



Episode 234 – Sensei Guillaume Erard | [whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com](http://whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com)



### Jeremy Lesniak:

Hello and thank you for tuning in to [whistlekickMartialArtsRadio](http://whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com), this is episode 234 and today's guest is another international one, a little bit of an accent but I know you're gonna be able to understand and I know you're going to want to stick around because it's an awesome story of someone who started life in one part of the world, moved to another part of the world and it's all because of love of martial arts. If you're new to the show my name's Jeremy Lesniak, I'm your host here for martial arts radio. I'm also the founder of whistlekick sparring gear and apparel, where we like to say we make the world's best sparring gear and we make some great fun functional apparel, accessories, new stuff always on the way and you can check out everything we're doing at [whistlekick.com](http://whistlekick.com). You can find the other 233 episodes show notes, photos, videos and so much more at [whistlekickmartialartsradio.com](http://whistlekickmartialartsradio.com). No hyphens, no spaces, no weird spellings or anything like that, we like to keep our domain names easy. If you wanna check us out on social media we are @whistlekick on Facebook, twitter, YouTube and Instagram. We're also hanging around some other places like google plus and tumbler and did I say Twitter, we're on Twitter? We're pretty much everywhere we don't interact as much in all of them but let's be honest not everybody uses every version of social media. Some of you may not use social media at all and that's why we have our websites, that's why we have email. You can email me directly [jeremy@whistlekick.com](mailto:jeremy@whistlekick.com). I still reply to every email I get, I love hearing your feedback, love hearing love letters not really not love letters, thank you letters. Yeah whatever the opposite of hate mail is, I get a little bit of that not too much. Our guest today has a unique and interesting story. He jumped from martial art to sport and then to martial arts again. Then he jumped to other side of the world. Sensei Guillaume Erard trained in Judo as a kid living in France but felt such a strong love for Japanese culture



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that he decided to live there. As a contemplative Aikido instructor and practitioner, Sensei Gerard has found his home in Japan so let's welcome him. Sensei Gerard welcome to [whistlekickmartialartsradio.com](http://whistlekickmartialartsradio.com).

**Guillaume Erard:**

Yes, oh thank you for having me.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Well thank you for coming on the show, thank you. We are, our kind of book ending the long edges of a work day because as the listeners may be able to tell you have an accent.

**Guillaume Erard:**

Indeed.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

You are not from right here you know you are not down the street, you're not in New York City or something but you're actually not from where they're going to think you're from.

**Guillaume Erard:**

No

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

At least not today. You know here and I have to be honest this is the earliest I have conducted an interview for this show and it's a completely different time there so here it is 6am on the east coast of the US and what time is it there and where are you?

**Guillaume Erard:**

Oh it's 7pm on the I mean I'm sorry I'm in Tokyo right now.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Yeah so here we've got our first actual interview coming out of Japan. We've had folks from Japan on the show but never someone in Japan and actually that's going to change we have someone else even lined up someone that actually you know. You may not even know that I'm going to talk to them but somebody that I'm aware that you know



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**Guillaume Erard:**

Alright.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

That's coming on the show in a couple of weeks.

**Guillaume Erard:**

Oh, alright leave the surprise [00:03:58.06]

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

We never disclose who's coming on before it happens just in case, don't wanna jinx it.

**Guillaume Erard:**

That's fair enough yeah yeah yeah.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Well I'm glad you're here I appreciate you coming on and I know we're gonna hear all about you, before we do it you know we always start in that kind of really simple obvious way but it gives us context for who you are and everything else we're going to talk about. How did you get started in the martial arts?

**Guillaume Erard:**

Quite early on, I think it was around the age of 6. In fact I didn't have much of a choice I think my mum just registered me in a Judo place and I started Judo from the age of 6 and then you know I got to like I started to learn about Japanese culture and all that and you know before I knew it I was hooked on more perhaps than Judo itself the whole Japanese culture is growing to you know sort of lifetime interests actually because after I stopped doing Judo the interest was still there and then I moved on to other martial arts so but it started like this. I mean you might not know that but in France Judo especially at the time when I was a child, Judo was huge like it was one of the you know the big three sports that you would do like, you would do soccer and probably basketball and then the third one was probably Judo and it still quite [00:05:33.01] in France so yeah that's what the, this was the way you know I mean a lot of my peers have started martial arts so then have yeah sorry

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

No go ahead



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**Guillaume Erard:**

Then after that you know doing Judo competing all that I grew a little bit tired of it. Two things the competition was not really for me like I don't think I have that in me that need to dominate someone so that was something I never felt too comfortable with. I was more interested in the you know technical aspect the old techniques and all but the end of the day the [00:06:15.25] you do was taught and done was very physical and you know you had your set of you know 3, 4 techniques that you would always do the same in competition and they would usually work and then there was something missing so I left Judo for a while. I went into something completely different, I went to water polo which I like because it was quite physical so I quite enjoyed that and after that around the age of 15 I decided to stop water polo and to do another martial arts so I mean I had that old [00:06:51.03] gi still from my old days and I thought I really want to put that thing on again. So, I remember I went home one night and said to my parents, I said look I'm gonna stop water polo and I want to start martial arts so you know my mom said means she's okay what do you wanna do I said I want to start Aikido and then my step father looked at me and he says oh really? I said yeah do you know about Aikido and said yes actually I do because my best friend is a fifth dan and you know from then that's when I started I went to see his friend the week after and registered I never quit since. The reason why I chose aikido because well I had done Judo and the big three's in France you know Judo, karate and Aikido but it seemed to me that everyone was doing Karate and I wanted something a bit more obscure and you know in Aikido we're wearing the hakama the white pants and there is quite a bit of practice with weapons like the wooden sword, the sticks and that looked quite you know mysterious to me especially at the time you know [00:08:02.06] at the time we didn't have internet and all that so it was more obscure so I thought okay I'm gonna try that and I looked at few demonstrations like in France we used to have that massive festival in Paris [00:08:16.24] where you saw a lot of the most prominent teachers in all martial arts not only Japanese demonstrate every year and I used to watch the Aikido demonstration by someone who's called Christian Tissier who's the highest ranked French practitioner who spent quite a lot of time in Japan as well and I'm very much in his footsteps in many ways. So, he impressed me very much and I wanted to do what he did so that's why I started basically.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Okay I wanna go to a time that you that I think that is a pretty important time in that timeline you just gave us and that's the point where you decided you wanted to stop water polo and go back into martial arts because the time in your life that that happened is not a time that most people choose to enter certainly not reenter martial arts at least in America I guess I can't speak to the rest of the world. But here in America when people join martial arts typically as young children and as they become teenagers, it is less popular here and then they will often pick it back up as an adult. What was it that you had remembered from your time in Judo that you missed that made you wanna try Aikido.

**Guillaume Erard:**

It's an interesting question, there are many things from within and without Judo. From within Judo I can remember you know as I said the Japanese culture thing that's a big thing, that's certainly the what



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underlies everything I do that culture and just the smell of the tatami the feeling of wearing the [00:09:59.07] gi and all these things I mean I did miss it. As far as why I stopped water polo is because it's the same thing as the competition I mean water polo in many ways was way rougher than anything I had done in Judo before and you know I never got really injured in Judo I did get injured in water polo so I was a bit tired of all that and you know there were days that competing element as well that I didn't like that much in Judo and I didn't like anymore in water polo so you know long way start in Aikido there was also the thing that as you may know there is no competition in Aikido at least in the Aikido that I do and that was very appealing to me because I had done competition for most of my life at the time I knew what it was and I knew what was good about it, what I didn't like and I made a constant decision to stop competing in other words I did not you know I made a decision not to have anything to prove to anyone is but myself from that point on because what does it mean to compete you know sometimes you win sometimes you lose. Does that make you a winner or a loser of course you can't you know qualify yourself in such way? One day you win one day you lose which I found it [00:11:18.16]pointless at the end and I figured you know I've got pretty stringent criteria and then expectations for myself and I think that actually higher than all other standards which are there and I thought you know I think I've got it in me to still go forward without the incentive of winning a title or something like that so that was part of it and again you know getting back to the Japanese culture the feeling of the tatami under your feet you know the I [00:11:46.04]the holding someone you know like a that one to ones and that sort of contact that was quite appealing.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

When you first talked about Judo, you said that you didn't have a choice.

**Guillaume Erard:**

Yes

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

What did you mean by that?

**Guillaume Erard:**

Well at that age 6 years old you don't really know what you wanna do or what you don't wanna do. Certainly, in France you are expected to do one or two sports at that age and I don't know I mean you know Judo probably seem like a good thing to do to my mom I don't actually I never asked her why she thought that Judo was better I did than you know putting me in the local soccer club. I reckon perhaps because she also felt like you know everybody was in soccer and perhaps there was something you know different from me a different path and I appreciate that I think and [00:12:45.27] really, I mean Judo is really another choice of mine. I grew into it but yeah.



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**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Okay now clearly in Aikido you found something that you love you're still practicing it now and you've mentioned the culture elements of martial arts a couple of times so I'm gonna guess that your move to Japan had at least some part to do with that.

**Guillaume Erard:**

Yeah and I mean you put it exactly right you know that some part in it. There are a lot of people assume that I moved to Japan because exclusively of Aikido which is not true at all. I went to Japan because of Japan because I thought you know you are studying a Japanese cultural property you know the Japanese they call that [00:13:39.01]. It's the intangible cultural property it's an item in Japanese culture and to me I couldn't see how you could get really deep within that subject if you did not study Japanese language and study in Japan. Now in many respects there is lots to learn abroad I mean we know like US and France are probably the 2 first countries perhaps with Brazil where you know budo got exposed [00:14:09.25] so we got pretty long lineage in very very competent teachers but there is sometimes a little cultural elements missing and that's what I, I want to get that element as well so that was certainly a part of the reason why I moved to Japan but really since you know going back to my Judo days and reading you know magazines about Japan and you know every month you'll have a couple of Japanese words that you know they would explain to you and so on and perhaps even the little the country writing card or something and I thought you know I wanna learn that stuff in many ways. It's for some reason I have no idea why but Japan seem to be well my idea of Japan you know as inaccurate as it was at the time seem to be the right place for me to be in some in many ways that's what you know my goal in life when I was like 10 years old and so on I wanna become Japanese. So that was pretty strong drive.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

So, it's almost seems like the opposite of what I would expect for most people you resumed martial arts training because of your interest in Japan not the other way?

**Guillaume Erard:**

Yes, I would be dishonest with you if I didn't mention the martial aspect as well you know I believe and you know and perhaps this is just a bias on my part but I believe that you start the martial arts and many people start martial arts either because they want to beat up people or because they're afraid of being beaten up. If I see a lot of people doing martial arts and to me if they don't have that need to learn potential distractive techniques in other words techniques designed to harm a fellow human being. If you are willing to spend time learning those techniques you have to question the motivation behind it's not, you don't get that for free, right? You must be open to the question and you know I certainly the answer to me was that I was in you know 15 and not very confident person kid not very good at school either not much luck with the girls all that and much much insecurity and I felt you know I'm gonna [00:16:34.05] you know strong with that I'm gonna become a better person, a better person in terms of



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you know a stronger person and a more confident person that was a big big motivation for me I thought you know if I can define myself as a martial artist as this sort of you know like white pants wearing black belt thing you know that's going to project an image of myself that can live with so that was my part of the motivation. I didn't want to be the people but certainly I felt insecure enough for having that the drive in me to start the martial arts too. I think that's the significant part of it.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

You know I maybe making an over generalization here because I don't have a lot of examples to draw from but the folks that we've spoken to on the show that have found their way into aikido, the friends of mine that I have that train in Aikido that have not been on the show all seem to have a very similar story. There seems to be something about aikido that attracts and really takes hold of people [00:17:46.19] particular mind set and I just I find that interesting.

**Guillaume Erard:**

Well in a way you know aikido is pretty straightforward in its message you know that it is I mean a lot of them are like this it's one budo, one harmony in Japanese. It is not designed to beat people up, to attack people it is something associated with self-defense. so, I think it takes a certain type of person to actually start from that postulate where as I can see more easily you know karate or kung fu to be used for offensive means even though they are not designed for that but you probably get more of a mixed bag in you know in those school compared to aikido I think you know you sign up and you know where you're going you know where you're what you're getting into really, the message of aikido and its founder is its pretty clear. So, I think that probably explains that your assessment of the people who do aikido.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Sure, that makes sense. I think we've got a pretty good idea who you are, how you found your way into martial arts and now it's story time.

**Guillaume Erard:**

Alright

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Here on martial arts radio we love stories I love stories. I founded the show because I love hearing martial arts stories so I would love to hear your favorite martial arts story.

**Guillaume Erard:**



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You know a good friend of mine who you know who used to do aikido is an author of [00:19:34.00]. He told me once when we talked he said the most important part about my life should be my life as opposed with martial arts training and all that now I'm you know thinking about your question that makes me realize that in many ways in my life is you know intertwined with aikido, aikido is my life and my life benefits from aikido but my life doesn't rely on aikido but I think if you want a story I think this is the way aikido the practice of aikido has allowed me to make the most of my time as a human being and to end up now in a place where I am happy where I am and when I get up in the morning I am happy to go where I'm going and [00:20:24.28] that's been through aikido so in other words is the my whole life story which through my contacts the people I met through aikido the sort of state of mind that aikido has given me to have that sort of you know approach to situations that will yield the most such structural results without I must say conflicts without burning bridges if you don't have to and that kind of things so really my biggest accomplishment if you like is to have been able to stay somewhat truthful to that child's dream you know the child who wanted to become somewhat Japanese. I am not Japanese but I think you know I didn't disappoint that child and that's because of aikido I mean in many many ways I think that's the major thing without having picked up aikido at that time my life would be very different and I think it might be very good but it would not have been as truthful compared to the image that that child had of its own future. So that I think that's the most important thing, important story with my martial arts background. Now I could tell you about stories you know of you know little fights and things like that but I don't think there is much a good points in there usually you find that when you find yourself in [00:21:59.09] situations most of the time you have some bang in that situation and if you've been a bit smarter you probably wouldn't have ended in that situation.

### **Jeremy Lesniak:**

Okay sure, outside of martial arts what are you passionate about, do you have hobbies or things that take your time?

### **Guillaume Erard:**

Oh yeah I mean [00:22:22.11] I can't step on the tatami anymore [00:22:25.20] just the day where I'm just fed up too with the whole thing and there's so much so many thing that you know that I could potentially spend my time doing like I've taken up you know film making I bought a camera I had no idea where you'd use a DSLR or make videos but I really enjoyed it and to a lot of extent it's what made me somewhat known within the aikido community that I produce those videos and tell you those sensei and so on. So that's a big thing I love film making and I've got a bit of a musician in me as well so I also write music which you know is pretty convenient to stick on those videos and not getting you know copyright strike on YouTube so these are the two major things that I have hobbies that I have on top of aikido but you know I have like everything else in my life I try to merge these together and then what I produce in terms of contents for aikido kind of you know has all of those aspects of my personality in them they're very much you know perception of what I am basically.

### **Jeremy Lesniak:**





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Cool and of course we'll make sure we drop a link to your YouTube channel in the show notes.

**Guillaume Erard:**

Alright thank you very much.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

And anyone that's listening you know in the car or something you don't have to worry about jotting in down [whistlekickmartialartsradio.com](http://whistlekickmartialartsradio.com) is where we put all those so don't sweat no need to have to take notes while you're in traffic. One of the things that is maybe not unique but very pervasive in the martial arts is the ability to reflect on our training as we go through difficult times. I'd like you to tell us about a difficult time of yours and how your martial arts was helpful.

**Guillaume Erard:**

Ahh yeah interesting question yup. Many ways in a way that aikido practice, that's grounded me in all those periods in my life where yes sometimes you get rougher times and I have moved quite a bit as well like you know I left France when I was I don't know like 22 went to England to do my undergraduate studies then I moved to Ireland I did my PhD there. Then moved to Japan and even within the same country I didn't stay in the same city for more than a year or so. So yeah and many things change and the only, one of the only thing that stayed the same besides my family was aikido practice. Every single time I moved to a different place looked at the local dojos, went to all of them and register to one or two of them and that created a social circle, that created contacts and I got a lot of my you know support from that really [00:25:24.28] and whenever you know I was a bit uncertain about my life or perhaps I mean I don't know if depressed is the appropriate word, I think I'm never depressed but uncertain aikido was the thing I was you know I knew I had and the beauty of it is that this is katageko, kategeko in Japanese this is we all practicing through the repetition of form. In other words, there are certain number of codes, they can be etiquette, they can be the uniform, they can be the name of the techniques but it is also a major agreements between practitioners of aikido in which we are helping each other to improve. I am lending my body to my partner so that my partner can work on what they have to work on and you know 50% of the time it's the other way around. So, with that basis which is a mutual understanding everywhere you go in an aikido dojo, that's really the [00:26:17.26] fruitful relationships and a growth medium wherever you are even you know sometimes you get a bit less money sometimes you get you know problems with work or your studies but that remains I think it's largely due to that katageko and the lack of competition. You never have to worry about at some point having to face someone in a win or lose situation. We either both winners, we've had a good practice we've understood each other even if your practice is different from mine, it's my job not to be judgmental of it and it's my job to still give you a good way to develop whatever it is you're developing and that is once again mutually beneficial it you must be understanding of other people's technique and style and whatever and if you're not going to learn something from that style at least you must not be offended by what you see or what you feel in your body because your lending your body to your partner



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and that really I think changes you as an individual to be able to behave like that and let's face it in aikido and you know and many martial arts you can get reach proficiency pretty quickly, that is not what the character the do character Mich in Japanese the way that is not what the way is about you will learn the technique in 5, 6 years if you're you know competent enough and dedicated enough with the for the next you know 74 years after that what is it you're doing? And what you're doing is developing that Michi that do is the way you're doing the techniques and the way you're behaving so the difficulty is not in learning the techniques, it's staying open and being able to do your technique on anybody regardless where they're from and to receive the technique of anybody regardless where they're from and that's the major difficulty because we always run back to our own mothers and our own certainties and when we see something different we start to judge and all that doesn't work or that not the way it's supposed to be or blah blah blah and you know if you have it on YouTube on martial arts video in YouTube that's the whole situation exacerbates very very quickly and it's built in within aikido to try to go beyond that.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

One of the things that I appreciate and you articulated it pretty well there. One of the things I love about aikido, judo jujitsu, is that you can't do them by yourself.

**Guillaume Erard:**

Indeed yeah,

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

You are going to be a pretty poor judo player, a pretty poor aikidoka if you're doing it by yourself at home.

**Guillaume Erard:**

Oh yeah but same goes for karate, same goes for even the koryu the old martial arts they all this is the teaching method in Japan this is katageko. You do, it's a repetition of the form and a lot of the times actually two people you're not gonna get very fun karate if you work alone and I think that's pretty important. Now I am not that knowledgeable to be honest in all the martial arts so I'm not gonna you know go beyond my own level of expertise but that katageko is really the core of what you do in budo in Japan, that's really important and you know one other thing is that in budo the way we think of it then like in karatedo and aikido in a sunmodo and all those they are very recent right, they were formulated before or during the second world war within the very peculiar context and they have to change somehow to fit the times both politically and in the way that they pretty much use this in the battlefield and in Japan there is that same [00:30:07.22] which is the way of development as human being it is developing you as a human being, it's when you use the medium of budo of the martial technique and you get to do [00:30:20.16] what it is to be human and that's where concerns of efficacy and who is the best martial arts that really not only [00:30:30.11] but the non-pertinence they don't have a place in the



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discussion because that is not where budo were formulated for and to actually if you look back in history you'd be surprised to find that even the older martial ways the koryu also have that element in them of the betterment of human being and regardless of your style if you're saying that you're going to do the Japanese budo you must acknowledge this. You may have more or less martiality within in but if [00:31:04.29] you're missing the point of what budo is and that's true for aikido because it's probably more explicitly displayed based on the in old Japanese budo.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

I agree, I won't even reiterate it or attempt to add to that because you said it perfectly. I'd like to talk about your influences you know certainly your parents were pretty influential saying you are going to do Judo not giving you a choice and hopefully you would have found it and you know I tend to believe in fate at least to a certain degree so I'm gonna believe that you would have found aikido regardless of that and your first instructor you know and your instructor in Judo you know and your stepfather's friend who taught aikido certainly big influences in your life but if we were to name somebody else, somebody that might be on the fringe that was influential in your martial arts, shaped you into who you are now who would that be?

**Guillaume Erard:**

Are we talking about somebody who is not directly a teacher?

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

It could be a teacher, I'd like to pull out those obvious answers you know my first instructor if I say who was the you know if you were to ask me who are the most influential martial artist in my life was it would be my first instructor but that's there it's about the stories as you know so that's not really where the best story seem to come from so I like to cross those people off the list.

**Guillaume Erard:**

I see, okay there is someone and I have mentioned it before who is called Christian Tissier he came to Japan in the late 60s he stayed a good few years and went back to France and you know taught aikido and now he's the highest rank aikido practitioner in France and he was the one of the very very first non-Japanese to be awarded a 7th Dan and an 8th Dan by the Japanese and that person's been an example ever since I started aikido and I told you that. I watched his demonstrations on VHS and I thought oh that's what I wanna do and you know always thought oh he went to Japan and you know I lived in Japan and he can speak Japanese. I can remember one day I went to a seminar of his long long time ago and he just grabbed somebody by the sleeve and he looks at their name written in Japanese and says oh [00:33:49.12] now he can read Japanese that's so great ah so right then he was in the back of my mind. I was not a student of his at the time I was even actually in a different school and sometimes school's being schools you know I kind of you know I didn't tell my Sensei I was going to his



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seminars because it was a different school and you are not supposed to do it but I did I went nonetheless. I had his books and stuff and then always wanted to become you know one of his top students I want to be the next generation but for some reason that never worked out. I met him when I was living in Ireland of all places you know him being French and me being French formally met him at the time I was actually organizing a seminar and actually we had him over to Ireland and you know started to go into his group and to take his seminars take a little bit [00:34:42.11] for him and so on. But for some reason that affiliation never happened, first I was not living in Paris where he's teaching and perhaps he didn't see in me something that he needed which is perfectly fine but our paths have been close ever since because you know I live in Tokyo I practice at the world headquarters in Shinjuku very very often so whenever he goes we see each other and we've developed through the years that sort of relationship which is not a teacher student relationship even though [00:35:14.03]aikido is very very heavily influenced by his but not formally. I can't call myself his student but in many ways even though that's at the time I would have wished to be his student. I'd like to think that I'm a little bit, I'm a little more than that now. We got, when we meet it's not a friendship because he's much older than me so I wouldn't you know claim that friendship but it's not a teacher student relationship, it's something which basically is how would you call that it's a guide in a way intangible guide I follow many of his footsteps in many ways I'm very much after getting feedback from him when I do something or something I'm always interest to hear what he thinks about what I'm doing and in several occasions he's been very helpful to me even when as far as giving me or lending me his dojo for free one day that I was supposed to teach a [00:36:16.00] in Paris and suddenly the you know we lost the training all and he said that's no problem take my dojo and you know like which is a very very famous place in France and like nobody like me going to teach there it was like a big big thing, for me at least so really very very strong influence in a way guide and a standard as well but not really a teacher in the formal sense of the way I think that's the best answer I can give to your question.

### **Jeremy Lesniak:**

And those were the exact kind of answers that I hope for when I ask this question so thank you. It's clear that there's a lot of respect that you have for this gentleman and I could here as you were talking you know there was some reverence for his skill when you were younger but the way you're talking about him now doesn't, it sounds like your appreciation for him even as a martial artist is about a lot more than his skill.

### **Guillaume Erard:**

Yes,

### **Jeremy Lesniak:**

It's more about who he is. so can you tell us a little bit more about that.

### **Guillaume Erard:**



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Well he's one of the person, two things, he's one of their persons who've managed the best to come on an equal footing with the Japanese on their own turf in their own terms. It is easy to perhaps break off, start your own thing and be at the top of your own organization, he never did that. He stayed in Japan, he stayed with Japan [00:37:49.28] but always paid due respect to the Ueshiba family the family of the founder of aikido to the Aikikai which is the head organization in Japan of Aikido when he could really had the fame he had the number of students to break of on his own and do very well for himself, he never did that. He respected his house and to me that's a huge source of respect. I've seen a lot of people break off for good reason, bad reason, a lot of it ego driven he never did that and I'm pretty sure that's you know life has never, has not been particularly easy on him as well particularly dealing with Japanese people especially in the martial arts in Japan which are very very special in the way they deal with things they're very archaic in many ways. So yes, it is the technique or ability that is the fact that he managed to come to Japan, he learned Japanese in that time when it was a lot harder that when I came you know. He went to Japan by train you know it took [00:38:57.14] took forever whereas I can be back to Paris in 11 hours you know so yeah, I show a lot of respect and the fact that he did not [00:39:09.21] to the temptation I'm pretty sure that it happened of breaking off. It is easy to be a big fish in a small pond so that's harder to you know to keep you know working with the large group of people and accept the hierarchy. It's a big thing in Japan you cannot skip ranks and even somebody who's not as competent as you if they are your senpai, if you're senior they will always be your senpai and you have to deal with them with the respect that is due to a senior even if you're training harder, you're better, you're smarter it doesn't matter and that's a big sort of teaching for me so did you know you've mentioned it like culture is a huge part of what I do and I could recognize that culture within what he was doing and I'm trying you know to stick to standards that he set for himself for my own way.

### **Jeremy Lesniak:**

If you could train with someone that you haven't, someone anywhere in the world any style anywhere in time that can be alive or dead.

### **Guillaume Erard:**

Yep

### **Jeremy Lesniak:**

Who would you wanna train with?

### **Guillaume Erard:**

[00:40:24.24] We got a bit of an explanation so to answer the question I would like to meet someone called Takeda Sokaku. Takeda Sokaku was the teacher of Ueshiba Morihei the founder of Aikido. He was teaching a martial arts which was called a Daitō-ryū Aiki-jūjutsu and you know 99% of the techniques taught in Aikido are directly taken off the Daitō-ryū Aiki-jūjutsu curriculum. The Daitō-ryū Aiki-jūjutsu



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curriculum is much much more extensive, thousands and thousands of techniques but really there's a very strong affiliation there and you know, nobody understood what Ueshiba was doing. You can ask any of his students, there are still some who are alive and you'll get always the same answer, it was very hard to understand what he was saying, very hard to understand what he was doing I'm doing my best, okay. So clearly something got lost I tried to study with as many of the direct students of the O'Sensei those who are left that's why that's partly why I'm in Japan as well but I want to go further because of the culture and because of the history so I am also a student of Daitō-ryū Aiki-jūjutsu. I was lucky enough to be accepted to one of those schools one of the main branches of Daitō-ryū and I am able to study the older forms of Aikido in other words and to study the techniques that were not put in the aikido curriculum by Ueshiba either the founder or his son and by understanding which technique they put in aikido which technique they didn't put in aikido and the changes they made between techniques that I think give me an edge in understanding what was in the head of Ueshiba when he formulated aikido and of course you know what I really want to know is how did it feel to receive techniques from somebody who could actually throw Ueshiba like he was nothing in other words there is the whole concept of aiki in Japanese. It's sort of old and fussy concept but it's formulated quite well in Daitō-ryū so you know the past of Takeda Sokaku is quite unclear. Did he transmit a very old martial art or did he make it up? You know historians are debating, I've got my own opinion, it was why it was but what's really interesting is where did he get the skills the you know undeniable skills that he had, [00:43:18.05]and of course if I could have felt the technique of Takeda Sokaku I would have loved to perhaps I would have understood anything probably not I'm not smarter than anyone else but I would have liked to see how it felt. So that's the yeah you know since I moved to Japan I've you know I've studied Daitō-ryū so that is well it's gonna be 9 years now and that's really huge part of my study of Aikido as well, Daitō-ryū and Aikido together. You know it's a different time as well Takeda Sokaku was from samurai family he was much older than Ueshiba Morihei so he was really at the you know the bridge between old and new Japan. That man used to you know of course wear kimono and within his kimono he would have raise a blade just in case he would get attacked in his cane he would have a sword in his cane just to defend himself you know really much a man of the past. I would have liked to see you know how is a man from that time behaving talking and practicing.

### **Jeremy Lesniak:**

Are you much of a reader? You strike me of someone who would be consuming quite a few books?

### **Guillaume Erard:**

Yes, I mean you know I as I told you before I just moved houses and my book collection is ridiculous in terms of the number of boxes that I have to pack and stuff that I have to buy so yes.

### **Jeremy Lesniak:**

When it comes to martial arts books cause I'm assuming that martial arts books like make up at least a good chunk of your library, what kind of books are you reading?



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**Guillaume Erard:**

Anything I can get my hands on, in fact I am studying Japanese nowadays almost exclusively through old martial arts books. I go to a place in Tokyo near Kamba which has a lot of old bookstores and I'm after old books about you know budo and Aiki Jujitsu and aikido and all that and I'm trying to best of my ability to make sense of the articles you know with my dictionary [00:45:26.21] get the meaning of those so that's yeah that's a huge part. To give you one reference in particular it's a little bit difficult and in fact that could come as surprise you know I have my own you know I need to separate what is my own I would call I dare to call that academic interests in martial arts you know I'm an academic you know I'm a scientist but I know what it is, I know what good research is and I think I'm good research in aikido so I dare to call that at least informally in the way it's connected sort of somewhat academic research but you know as far as my favorite books these are not my favorite books they are necessary to what I do but you know favorite book you know there is one which was written which is called Angry White Pajama have you heard about this?

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Yes, we've talked about this book on the show.

**Guillaume Erard:**

I love that book it's I think that the author is called Robert Twigger is it? He came to Japan and you know he took up a program [00:46:34.29] is that the way they call it in there but anyway it's an instructor course one of the hardest you know budo programs in Japan and basically relates his history of moving to Japan living in very very harsh conditions and undergoing even harsher training. That's a different school of Aikido that's yoshinkan aikido but I really found the book really really interesting now of course the man is a journalist so I'm guessing you know there is a little bit of creative license behind it but I really liked the way it's put together, very very entertaining certainly whereas the books I read for martial arts are pretty boring to most people but me.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

What do you mean by that? Talk about that for a second.

**Guillaume Erard:**

It is a you know historians job and I was lucky because and actually it's a good opportunity to picture it to people who actually deserve credits like we wouldn't know much about we know about aikido and its history if it wasn't for the work of a few individuals one of them his name was Stanley Pranin who founded a journal which was called aikido journal and he was in Japan long before me and he's the one who really started it all like interviewing the old sensei, translating documents and 75-80% of what we know about aikido today is directly because of him. He passed away very recently sadly but we owe him



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a quite a lot and I have I was lucky enough to be in direct contact with him if not you know physically with him and quite a few times we've collaborated on a few things and certainly a big big influence although you know a few other people like you know Allesandrio or Peter Goldsbury lives in Hiroshima he's a professional, he's a professor of Philosophy at University of Hiroshima and you know very much an academic and I'm you know I'm really trying to adhere to those guys standards when I do what I do but it takes a bit of dedication but I was really lucky to have those people as models and still have some of them like Allesandrio, Peter Goldsbury, people that you know I really ask for advice whenever I'm looking into something and perhaps I'm lucky in a sense that I do get to learn the old techniques for real which I'm as far as I'm aware of my peers don't have that either don't didn't get the opportunity or choose not to take that opportunity so that's what makes the, it makes it very academic in nature, not very entertaining because you have to try to do the historians job of looking cutting through the you know the embellishments or the not [00:49:31.20] that's probably too strong of a word but the you know you write history and when you write history you write it's for your own understanding of it. You need to take that neutral stance which is what makes it a little bit tedious is that if you take that neutral stance you can't really enjoy it because if you start enjoying it then you run the risk of being stuck in to the narrative of whoever wrote the book.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Okay, how about movies I'm wondering if you have a different perspective on martial arts movies than some of our guests, so do you enjoy them?

**Guillaume Erard:**

I don't, I must admit that I don't watch too many of them, it's just because like it doesn't do much for me watching martial arts on movies I like doing it like I get you know it's like suppose you're watching sports I'd rather do the sports than watching it you know on TV. Now in terms of martial arts movies having the interest in cinematography in history and all that the obvious sense that comes with the movies of Kurosawa Akira you know Seven Samurai or Yojimbo or those movies which are on top of being interesting in the way that they describe archetypes of characters especially Seven Samurai but they describe them, they put them in the setting which is quite truthful in the time where the relationship go and then of course the cinematography of scope of those movies to me is so far equal so I go back to those movies quite. Interestingly my wife hates to watch those movies because the way they speak to each other is very rough and she won't let my son go anywhere near those movies because she doesn't want him to start talking like these but these are great movies and you learn quite a bit from them you know like we all have this image of the samurai like Tom Cruise you know with the wonderful hakama and kimono and so on but most of them butt naked and you know wearing they had and they could and see some more nitty gritty, it's more gritty than what it seems from the perspective of Hollywood and the nice thing is that Kurosawa was not afraid to show that that aspect of you know the gritty of like of a lot of samurai especially because he dealt with often with a period of almost the point of the Meiji restoration where the Samurai class was actually dying of that makes it a very very interesting period.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**





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Let's talk about the future.

**Guillaume Erard:**

Yup.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

I know you've got a lot going on you know it's because of some things that you have going on and I'm gonna let you speak on them that we were introduced to you and I appreciate what you're doing with YouTube and your other projects but where's your motivation coming from? Is it simply a love for the martial arts or is it more tell us about what you're striving for?

**Guillaume Erard:**

I'm an obsessive individual, I think I am excessive, I'm obsessive and you know my wife describe that she call that otaku you know the term Japanese term otaku which means somebody who's obsessively interested in something. So, I am from what she says I'm a budo on aikido otaku, I wanna know anything there is to know about it and I won't stop until there is nothing more to learn. But of course, because that keeps extending an interest which started with just plain aikido whether if you start the techniques of aikido went to 3000 techniques of Daitō-ryū and then the cultural ramifications the historical context where they were born and in many many topics so that's never-ending sort of quest but my goal of course is always to understand what aiki is. The concept of aiki which is in aikido and aiki jujitsu based on the as deep of knowledge as possible of the martial arts that came before that and to always whatever I do ground it into culture, that's what I want. Which is why one of my big projects right now, more immediate project is I am trying to get on tape the last living students of the founder of aikido and I've been pretty successful so far getting some of them. I still have a bit more work to do to go and talk to them and get their impressions before they're all gone. So, it's more of short term goal but that's, that's certainly something that takes a lot of my energy and time. Now meanwhile, I am you know I'm almost an actor in that thing I'm not only a reporter you know there is what I learn and there is what I understand and I teach that as well and my goal is to refine the teaching to really try to be a mirror of what aiki is and to give it the most you know the most direct representation of aiki as much as I understand it. But of course, I can only do a good job once I truly understand it which is far from the case. So indeed, these are huge goals of mine I mean they are insane goals but you know if you don't have those sort of overarching goals then it's very difficult to accomplish the smaller bits along the way.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Completely agreed, so tell us more about your projects and actually before you do that I'm curious. How many of O'Sensei's students are still left alive?

**Guillaume Erard:**



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Ahh it's a good question, you know you get the famous ones especially those that who went who moved to the west and started teaching, in America in France and so on and then it depends what you're calling a direct students. I've actually asked the question to one of those students and he says you know anybody who met Ueshiba and respected him can actually in his opinion is legitimate calling himself or herself direct student of O'Sensei so that's potentially quite a few people but of course [00:56:06.01] speaking and you know it is really high time to get that done. So, I'm expecting probably I have a perhaps 10 years in front of me before probably the last people who have actually did spend an extensive amount of time within will pass away. Just as you know it's quite a bit of work to do.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Sure yeah, sounds rather daunting but it seems like it's something that you're passionate enough about to devote a time and to actually bring it together.

**Guillaume Erard:**

Yeah, the amount of time I spend on it is ridiculous but you know it's just there is that drive that is there. It's hard to explain to people why I spend so much energy and time and money as well and especially to my wife but it's still you know it has to be done and it's and there are few things in life that you can say if I don't do it who's gonna do it? I don't believe anybody's irreplaceable but really in this case if I'm not doing it who is going to do it? Stanley passed away, I'm one of the only one who's still in Japan with the technical knowledge on you know how to roll the camera and how to you know record sound in a decent way. If I don't do it I'm afraid that it's not gonna be done. It's so much my choice in fact and you know in a way if there are some aspects of your life that you can say I have contributed to society in a way that you know not many people could have, you know it's a good life I think and if it's just my little you know hobby of aikido and the very few people that on the world scale that it interests it's still good enough.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

And if people wanna find the things that you're contributing, you're YouTube channel and writings how do people find you online? How would people get a hold of you, tell us all that.

**Guillaume Erard:**

Yeah so yeah my YouTube channel has got quite a bit of traction in last few years that's and you know for someone especially somebody who is not a specialist in aikido that's perhaps a good place to start because you've got the whole nice package to apprehend the art and then the different expressions of the art from different people, different people I interviewed, different demonstration that I shoot and then for the people who are a little bit more explains there is my website where I put my interviews in the longer format more in depth, I've got some articles which you touch upon pretty specific historical points, so that's the website is probably for people who are a little bit more familiar with the art. So, first



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route of entry would be the channel and then you know I've got Twitter account and Facebook and stuff like that but I found them the more of a waste of time but somehow if you want to get your stuff out you need to go through them and I appreciate that but I try not to spend too much time on it. So certainly, the YouTube channel and the website.

### **Jeremy Lesniak:**

Okay great and I really appreciate your time here today, you've been very open very honest and I thank you for all that. If I could trouble you for one more thing what parting words would you give to the folks listening?

### **Guillaume Erard:**

Well I think what I'm trying to get really is to get the interesting the context of the martial arts and the culture we work out I don't like the term working out and I believe that this should be something more because there is something more available in any martial arts so whatever martial arts you do it'd be a shame not to associate with the culture it's from. Try to absorb it, try to be like a sponge and you'll see that you'll look at the way you see things very differently and you'll reach depth that you didn't suspect where present so that would be one of the thing. The other thing would be like my old Daitō-ryū teacher is 86 or 87. He says that martial art they're like a tree and there are branches that go in all directions. Now we've been practicing martial arts started in the west for a long 60 years now 70 years. The branches have grown, the question you have to ask yourself is what branch am I on. Who do I owe my knowledge to and to which trunk is it leading and if you find roadblocks there is no more lineage then you get to start question what you're doing. It is perfectly fine for different expressions of a martial arts to go in different directions, it's unavoidable and as much as the Japanese try to preserve their [01:01:14.01] these change nonetheless they are not setting stone which generations of Soke or teachers of Shihan or whatever and that's desirable because the more the branches grow the stronger the trunk becomes. But it is very important that every branch stays connected to the trunk and it doesn't matter which direction they go. So always look back to your lineage who do you owe your knowledge to, is it a legitimate branch? or can you start questioning your branch not other branches your branch. That's the in my view that's very important and then you're more aware of the choices which are made by your teachers by your schools, you understand the [01:01:57.15] choices and the whole thing is a lot more [01:02:00.17] and clearer. Then if you don't understand those choices of his somebody cannot express them clearly to you then it becomes dogma and that's helpful I think and finally which is you know linking the two things together once again it's easier to be a big fish in a small pond how do you fair in the larger scheme of things? Did you go to other places to train do you cross train like do you are you able to see the qualities in what other people are doing. It's very easy to be judgmental and to say what you see as flaws but are you able to are you mature enough had you practiced enough to see the qualities in what people are doing, that could be another important advice.

### **Jeremy Lesniak:**



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I found Sensei Erard to be both insightful and contemplative about a culture that's so completely different from the one he knew growing up. His dedication in the martial arts helped him find his place in a foreign country. I enjoyed hearing that passion not just for culture but for his training and I'm glad he decided to resume training after taking some time off. Thank you Sensei Erard for coming on the show and inspiring us to go wherever our hearts may lead us. If you wanna check out the show notes with photos links all that, you can do so at [whistlekickmartialartsradio.com](http://whistlekickmartialartsradio.com), this is episode 234. If you wanna find us on social media we're all over the place @whistlekick. If you wanna email us, you can get to me directly at [jeremy@whistlekick.com](mailto:jeremy@whistlekick.com). If you just have some general comments, [info@whistlekick.com](mailto:info@whistlekick.com). We keep it easy. If you wanna check out the products we offer [whistlekick.com](http://whistlekick.com) is the place to do it. I wanna thank you for your time today, it means a lot that you all listen. Until next time train hard smile and have a great day.