bestfriend we both gotten first 18:26 black belt at the same time and actually my you know my family didn't really care but my bestfriend was the son of a captain a military captain who was outraged that his son had gotten cut. So he actually after training probably a month his father would not allow him to continue with Echanis and I trained with him for a year and the only reason I stopped after a year was because that's when he left and went to Nicaragua to train Somoza's body guards and subsequently he was killed there, him and Chuck Sanders but it was an interesting year it taught me a lot about actual real close quarter combat so it was it was great and the other thing that used to happen a lot I had there are too many stories that count because it was such a regular occurrence as we used to have what was called the 13 month Korean wonders I don't know if you know or not but when you get stationed in Korea it's a 13 month tour, you're there for 13 months before you go there most guys who are there with no martial arts training so you piddle around for the first 2 months and you decide if you're going to go study so at this point you have 11 months left. 11 months either you come back to the states black belts in hand with the legitimate certificate and the first thing you want to do is go visit a school and test your skills and this happened weekly. Sometime they wanted to fight my father, most of the time they were very disrespectful that sometimes they wanted to fight him sometimes they



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wanted to fight one of the other person, one of the black belts in class closer to their weight or whatever but the outcome was always the same. And those were they were actually quite comical to watch because it was really, really sad because they thought because they had the certificate in hand and this belt around their waist somehow magically the skills were going to appear. Yeah unless you're some incredibly gifted individual you have a limited number of skills in 11 months so those were always entertaining to watch.

Jeremy Lesniak:

You know it's amazing to me that the birth place of a martial art would hold back on teaching to respect the integrity piece in favor of teaching the movement, it's a shame.

James Faralli:

It's all about the money

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yes

James Faralli:

You know it's an embarrassment for me it always has been and I'm 20:33 step one any toes here but it seems our art the Korean are the worst violators and I really, I don't mean to say that but it's renowned that they believe Korea's second degree black belts and get off the plane here as 7th degrees. and you go to any major city in the US, pick up a yellow pages and in every city there is a 62 or 63 national Korean champion in every city and then it comes in to the exorbitant I went to a school one time to visit I couldn't believe what I was hearing and he has testing fees worth \$5000 which is just incredulous to me especially since I don't charge money from my students anyway but and some you know if you're 21:24 this as a business I get it but there is a point where it becomes absurd too. I mean how many little 21:30 out there whose parents can afford to pay 5000 on testing fees.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Right and how many of them should

James Faralli:

Exactly, exactly so it's a sad state of affairs in that respect. It's going to be curious where things go there were a time we thought okay things can't get worse than this and they have but you know I could, I'm



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kind of a dinosaur you know Nicolai my son `kind of laughs he had to help me here with the Skype I'm not at all computer savvy, very I'm a dinosaur but I'm actually proud to be one, I'm buried in the past I live my life you know with a certain amount of discipline and respect and that's kind of the world I choose to live in.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Sure, hey no judgment here I come from an IT background and there are many, many days I wish I was a bit of a dinosaur when it came to technology. Outside the martial arts you know I'm not sure how much space there is for that, you know it's clear how passionate you are. Are there other things that you enjoy?

James Faralli:

There are one time permits I'm very, very passionate and again it's something my wife and my son we've done together for many years I really enjoy motorcycle riding I'm very, very passionate about it, it's the it's a wonderful stress relief Nicolai was a hero in his high school he got a brand new Harley Davidson for his 17th birthday and so that's something we really, really enjoy and I was the most 22:58 dog trainer so I still enjoy working with dogs just for the fun of it again it's I have a job so I don't really need to pursue the dollars in that, so it's just for the fun.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Sure and

James Faralli:

Our life is mainly taken up by the martial arts and we like it that way.

Jeremy Lesniak:

On behalf of the others listening that may ride what do you ride?

James Faralli:

I have a 2015 Indian Chief which I think 23:23 for many years but I think it is the, it's the best bike I've ever owned and ridden from an engineering stand point and it looks I 23:34 on 1955 which is what I love the most about it and my wife is, we're house divided she rides a Harley Davidson my son rides an Indian but he's had Harley Davidson too we are a house divided in that respect but I absolutely love it.



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Jeremy Lesniak:

Well as someone who rides and does not ride cruisers I'm still a little bit faster a little bit more bent forward than you are on my bike, I do.

James Faralli:

And my wife rode a Hayabusa for years.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Wow.

James Faralli:

I don't think she ever went over 80 miles an hour, she rode it because she liked the way it looked. And she's a 6-footer with a 37 inch 24:15 so she can ride anything very comfortably and not intimidated by the weight or anything.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Wow, yeah, my feet will not touch the ground on a Hayabusa, a good friend of mine has one I've tried.

James Faralli:

Yeah, I would, when I would mess around with her and I would be on my very tip toes, I'm not, I'm not, I'm a little vertically challenged.

Jeremy Lesniak:

So, we heard about some, some darker times you know fortunately not, not too lengthy at least in the way that you told it when you were a child. But I'd like you to think about a time after you had started training you know that you had some some martial arts context for life. And about something that you know maybe went haywire and how you were able to reflect or use your training to get past it.

James Faralli:

Well I've said probably the major thing was I was in an explosion in the Middle East in 1982 and 17 months in the hospital makes you reflect a lot and but it also put me in a, unwittingly, it put me at a cross roads as far as that I continue in a sport mode because I love the competition, I won over 70 grand championships. I won the battle of Atlanta which at that time the premier tournament in the US. I won



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the US open but it put me that, once you real, when a thing like that happens it's the decision is taken away from you whether I want to devote my time to sport or to traditional martial art. That injury that I have a 25:49 knee on the right side and my back was broken several places, my neck and I've always been anyone who knows me knows I've always been a, kicker. I pride myself on my kicking techniques, my side kick straight up. Even at 56, so I had, having to make that choice and the choice is taken away from me but in retrospect it was the best thing because I'm, I made the right choice. I think for the, for a career to continue in Taekwondo it would have pushed me in to a commercial venture and I'm glad I didn't go that route.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah, I'm glad as well. Let's deviate a little bit from you know we're let's talk about competition, you just mentioned competition there so tell us a bit more about your time competing and what really drew you to it because you were, these are local tournaments in middle schools that you're talking about these are the biggest of the big.

James Faralli:

Yeah we were very into the tournament when I was kid growing up in Fort Bragg and North Carolina had a very active tournament scene so a lot of there are local but then as I got older, I wanted to compete on a more, on a grander scale and just by virtue of circumstance since I came here from Germany I always lived in the deep south just by virtue of circumstance and you know the upside of that was some of the biggest tournaments you know the Battle of Atlanta, the US open which at that time was still in St. Petersburg before my 27:20 bought it and put it at Disney so they were you know they were only a few hours' drive so it was really the main you know motivation to being able to go to this tournament. The first time I traveled to a tournament was when in 1979 when the National Taekwondo Championships was held in LA and I took my commander gave me he time off cause it was a big boost you know publicity wise to the military and me and my father we flew one that flight which was a military transport plane because we couldn't afford commercial flight so we hopped one that flight to LA but that was the first time I had ever traveled I had always, I had wished that I could've competed in Ed Parker's International which back then in the 70s and 80s, 60s, 70s, 80s was he premier tournament to win and it was my, a lot of that was because of location you know I was in LA basically and so anybody who wanted to be in the martial arts film industry or anything like that flocked to LA and so you had the cream of the crop of martial artists there and I would've love to competed there but I didn't, most of my competition group you know in the East coast and South East Coast and I enjoyed competition very much and I was a very successful tournament fighter but my real passion was forms competition. And I still love forms and it translates today hapkido doesn't have forms but I'm much stricter on my students for kicking forms for stances, I'm very, very strict on it so form is primarily my main focus in any technique that they did. So, the competition I got that from competition I realized because in forms



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competition you know you can't score a lucky point. You're out there by yourself on your own merit. So, it teaches you a lot about yourself and it taught me over the years I love having ex dancers or ex gymnast students because they understand the concept of form before anything so that it was very good too in that respect. But I don't I also at the same time don't miss it that was that phase of my life. I was a young lion so I was 23 years old when the explosion happened so my career ended at a very young age, a relatively young age but I don't really miss it because it forced me to focus on teaching which is my true love.

Jeremy Lesniak:

So, if I was to ask you who the most influential person in your martial arts would be that's a pretty obvious answer we've heard about that man pretty powerful stuff there, but who would be second on that list?

James Faralli:

Oh that's a very easy answer to me that would be Grandmaster Doctor He Young Kim and out of Louisiana actually just after 40 years in Louisiana he just decided he wanted to move to Atlanta but he was one of the first hapkido instructors in the United States and he is written I don't know if you know or not but he has written a series of 9 books each one of those books is over 700 pages very large book, glossy paper, the books weighed 10 pounds each and just thousands upon thousands of techniques and he's always been very friendly to me and my students. I respect him definitely more than any other Korean instructor that I know and he was able to carve out quite a niche for himself and that which is what enabled him to publish those books because they're very expensive to publish and he sells and you know for \$130 which hardly covers the cost of them in their production but he was able to finagle himself years ago he got a position as a Dean of Andrew Jackson state college in Baton Rouge and even more importantly was able to get hapkido entered into the curriculum of the college so students would go in there by the time they graduated 4 years later, their official degree was a degree in physical education but the culmination of that degree was a test of their first degree black belt. So he's a very influential man he's a very humble man we just train together at Tom Gordon's Korean martial arts festival which is every April it's a fantastic event you know everyone that you read about in the magazines cause my students are relatively isolated here in Daytona and since hapkido styles don't compete that's one of the few chances they get to meet other martial artists it's a wonderful event but he was, this was the second year that he was there and hadn't seen him actually in 20 years and he's 77 years old now so I'm very, very fortunate that my students got to meet and train with him but he is very, very influential in my life and his books hapkido, hapkido 2, Kuk Sool, and philosophy of masters are required purchase for each rank of black belt and virtually to 4th degree black belt as part of their testing fee are his books. So, he is just a wonderful man I have a tremendous amount of respect for him.



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Jeremy Lesniak:

There are plenty of people who have written books on the martial arts but I don't, I don't know that I can name anyone who has written 90 pounds of martial arts books.

James Faralli:

Yeah, it's unbelievable, the quality of books and the photographs I mean it's just, it's hard to believe that the books you know would sell for \$129 it's just amazing to me just in the financial cost of producing the book itself, not counting the writing of the book but just the production of the books, it's just amazing to me.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Sound like an impressive man.

James Faralli:

He is, he is and he's a very humble man.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Now if you could train with someone that you haven't and that could be anyone anywhere I time alive, dead doesn't matter who would that be?

James Faralli:

I'd have to give that some thought I didn't realize you were going to throw that you haven't trained with because my answer was going to be my father just to get, just to have him back for a little while I felt like there was so much more that we had to accomplish and he died at a point where my son hadn't been training all that long so he didn't get the benefit of his knowledge and his skill and his wisdom because he was taken from us so young. So that would be my answer but saying that I haven't trained with man that's a tough one. There's a lot of martial artist that you know I have a lot of respect for but I, if it weren't for him I think I would've love to spend some time with Yong Sool Choi who is the founder of hapkido, I would like to have spent some time with him because he had an in, his life was an interesting story too he was taken by force from Korea to Japan of course to be a servant within the Japanese occupation in Korea but at the same time was taken in by Sokaku Takeda who was at that point the Grandmaster of 34:02 so he learned, he eventually started to teach him and he became his assistant so he learned aiki jitsu hand techniques, the throws and the joint locks and then when he did come back to



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Korea combined them with the Korean kicking techniques of Taekkyeon and 34:16 Hapkido so it's quite an interesting transition I would have loved if nothing else just to talk to him for a little while.

Jeremy Lesniak:

It, this is one of my favorite questions to ask because it forces people to step out of what what is and what they have done and consider you know this kind of fictional tangent to reality and I think it says a lot about what is important to our guests you know you keep talking about having a conversation, you're talking about your grandmaster your father and unfinished work and wanting to connect your son with him more you know it's I think just looking at that a lot says who you are it just kind of my observation.

James Faralli:

Although his death wasn't, it wasn't exactly sudden he hid the illness from us because at this point we were living in Florida and he was still in North Carolina he retired at Fort Bragg he had a house there and I used to take my students up there every 6 months to train with him. 35:20 in the car and another funny story there was, I'm always blessed with the financially poorest students on earth so we would, it was an 8 hour drive so we would pile in the car here Friday night at midnight drive all the way through the night at Fort Bragg get there at 8 in the morning stop by at Hardee's or Burger King for breakfast and then go train for 4-5 hours, take him to dinner and then do the 8 hour drive back so we do this thousand mile run plus training in 24 hours so it had been a few months that we were almost due to go back up there and he was very, very sick and then we finally got the call that he was much sicker than we thought so my wife my son and I immediately we've dropped everything that day, got in the car drove through the night to get there and I was shocked, my father in his prime was 5'10", he had a 59 inch chest and a 34 inch waist he was just like, he looked like a black Lou Ferrigno just massive massive man and to see him fight and move 36:21 jump kicks were phenomenal but he was this big man when we got to the hospice center we're walking in the hall and I looked in this one room and I see this little man lying on the bed and then we kept walking and it dawned on me that was him. We walked into the room and he was probably, he was 260 pounds he was probably 120 pounds and I cried like an infant, I cried like a baby and it took me a while to compose myself and he, you know he the smile never left his face he wasn't on any pain and that's when we sat down and talked and like I said my wife was there and my son was there and there were 3 of us 7th degree black belts he had 3 7th degrees and I thought one of them like I said Grandmaster Jim McMurray in Texas was the assistant when I was the beginner and I knew that one of us three would be the new Grandmaster in the American hapkido 37:14 and I thought I would be one of them too and then he told me he wanted me to take over although it was a great honor, it was also a great burden and I've 37:22 this is a hard job, this isn't a job I asked for but he asked me to do it and so I take it very, very seriously but it is, it's a lot of worry, it's a lot of work and it's a



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heavy responsibility and I think my son knows one day this will be heaped on him as he sees how hard it is but it was maybe it was probably the hardest day of my life it was also..

Jeremy Lesniak:

And certainly, that's not a circumstance that is unique to you, and I don't say that to take away any of the pain or but I know there are folks out there who either have been part of this happening or maybe you know things were handed down succession plan is not something that we discuss often in the martial arts so I'm curious if you don't mind sharing are there things that you've done to prepare your son for stepping into your role?

James Faralli:

Oh, I think so, I'm very, very hard on my son but at the same time I couldn't be prouder of him. Yeah, this Saturday will be his 28th birthday, he's a master instructor it took him longer than other people. I held him back slowly on ranks through the years. But he is a martial scholar, he is in chiropractic college my wife is a professor, a chiropractor, she's also a chiropractor but she's a professor at a chiropractic college so he is in this first quarter of chiropractic school. It was 3-and-a-half-year school but is still a very, very and that's a hard program and it's, but he's still a very, very focused martial artist. He's never done a drug in his life. It's just he's constantly, he's opened a new world for me as far as the internet goes cause he's constantly sending me videos and things like that, things that I don't even know existed or films that I didn't know were around. He sent me one the other day of Grandmaster Bow Sim Mark, she's in Boston and I have a picture of her 39:27 competing against each other in forms, weapons forms in the 70s. Well a lot of here will know because of the difference in names. She is Donnie Yen's mother, he played the Ip man and 1, 2 and I think there is a third movie? He played the Ip man and he's done very well as a martial arts actor that's his mother and I didn't even realize that 39:49 some of these videos so he's constantly researching he is well prepared and going to be even better prepared and I've got a great group of black belts there incredibly dedicated: Brian Freeman, Karrie Smith and Brian Rodriguez they are incredibly dedicated because I'm, I put a lot of demands on my students. I will ask a history question on Japanese Kyokushin Kai Karate in the middle of class. I'll ask some of the history question and a wrong history answer and you know these, they are studying hapkido but a wrong history question is 100 push-ups. So, I put a lot of demands on them, they, it's important to be a martial scholar. I think you can teach anybody a front kick and reverse punch but it's important to be a martial scholar. I feel my students should be able to go to any school of any style, visit there respectfully and before they walk in the door at least the basic understanding of what that style is about, the basic premises of those styles. So, I'm very and that's even the white belts. I'm very, very hard.

Jeremy Lesniak:



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That is hard, that's a high standard but one of my favorite sayings is that people are like gold fish they will grow to the size of the bowl that you put them in.

James Faralli:

Yes, they will.

Jeremy Lesniak:

So, I'm sure you see a lot of them rising to that occasion trying to reach that.

James Faralli:

Oh absolutely.

Jeremy Lesniak:

That expectation and I'm wondering maybe if you wouldn't mind sharing some those photos with you and Bow Sim Mark...

James Faralli:

Oh sure.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Listeners, especially recent listeners of this show will remember that out episode 212 we had one of Bow Sim Mark's students - Sifu Jean Lukitsh.

James Faralli:

Really

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yes, I've managed to make contact with her and a few other that were in that world and some things that aren't formed well enough that I can release them on the show but I can tell you once we're done recording. I'm not too far from Boston so we just kind of.

James Faralli:



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41:46 you're on the East coast

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah, yeah I'm in Vermont so we just kind of leave it at that I'll let our listeners wonder, that drives them crazy.

Sure.

Jeremy Lesniak:

I have fun doing that, yeah some of those photos would be a lot of fun. I enjoy that history as well. I can't say that I could step into any school and answer history questions on any style but I like that idea, the idea of a martial scholar. You mentioned movies, you mentioned the Ip man films. Do you enjoy martial arts movies, is that something that you know, the time that you started martial arts and you know it's kind of the heyday of the Kung Fu film.

James Faralli:

Oh my god we used to, it was from Fort Bragg down town to Fayetteville was 14 miles and we were you know, we weren't licensed drivers yet me and a couple of my friends and including my best friend we would ride our bicycles down on Saturday we had class from 11-3. Saturday classes 4 hours and then after class we get on our bicycle drive to 14 miles downtown Fayetteville and there was a street called Hay street which was, although our junior high school's at the end of this street, that street dead end into our high school, the street itself is nothing but bars and hookers and it was a really bad street but there was a theater down there that will play this continuous loop of really awful Chinese kung fu movies and back then it was a dollar to get in then just, you could sit 43:13 and it would start all over and we would sit there half the night watching this film and we did this every Saturday. But generally as far as martial arts movies go not martial arts movies per se there are only so many ways they're doing something under the sun before it gets old but there are a couple of movies that I never get tired of and I actually make them required viewing for my students one is the Challenge, it was done in 1982 and the star is Scott Glenn, the one who starred in a lot of movies you know Silence of the Lambs and Urban Cowboy but yeah it was him and Toshiro Mifune who was regarded kind of as the Japanese John Wayne and the great thing about the movie is it shows the difficulties the Americans have adapting to respect the obedience and discipline of an Asian martial art. So it's a great illustration of that because he resisted in the beginning you know what a foul mouth and a foul attitude and then comes around and the other one of course is the other film, there are many films that I make require viewing for students, the other one that really strikes on with me is the Last Samurai even though I'm not a great Tom Cruise fan, the story line is phenomenal and he did a great job in it so those two films I really enjoy and I never get tired of watching them and you wouldn't necessarily call them martial arts movies per se.



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Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah not in the way that we typically think of them it's there's, I haven't seen the Challenge but the last samurai certainly has a plot 44:43

James Faralli:

You have to say. the challenge

Jeremy Lesniak:

I'll check it up.

James Faralli:

It's as good as last samurai and then of course, Billy Jack is you know 44:55 that was the first film that ever displayed hapkido, first western film to display hapkido and that was it was a great great film done one you know one talk about a shoestring budget but the part fight scene in Billy Jack is still considered today by many people as the greatest movie fight scene ever filmed and the reason that was, was because Bong Soo Han spoke basically no English so he had these stuntmen who weren't professional stuntmen they were local town students in Scottsdale Arizona but in the film they volunteered to kind of be stuntmen well they weren't prepared that he was going to kick them and kick them full power. So, he broke a couple of jaws he dislocated a couple of shoulders that's why it was so realistic.

Jeremy Lesniak:

It was real.

James Faralli:

Yeah it was a phenomenal fight scene and of course the movie was so controversial at the time because the Vietnam war and racism and things like that there was a, it stepped on a lot of toes so but it really opened the doors for hapkido in America.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yes, Yeah, we did an entire profile episode on Billy Jack because it's such an important piece of martial arts culture. It really is the first modern martial arts movie in the United States.

James Faralli:



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And today the highest grossing independent film of all time.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yes, I do remember that.

James Faralli:

Yeah.

Jeremy Lesniak:

And of course, one of the greatest lines of all time I'm going to put my tick my left foot and put it on and whop you on that side of your face. Right who doesn't love that line if you've seen that movie.

James Faralli:

Absolutely.

Jeremy Lesniak:

And if you haven't seen that movie, you have to and of course good time to mention the show notes whistlekickmartialartsradio.com all the things we talked about and photos and all the other bit stuff goes over there. If you want to check those out later, I hope that you do now you mentioned movies how about actors, is there anyone that when them you say that person.

James Faralli:

I was it's, it sounds almost like a cliché but it would be Chuck Norris and but the reason I picked Chuck Norris is because of all the actors and you know martial arts personalities out there he was a true world champion you can't take that from him. It wasn't an imagined title but more importantly than that he has never done anything on film or in his personal life, in his real life to discredit the martial arts or embarrass the martial arts or himself. He has held himself to an amazing standard all these years and that gets my respect and he wasn't the greatest, he's not the greatest kicker, didn't have the greatest flexibility but he's martial arts techniques were very, very good and he always you know, he's always been shown in a positive life because he's lived his life in a positive light. He never embarrassed himself in anyway, it's a reminder that I'm not a huge football fan but somebody that comes to mind in football is Emmitt Smith of the Dallas Cowboys. He had an unbelievable career and never did anything to embarrass himself, his team or his family, nothing. No scandal.



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Jeremy Lesniak:

He was a class act, I came up when I was a boy. I was a big 49ers fan and of course anybody that may remember the 90s it was the 9ers and the Cowboys for quite a few years. And yeah you had to have respect for Emmitt Smith and you know Chuck Norris was no slouch in the ring he doesn't often get the credit he deserves and as good as he was you know the era he was in, he held his own against John Lewis and Bill Wallace and these other absolutely amazing names.

James Faralli:

Absolutely, you know the other one of the other great kickers of the era was a man that didn't get a lot of limelight or attention was Skipper Mullins from Texas and he was very long legged and very thin and he was a phenomenal kicker but you know the first time Chuck Norris entered the ring and scored with a spinning back kick he was just gassed, you know it was just wasn't done. It was primarily a Japanese art then and it was front kick reverse punch or leave like side lick and you know he does this spinning back and people were just amazed. You know his skills were real and phenomenal but he was you know he never had the flexibility, say Jean Claude Van Damme, he never had a straight up side kick things like that, but it doesn't take away from his ability at all, at all.

Jeremy Lesniak:

No, no.

James Faralli:

That I could never distract from his abilities, you know he was a true fighter, he was a gentleman in the ring and fought anybody there was to fight and beat most 49:31 there was to beat at the time.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Now books you mentioned books and just to kind of loop it into this section, the gentlemen would be hapkido books that you mentioned before, what was the name of that series or at least his name.

James Faralli:

The author is Doctor He Young Kim and the first book he wrote it was just titled hapkido and he wrote these as curriculum for the students that enrolled in the physical education program at Andre Jackson State College that's how it all came to be and then everybody wanted these books and so then he wrote Hapkido volume 2 and that he wrote Kuk Sool because at the time in 1975 till about '79 him and the grandmaster of Kuk Sool and Hyuk Soo they had attempted to unify hapkido and kuk sool 1 because the



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2 arts were so similar the only difference being Kuk Sool had forms and so for a time Dr. Kim was secretary general of The World Kuk Sool Association and then they split around '79 when they decided, it was a power struggle and they've decided it, it just wouldn't work. But back then we were called Kuk Sool hapkido for a time and so the third book he wrote was while he was serving as a Secretary General of the Kuk Sool association it was call Kuk Sool again 700 pages then the 4th book, it's the f4th that I require for my students is called the Philosophy of Masters and it's just a 700 pages of Korean Philosophy with wonderful photographs and then he wrote, he created his own organization called Han Mu Do and had a Han Mu Do text manual then he wrote history of Hapkido and Korea that the title of the book and again it's unbelievably and death of my father was mentioned in it and then he wrote this definitive work the last work was that's just called Taekwondo and yeah just a wealth of information but I have several hundred books, I'm a voracious reader and back when I first started training I felt it necessary when I got a book to put the date inside of the cover when I bought it and I was looking the other day that first book I ever bought I've written inside of it December of '72 and that was by Duk Sung Son that was called Korean Karate which was one of the first books written on Taekwondo, that was my first book but I have a hundred, I'm a voracious reader.

Jeremy Lesniak:

What do you like about martial arts books? It's this quietly polarizing thing it seems in our world.

James Faralli:

Well I tell my students because Hapkido especially I mean I love all the martial arts and I glean something from every martial art that I come in contact with but what I love about Hapkido is the art is so fluid and because of the 52:26 and the details in Hapkido techniques and I have one student comes to mind I have a student right now that's 250 pounds he squats 800 pounds he's just a beast he's in chiropractic college that's how he came to me and he's just a beast he can, I think he can lift a car you know just a beast but I have made him squeal like a pig with a finger lock so it's a great reiteration and reinforcement but the thing about Hapkido is and a lot of martial artist like Hapkido whether it's Hwa Rang Do or Kuk Sool or Aiki Jitsu for example you can, that are great training tool if you're training but you could not learn Hapkido from a book if you weren't training at Hapkido because a book is static and a still photo so you can't see circular motion, you can't see the 53:13 in a static photo and then if you try to do it by a video you couldn't get close enough one the detail of where the fingers are, or this wrist lock or this pressure point so they're a great, great supplement and I insist that my students read but they're just that they're supplement.

Jeremy Lesniak:



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I agree, let's talk about your goals, you've got your organization you know we've been able to piece together quite a few things that you've got going on and we've got you know we know how the trajectory has gotten you to here but where is it carrying you?

James Faralli:

Well, my focus now is to prepare my son, there have been some amazing parallels in his life and my life for example I was born in the year the Berlin wall went up in the 54:04 Germany, he was born in the year the wall came down. He got his fourth Dan at the same age that I got my fourth Dan. He started training one year different from the age I was last started training so it's just some amazing similarities there, some amazing parallels but I'm trying, but now because I'm a little older and I hope a little smarter I can look back and see the kind of master I was at 28 and you know 15, 16 years training and realize some of the mistakes I made so trying to curtail some of those mistakes on him. Also, that Hapkido are our curriculum anyway we're very strict, very detailed curriculum every kick is learned in a particular order, every throw in a particular order so taking the curriculum and making sure to understand the inside out and we do a lot of things for our students that are different than a commercial school. Our black belt uniforms are custom made first in Korea, our black belts are custom made and custom embroidered I really feel, want my students feel like that they earn first degree black belt or higher it's really a special thing so those things have to be coordinated so he's at the age now, I'm starting to feel my mortality a little bit is scaring because my father was only you know 7 older than I am now when he passed so it's made me think that a little bit and it's very unexpected and very sudden so I want my son to be prepared so that's my primary focus and to have my students to reach the best potential skill level that they can. My entire focus is the well-being and the advancement of my students that's it and there are many other instructors that it's never really meant much to me when somebody says you know I have 500 black belts, I know I have 23 out of those 23, 6 reached master level and I'm very, very happy with that it just doesn't mean much to me that I don't know you would have, how you would have enough days in the week and enough months in a year to produce 500 black belts, it escapes me, it's also none of my business. So, my focus and my goals are relatively simple and that's train every day I mean I'm 56 years old I still get thrown, I fight them on the mat every day. I would never sit back and just bark out commands I train alongside my students. So that's just my focus is to get better than I am, I don't necessarily feel like I have I passed my prime, I think martial arts are a journey. When I was 28 years old, I was busy you know doing you know 540-degree jump spinning hook kicks and with my, I have a total knee one the right side now so it forced me to get better hands. So, my pressure point techniques and my joint locks had gotten better so I think it's just part of the evolution and but that evolution doesn't stop.

Jeremy Lesniak:



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I like that, alright no for the people listening if they'd like to reach you and you know what you've got going one out there, going to swing by your area could they drop in you know any of that kind of commercial time stuff why don't you let us have that.

James Faralli:

Yeah they can find us on the American Hapkido Alliance on Facebook my son and my wife both administer that a great deal so they can contact us that way they can contact us by telephone it sounds kind of antiquated but I have will pick up the phone I will answer and you know my phone number is 407-474-0989 my son's is 386-466-4414, we're always glad and we'd love visitors and anybody's welcome by the school you know come with respect but we'd love visitors and I have my students, I insist that my students visit other schools that are receptive to the idea to be respectful to learn about other martial arts it's very, very important again that comes out of the martial scholar thing that's very, very important that they visit other schools and see how the schools do things.

Jeremy Lesniak:

I agree, that's a subject we've talked about on the show not a lot but a bit to say it's important to round that out no one person has all of the answers.

James Faralli:

Absolutely.

Jeremy Lesniak:

This had been wonderful, I appreciate your time, I appreciate all the wonderful stories and the wisdom you've shared with us and I'd like to trouble you for one more thing and that's to send us out, send us out on a high note if you will.

James Faralli:

Well there are 2 things that I tell my students that I try to live my life by, one is to never put profit before principle because even if you win you lose. I don't begrudge who teaches martial arts for a living but I do begrudge people who sell the martial arts there's a big difference. So never put profit before principle and the other thing is I'm a warrior not because I would always win but because I would always fight.

Jeremy Lesniak:



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Hands down. Grandmaster Faralli seems like a wonderful person, I had a blast talking to him, his compassion, dedication to teaching really deserves recognition. Few people are able to move forward from the type of start that he had, that really just, that really stuck with me throughout the entire conversation. I'd venture to say his students are incredibly loyal and that was a lot of fun to speak with. I hope you enjoyed it as well. Thank you Grandmaster Faralli for coming on the show, over at the show notes page at whistlekickmartialartsradio.com you can find a number of photos of Grandmaster Faralli as well as a lot of fun stuff that we're including there so you definitely want to check that out. If you want to find us, we're on social media, we're @whistlekick pretty much everywhere you can imagine and of course don't forget martialjournal.com no hyphens or anything like that just martialjournal.com We look forward to all the wonderful content that all these people that we've connected with are going to produce over the next forever and we look forward to your feedback because we made this for you so check it out and if you got something that you'd like to add we want to know. I haven't mentioned the newsletter the few episodes so if you are on the newsletter list that's how we communicate with our audience the most, the most direct. Check that out, you can sign up at any of our websites except martial journal we're not going to do that there, that is not a whistlekick site, it's for everybody but at whistlekick.com or at whistlekickmartialartsradio.com you can find the sign up there get in on that newsletter we send out sometimes 3 a month not a lot just to let you know what's going on give you some discounts one 1:00:52 I'm going to stop talking now cause I want you to go on and do something great with the rest of your time today. Until next time, train hard, smile and have a great day.