



Episode 236 – Sensei Mikel LaChapelle | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com



Jeremy Lesniak:

Hey there what's going on thanks for tuning into whistlekick martial arts radio. My name is Jeremy Lesniak, I'm your host and founder of the show and today were joined by sensei Mikel LaChapelle. If you're new to the show, if you haven't checked out any of the other 235 episodes that we've got over it whistlekickmartialartsradio.com, why don't you head on over there check them out, find out about everything that we've got going on as a show or you can check out whistlekick.com that's where we have links to all of our projects, all of our products including our absolutely awesome sparring gloves with a much longer lifespan than you're gonna find on pretty much anything else. I will say anything else these things are fantastic, I'm still wearing my original pre-production hand cut pair from mid-2012 and its end 2017, so the gloves that I'm wearing a five years old and you know still comfy they still work.

Today's guest is a multi-discipline martial artist who's embraced everything from karate to Filipino martial arts. He's on a lot of training not only here in the united states but also internationally. His name is sensei Mikel LaChapelle. He hails from New Hampshire and we've got some mutual friends and it's because of another guest on the show that we connected which I'm really appreciative of, I love when that happens. And his journey into the martial arts started from watching a movie. I'm not gonna tell you what movie and rather than telling you his story all, I'd rather you hear directly from them so let's welcome him to the show.



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Sensei LaChapelle, welcome to whistlekick martial arts radio.

Mikel LaChapelle:

Thank you very much for having me.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Thank you for coming on. It's in honor of course you are a, I guess we can say referral. We had a past guest suggest that you come on the show and I don't know if that's gonna come up in our conversation you know, if not we'll shout them out later but I appreciate your time you know, just as I appreciate everybody's time and I'll say it again I've said it before I have one of the best jobs in the world. I get to talk to other martial artists about martial arts and call it work.

Mikel LaChapelle:

You do a good job. I think it's unfortunate, one thing that can never worked well is you can never have therapy for a bunch of martial artist cause they just exchange technique and information with each other. It will never be very useful in the end.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Well, maybe that is our therapy, right?

Mikel LaChapelle:

There you go.

Jeremy Lesniak:

You know the idea, we have a social media posted that pops up once in a while and it's you know your martial artist if you made a friend after hitting them in the head.

Mikel LaChapelle:

True. That's [00:02:43.19] my best friends from that.

Jeremy Lesniak:



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Exactly and it's something that we only seem to grasp within the martial arts outside you know maybe rugby. Rugby might be an exception.

Mikel LaChapelle:

I would say rugby might be another one too.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Those guys are kind of rugged. But were not hear to talk about rugby, were here to talk about martial arts. Maybe a little bit of martial arts therapy if we go there

Mikel LaChapelle:

Sure.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Let's go way back. Let's go back however far that's going to be, how did you start with martial arts?

Mikel LaChapelle:

Sure. I was like many people, I think 35 years ago I was on a trip and I saw the movie the karate kid out Michigan and just by chance my best friend who I've known since you are six years old, his uncle was a very avid martial artist and there was a wedding going on and we were very fortunate to have a gentleman named Ron fox who was a nuclear engineer, I still remember very clearly, and otaka from japan. And they ended up doing kendo for us and you know as young kids, how more exciting can it be than to have stick and whack your best friend in the head and be told its good. So, we started out kinda doing that, we were there for a week, we had a great time, they treated us very well, they did very big ceremony for us receiving a shanai and a kendo sword and we ended up coming back to New Hampshire and both of us try to find the fastest class we could get into for karate. Actually, that was kinda the popular art back in the early 80s. So, at around 11 I started looking at schools and there was a school probably about an hour and a half from my house and its traditional Okinawan school. It taught gojiru karate, and then, I was fortunate to find out the gentleman a little bit closer who taught ouichiru and shornu karate and I started out with, well at that the time it was renshi [00:04:31.23] and ended up going probably from age 11 to 18 I trained. The problem however was I hit my growth spurt really young and I was always put in adult classes whenever we had a kid's class, I was very tall for my age. So sometimes I had to reminded the adults that I was only 11 or 12 and not that I was 17 or 18 years old



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but it was a great experience and I get to study some very traditional arts with some very good teachers actually.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah, so of course you know the idea of get to do some kendo as a young kid I mean, that's exciting. I think we can all connect with that and say yeah, that makes sense even somebody who might not be interested in what we can call more traditional unarmed martial arts would look at that and say yeah, I want to hit my friend with a stick. But something about that, beyond the idea of working with the sword intrigued you because you came back and you didn't jump in kendo there is something in there that resonated even at a young age. Any thoughts on what that was?

Mikel LaChapelle:

I was, like I said I was a pretty tall kid being young and very quiet kid so a lot of older kids thought or expected more from me so to be very frank, I think a lot of times I was treated as an older kid and if I didn't react where they wanted to or they didn't get the kind of the maturity they were looking for they would sometimes try things to me physically, so I ended up for self-protection as well as just some confidence, I really thought that your karate would be the right thing or any marshal or the time, cause they didn't know a lot about the different arts, that would be a great opportunity for me. And I found that it was also a great way for me to spend time in a very productive way. As much of my job is currently. I'm a very much and I have to be on most the time, I'm working environment where I have to be able to speaking in a public realm, I have to work with adults and children but, the reality is I'm more of introvert than anything else and the martial arts allowed me to use that time to kind of spend a time by myself in a productive manner. And I have always been thankful for that actually.

Jeremy Lesniak:

As you're talking, you mentioned karate being the popular art of the time which kind of implies to me that maybe you've stepped off and you're doing some things other than ouichiru and goju?

Mikel LaChapelle:

Yeah gojiru, yeah, I definitely, like I said, I think I have been fortunate, I started out in high school like I said, I did ouichiru, gojuru and shonuru then I went to college I did shotokan and taekwondo. After college, I studied nimpo with mark Davis and jeet kune do with a guy named mike Perry. And I was very lucky, around 1995 I'm sorry, end of 1994, I flew and lived in south Korea for about four years and while was there I was teaching English as a second language but it allowed me to really study the arts kind of you know on the homeland. I picked up hapkido and kuksuruwan for my first year and then my teacher



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saw that I was pretty for proficient so he recommended judo which in Korea they call yudo, same symbol just different pronunciation so for the next four years I like literally six days a week, three hours every day doing hapkido, judo and kooksulawan. When I came back to America in the end of 98, beginning of 99, I continued with judo but then I picked up some Brazilian jujitsu. And I really fell in love with the Filipino arts of kali and I had a very good opportunity to study kali and silat for the last maybe 11 years? But for the last 4 1/2 years, I've been training under guro guy chase, who was fairly famous uhm studied under Dan Inosanto and living out there and get it under [00:08:23.48] for catch wrestling and so forth. But I've always had judo as kind of my art that I love to teach the public to work with kids. So, I kind of jumped around to go from the southeast Asian arts to Japanese arts to the Korean arts. Like I said I feel very fortunate to have a lot of different teachers and the opportunity to study these arts. It's been about 35 years now. So, I've had some pretty good exposure to say the least.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah, I think that's quite the understatement. You know folks that are used to checking out the show notes know that we will tag episodes with the style or sometimes styles that our guest will have and you know I've got quite the list for you. And you and even if we just focus on the things that it sounds like you've trained in for at least a year let's say. I mean, that's a long list that, there's a lot going on there.

Mikel LaChapelle:

Yeah. I've been very fortunate, I think the friends I've made have been very open about doing different arts and sharing the knowledge. For the last maybe 10 years I've been going out to California doing a thing called masters in the mountain and that's everything from guys doing MMA to tai chi to systema to whatever. And the first day we just beat the crap out of each other and the next they would just try to do a lot of healing. But it's been a very good bonding experience getting a different perspective it may sound strange but like the west coast mindset a little bit different than the east coast martial art mindset and that's always been kind of fun between the two groups talking about that. It's been a great opportunity, I have some teachers were all quite a bit older than me in their early 80s, late 70s you know they always call me their big brother jokingly because, I'm a pretty big size guy compared to some of them. But the things that we shared in the knowledge I've gained from them is invaluable, I could never trade that for anything in the world. And some of the things that I've learned about myself the fact is yeah you may think you're the toughest guy in the room at some point which I never have thought to myself that way but, watching I'm 76 years old and play mercy with a group of bunch of young 23-year-old guys and be the last one standing, you have to question sometimes you know, just that old-school mentality and toughness which has been it's been neat, it really has. I haven't been there the last couple years due to their, some of the illnesses the instructors I've had cause unfortunately age, no matter how great you are and how healthy you want to keep yourself up to be, it does sometimes catch up to you.



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Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah, yeah. The thing that we all do in love is not always easy on our body and it's...

Mikel LaChapelle:

Very true.

Jeremy Lesniak:

It's kinda easy to see that as we get older. Now I'm curious because a lot of us haven't had the opportunity to train you know, at a far just far away distance and certainly few of us I've have had that opportunity enough times to draw a comparison between the east coast martial arts attitude towards training and the west coast. We've had plenty of folks from both coasts and through the Midwest and all over the country and even the world now have come on the show, but you might be in a sort of unique position to compare the two and for those of us that haven't had those opportunities, how would you contrast them?

Mikel LaChapelle:

This is just my own personal experience I've had, the guys the west coast specially with Brazilian jujitsu guys, a lot of times are very laid-back and I think they also, due to the weather are able to train more consistently throughout the year. Here the east coast of course, with the changing of the seasons I think that there are certain times martial arts are great for indoor activity when the weather starts to loosen up a little bit everyone is to be outside as much as possible. So, the training may either change the environment you train or it may kind of drop off for that period of time. But the guys in the west coast some of the guys I've trained with they have a little bit more of an open mindset of, hey let's try different stuff lets you know, that's great, we did you just do, tell me little bit about that, while I had a little bit more difficulty in the east coast you know, being very respectful when I enter the dojo or dojang or going out a cheyoquan, whatever, I'm very careful to always make sure that I want to be sharing what I've been asked to share or making sure that I get very clear props to whatever art that's being taught that school. The west coast is not so much, I mean the guys give each other hard time at least in my experience about you know, they can kinda be honest about the areas of weakness in some of their arts and they'll ask to find gaps to how to fill it up. On the east coast, takes a little bit more time I think to make that friendship and establish that, it does happen but it takes over little bit longer period of time for these people little bit more, I won't say guarded, but just like in the new England aspect of living, you take longer to make friends but when you make friends, you have lifelong friends. That's just kind of my observation of the situation whether it is hundred percent true or not, who knows?



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Jeremy Lesniak:

Well, it's an opinion and that there are no there are no right opinions but I would say that based on my limited exposure and certainly folks that have been listening to a lot of the episodes of the show may be able to agree with me that that yeah, I mean, I think I'm right there with you. It's not always easy to convince a martial artist in new England that what they're doing is wrong to the point where it's certainly not something I go out of my way to do.

Mikel LaChapelle:

Yeah, I try not to do that, it's not usually what I thought.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah, alright. Well, that certainly gives us some ideas of who you are and how you got where you are and of course, any of us reading between the lines as I am, we're starting to build a picture about what makes you tick. But now it's story time. Martial arts radio is all about stories and you know really, we built the entire format around how do we get people to tell stories because I love hearing great martial art stories. If I was to ask you for your favorite martial arts story, what would that be?

Mikel LaChapelle:

My favorite martial arts story that's a tough one. I guess there's a couple, I guess I'll tell you one that actually involves a friend of mine and the stories is great because there's a gentleman named Sam and Sam is probably most unique individual I ever met my life. He is in his late 80s, he has 14 kids he you know, gets pulled over all the time by the police because is literally hitting himself with different types of metal getting the energy. Sam has written six books the last five years and you know, were talking late 70s and 80s. But as martial arts he studied extensively in Taiwan and he studied also with the William Chen for a long time. One of my favorite stories of Sam and I'll never forget this around martial arts was, Sam was actually in Nepal for many years and he was a guard at the embassy and was talking about you know, at that time he believed himself to be a just a tough guy. You know, he's late 20s, he's been doing different types of training, he worked with different types of special forces and he was, he thought of himself as really a badass to be very frank. And he said what ended up happening was there is a huge riot that broke out outside of the embassy and he saw that the people were carrying bricks and stones and sticks and stuff and he's trying to figure out what can I do? He knew he didn't want to use a firearm and he was in very clear orders that he was not supposed to. So, is this the situations are to get more volatile, Sam kinda thought about what can I do with this moment, what am I going to do? And someone threw a stone at him and he said it was like slow motion he saw the stone coming and he stepped out of the way and it kinda fell next to him and then someone threw another stone, and the same thing kept



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happening. He said, you know it's like unreal, he couldn't believe it was happening and he thought it was absolutely incredible. He's like, this is just amazing, he kept thinking this is just like supernatural powers, then all of a sudden, it was black. When he woke up his friend mentioned to him, he says you know, were very glad we got you out of the situation. He goes, what you talking about? I was able to avoid the conflict, he goes what you talk about your hit the back of the head, in the first three seconds and you're knocked out. So that's just kinda makes me laugh cause Sam is a very humble person, but he realized that whatever his skills were, that is not that the, he wasn't a superman and to this day, he's a pretty impressive guy, he's like a, I think he's the world light heavyweight champion in push hands but he always emphasizes that no matter what you think you're doing at that moment the reality is somewhere else. And that story is always stuck with me ever since I've known him which is been about 20 years now.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Some pretty poignant wisdom in there whether you want to take it on an emotional, mental level or a physical level. You know the idea that doesn't matter how many people you can evade or dodge you know, if one sneaks behind you it's all over.

Mikel LaChapelle:

Right.

Jeremy Lesniak:

We don't do well being able you know, with our ability to see your react to things behind us. So, he sounds like quite impressive man.

Mikel LaChapelle:

Sam is. Sam always downplays himself consistently as he's always I'm a terrible martial artist, teach me something. But my first memory with him actually was think of the family gathering on Colorado for the du toit brothers. William du toit's one of the last of the four brothers. They come from Indonesia and they're studying art. That's a family art that's couple hundred years old and my first opportunity I was a young guy probably 28-29, I went out there to know anybody and I was joining these different little subgroups that were training and I saw this guy that everyone was kind of avoiding. This crazy you know, older gentleman and I went another group and he happen to be there and he was my partner and several people walked up to him and said Sam, take it easy on this guy and I'm thinking, who the hell is this? So, the gentleman teaching the session was talking about doing some type of wrist lock and breaking a grip and so forth and he is explaining about you know, the physics of it and turning your body



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and so forth and he says okay I want you to work with a partner and partner's going to grab your practice this. Well, Sam grabbed my pectoral muscle so hard I thought he was gonna rip it off my chest. And I remember thinking this is ridiculous, the amount of pain. And I kept trying to do the locked [00:18:16.49] technique I couldn't do, so finally I had to smack him in the face from blackout. I smack him in the face hard enough then he let go and then looked at me and he says that was great, let's do it again. And he is the most sincere and non-egotistical person but he really wants if the technique worked. And that's what we've kind of we've all had to deal with Sam's now is our meter. If something truly can work or not is if you can do it on Sam. So, he's a very interesting gentleman to say the least but he's never done anything in the 20 years I've known him to really try to make someone look bad or try to say no this doesn't work. He just wants to figure out for himself is it really effective? And sometimes Sam has to take a few bumps and bruises to realize it works.

Jeremy Lesniak:

I think we can all, maybe not all of us, hopefully all us can speak to the value of having a training partner like that, that will push us, that'll you know kind of, read through the BS and say yes, I want to know if this works and I'm willing to sacrifice my body a little bit to find out if it will. But I can totally see why you hold him in such high regard and why you've established a friendship that's lasted so long.

Mikel LaChapelle:

Yeah, definitely.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Outside the martial arts is there anything that keep your interest? Any hobbies?

Mikel LaChapelle:

Yeah, definitely. What I, living in you know, the area that I live in, hunting is very popular. I've never been a big hunter, but I've enjoyed using the bow and arrow, I've been going to, lately I've been using a crossbow but previously I have used the compound bow. I do tons of hiking and kayaking cause that such as part of like this area that I live in and my son is the avid videogame player so I'm trying to learn to play some video games against him. We made a deal that he would train more with me if I played some games with him so it's been interesting so far. He whoops my butt on the screen with something and I come back and whip his butt in the dojo and we kinda laugh about it. But a lot of my time also spent reading. I read various types of literature anything from professional works in my field of education, to a more fiction. I love some that is the great works of fiction out there and lately I've been reading uhm, I can't think of the name of the series now. The Jack Reacher series which is been much



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better than the films, so I've written those books. And then three kids so a lot of my time spent with them. Once you have children you realize your life is truly not your own anymore because it becomes theirs.

Jeremy Lesniak:

I love that that deal that exchange you have with your son training for video games. It sounds like you're both winning on both sides of that.

Mikel LaChapelle:

It was funny because I... Yes, he actually brought in three different instructors because he just never wants to train with me and we started this around age 5 and now he's 14 he says dad, you're not too bad can I train with you? I just started laughing like oh my gosh it took this many years huh? It took the video games to get you actually do it so, it's been a good journey though, now he wants to train. I do know a lot of instructors who tried to get their kids to train with them and it didn't turn out very well actually often they felt forced or the kids lost interest very quickly it's kinda just disheartening to the parent. But I think the kids find it on their own, they're very enthusiastic about it.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Completely agree, I mean the best way to get kids to do anything is to model the behavior you're looking for to show them the benefits rather than say you have to do this.

Mikel LaChapelle:

Right.

Jeremy Lesniak:

I'd like you to reflect back on your life now. We all have these difficult times and martial artist have this way of getting through the tough stuff the rough spots that non-martial artist just don't. We have a broader toolbox, more things in there that we can use. Think about a tough time that you had and tells how you got through it.

Mikel LaChapelle:

That's a tough question actually. Well I guess probably, a very tough time and still has some a little bit of difficulty with that is, I had actually met my son's mother in Korea and we were together for about 10



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years. She was a pharmacist there we moved back here to united states, her family was actually kinda neat, they adopted me and they taught me a lot of things about Korean culture and their parents actually, her uncles and father both martial artist. So, that kind of help me get into the family. When we came back here I realize that there is a big difference of culture and there's a big difference of our age actually, she's about eight years older than me. And's we had decided to get divorced and actually my son was conceived which is odd because she is age 40 when she was, she got pregnant. So, it became a time of us to kinda think about what we wanted to do. For the next few years I wanted to make sure that my son was gonna see there as a part of his life so, for me to do that it was kind of getting to the daily grind to the things that I knew I had to work through to get the thing I wanted. And that was to have a good strong relationship with my son and at the time was hoping maybe to repair you know, my marriage. Many of my friends and even my family said what you doing want to just leave you know, why you enduring this. And I kept trying to say to them you know this is what needs to happen to get where I want to go which is, I want strong relationship with my son. And in the end, I think it was the fact of learning that you know, to get through to these times of discomfort, that time of displeasure, you know you times question of why my doing this? I was able to see that the goal in sight was to be able to have a better relationship in the end and it worked out really well for me. I actually have my son more than half the time and we have a very strong relationship. And I look back thinking if I didn't have that fortitude in the years of dealing with discomfort in dealing with hardship, I had many teachers when I was going to martial arts traditionally that they didn't care how long you're in the art, they didn't you know, wasn't caring that we do test every month it was, they made a determination when your heart was in it and what you try to get to the kind of made a lot judgments from that, I was able to do that myself as well. I learned you know, this is gonna sound like silly thing but I remember as a kid before it emails and stuff getting a letter was a big deal I taught myself, even when I get that letter the first day to put it aside and wait 24 hours to open it and those little things of doing that teaching myself discipline made it so I can endure a lot more. And its help me definitely in that situation, it's help me get through some hardship as time gone on also. My son now at 14 is a lot more aware of the situation understands you know why things were the way they were and has said to me thank you. You know, and then that could have of blew me away. He said thank you for always thinking of me and putting me in that situation so that was tough and still tough because you know you go to child going to another home and you don't control over that but the good thing about it is through having years of experience years of discipline and being able to deal those highs and lows of training, I think most of us go through the period like while am I even doing this anymore? Why would I continue with this art? And kind of pushing yourself through it together continue help me a lot. I don't know if that's what you're referring to, but that's what kinda comes to mind.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Absolutely you know it's, one of the things that I find interesting is that when a lot of us hit these difficult patches in our lives, we get, we become very withdrawn. But what I found is that we all



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experience this stuff. And so, one of the reasons I enjoy asking this question is it reminds everyone listening that you know, you may be going through something difficult but there someone else out there going through something similar and there's a somewhere along the way that is going through something that dwarfs what you're going through. And so just remember that you know to be open to you know, the people around you that that love you to lean on people that you train with for support whatever it is that there are options other than closing often in a hiding.

Mikel LaChapelle:

Sure, definitely. I think many times for me actually it was that uhm, going to the dojo or going to the dojang or wherever you want to call it, a lot of times that allowed me to feel alive and kind for those hour two hours of training you got spend all those other things and focus on something that requires you truly to pay attention and when you do that you get to kind of realize everything else may not be as heavy on your shoulders that burden. And even that you know my wife and I moved into this house about two years ago and one the first things she said to me knowing who I am she says there's a perfect space downstairs for you to have a good-sized dojo. And that was you know, it was amazing to me that's the first thing she thought of when we saw our home. I laughed and I said you know what, you know me well and my three-year-old, since age 1 has been to say the word dojo which blows our family away. She's like daddy, I want to go to the to the dojo like, how she knows what that is. Because that's where daddy goes so, she wants to go down there and train. It is nice because having two little girls, I want them to be strong, I want them to feel confident, I want them to be empowered to do whatever they choose to do, but also what the reality of the situation is it's a violent world. There's things going on right now that are pretty scary and I want them to feel confident that they can survive it or be least aware of situations up with themselves in it as possible. I also teach krav maga and I've been in krav maga for about eight years and I studied with moshe katz and mone izik. And they're very different men, one is a rabbi and one is an ex-military special forces and one has children one does not. And I find it fascinating to hear their view on violence and their view on self-defense and the religion deftly comes into it sometimes but, what I talk about my kids to either one of them they both have the same answer. Just you know give them confidence to make them feel good and strong and that'll help him carry them to the world. And I just always found it fascinating, from different cultures, from different philosophies, different you know experiences, when it comes back to the fact that we all kinda have a basic understanding of what we want her children to have. And that's been a great avenue when you want talk about meeting someone and train someone. I've trained some people that are a little bit hard to get to know but, when I see you around kids or they see you around their children, they warm up instantly there's a definite bond there, because there's that commonality as we talked about. You know martial arts can share stories and experience and techniques and sometimes politics come in place and sometimes just experiences. You know preconceived notions about other arts and so forth or people but you throw a kid in the mix and it's a total different world and I and I really appreciate that factor of it.



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Jeremy Lesniak:

Children are an amazing opportunity to show us not only what we know or what we don't know but all the things that we had never even considered as an options.

Mikel LaChapelle:

Yeah, definitely.

Jeremy Lesniak:

You know anybody that's taught children that has been incredibly explicit with instructions to kids thinking that that was what was going to get the result they wanted and least one of them will come up with a way around those instructions. But you didn't say

Mikel LaChapelle:

You weren't clear enough

Jeremy Lesniak:

Right

Mikel LaChapelle:

Actually, it's funny because, you mentioned that when I was, for the last 10 years I've been a principal and assistant principal in public schools and the school left was grades k-8 and they allowed me actually to teach judo three days a week to about 45 kids. I was throw my tie off, throw my gi on, throw my belt on and they've actually bought training mats and gis for all the kids. It started out the first year only like 10 kids there called at risk population, by the third year we had over 40 kids and the teachers would keep coming to me say hey can I have this to join, can I have this kid join and I was laughing thinking okay you know this is getting bigger and it was such an amazing experience because as an assistant principal you have a disciplinary role. As there sensei, I have a different role and they had a much greater concern about disappointing there sensei, then the assistant principal. The assistant principal was a guy walked around the building with the tie and made sure they follow the rules. But when I was the sensei was you know, sensei today I did... or hey there was a problem in the cafeteria and I told the kids to stop and leave me alone and I walked away and I made some distance as I realized the value in the power of that and you know one of the things that I've always had hoped I know that japan judo still taught now onto middle school age and older kids as part of the public education system and that is



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kinda the principle of jigoro kano what he had hoped, the founder judo, was that was going to occur. Well, I would love to see more than public schools because every time I've seen some type of program that's run well, kids are grown and really get a lot from it especially kids you may not be able to do like a typical athletic type activity, it allows them to kind of go at their own speed, their own difficulties, they may have to go to the challenges they can overcome that and that's I think is absolutely the most amazing gift we can give any kid to give that confidence. But it also gives teachers it gives teachers and it gives adults something look at say maybe look at a different way of teaching and different way of having expectations for our kids. I had a student who unfortunately, his father was incarcerated for a pretty violent crime and the in the young man was very angry to say the least. And anytime another kid approached him or came towards him or surprise him he would be very violent and come out and hit them or throw something at them or strike them, and by the end of the third year he was my best student. I actually allowed him to teach the class, I could hear him using my words and some of the philosophies I gave. It was absolutely incredible and that was probably the best experience of my life as far as professionally or you know just the martial arts was watching this young man take that role and become incredibly positive leader. He went from being a kid who everyone was afraid to be around to hey can you be the kid who helps me and he would be very happy to do so. And that was the martial arts and you know there was no way around it, there was nothing else that was, that factored that would had such a strong influence. It was neat to see, he had success and that success just a building upon himself. He is now in high school actually, which I started to feel a little bit old. But he's in high school now and he actually reached out a couple times to me asking me know to come and train with me as he's gotten older. So, it's been a neat any road in that regard.

Jeremy Lesniak:

It's so cool to be able to have an impact on people. You know, whether its adults or children but to take a kid that is so clearly in need and to have another set of skills beyond assistant principal. Beyond what the state, the school district enable you to do to use martial arts to help him heal, to help him move forward and have such a dramatic experience. I don't know if everyone listening has had that kind of experience if they are an instructor but you know teaching is so rewarding and I can hear that in your voice you know here's the common thread in what you do you are an educator, you know whether it's martial arts or professionally, I guess non-martial arts and it's clear how passionate you are about that. And I'm gonna guess it's because you enjoy seeing that growth in others and knowing that you had a hand in it.

Mikel LaChapelle:

Definitely, I mean I think that's as many young people and as many people get into the martial arts I think there's sometimes there are certain factors that influence you and for me I think it was it gave me a lot of confidence, it also gave me a positive place to go and with that I kinda wanted to pass that on. I



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was very fortunate to have people assist me in pretty tough times, I had scholarship to college and unfortunately, I was injured and I lost my scholarship and a woman who I didn't even know, her husband was a professor on the campus they paid for my last two years of college. They trusted me and they didn't know me they just see me around campus, they heard little things about me but because of like kind of my interaction actually, introduced first martial arts club at the college I went to, they trusted that I would pay them back when I got out and I did actually. When I went to Korea that was one of the first things I did was pay back on my loans, pay back my physical debt but when I came back from Korea, they were the first people I went to visit to show them you know how thankful I was that these expenses would happen without them. But when I asked well, what was the deciding factor the person who did this and the reason I'm using names because they are still alive and they get of the very quiet people, they said that you know what the biggest factor was, every day I walked around the campus having an air of confidence but not an air of arrogance. I laughed about that ii said what you mean by that? They said you seem very approachable, but very comfortable with who you are and I realize that was definitely from feeling confident from many years of training and it's also just I think it kinda comes across when you go to a job interview or you go to you know where you have to kinda be in front of group of people. Not everyone can do that and I know I would've been able to do that if I had had that exposure at younger age of ability that confidence I am very appreciative of that. And I had an instructor at a young age who really wanted me to, he saw potential and he kept emphasizing [00:35:56.06] sometimes I couldn't pay for classes and he would say, you want to worry about give me next month and you know if I can do it next month said give the month after don't worry. And I still have connection to them which is kinda neat. It has been many years but those relationships they kinda don't disappear. Even though you may fall out with someone as far as politics or philosophy or just life may take you on the past you always still the bond. And that's a huge thing, and I enjoy having a bond with my students.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Martial art seems to form those bonds and temper them, solidify them in a way that few other things do. I'm not going to say it's the only place but...

Mikel LaChapelle:

No, it's just like when you bleed with someone and you sweat with someone and you push each other through something you feel bonded. You know, it's pretty amazing.

Jeremy Lesniak:

For sure. Other than let's say your principal instructor, and I'll let you define that group however you like, who has been the most influential person on your martial arts training?



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Mikel LaChapelle:

Other than my principal instructors?

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah.

Mikel LaChapelle:

Other than my principal instructors. My wife. I'm saying my wife because my wife, I'm 6 foot 2 and I weigh about 250 pounds. My wife is 5 foot one, ways maybe 107 pounds. When we first started dating I taught her martial arts but the difference in you know the reality of the difference of our sizes is there are certain techniques that don't work for her. Also, she is legally blind in one eye which I didn't know for the first three years of us dating, so she was much more sensitive about that having contact in touch. So, I found like jujitsu and judo works really well for her and that was great and then as I start to go, as we start to know have a relationship and got married and all that, she was always good about pulling me back and saying Mikel, remember not everyone is your physical size or your attitude or your abilities, you have to think of the person as an individual and how would you adapt that and every time now I go to class I think about that. It sounds strange but that was a huge factor for me, I had to kinda reanalyze techniques, I had to think about the principles of the techniques I had to kinda to think about the energy in the attitude of it and she was an amazing factor for that. Now's the point where we know for short period of time when the UFC was a huge craze, we used to watch the fights together, she would be able to tell me who's going to win based on the other moving other techniques, I was laughing thinking, what are you talking about and she was often very accurate. So, she's been a very positive influence because even now with our daughters she says you know that's great when you see me do a technique or she watches me train with a bunch of guys and just say but could you have our daughters do that? And if you can analyze and go wow you're right, a relied way too much in strength there or too much on speed or my size or you know whatever else and that's been a very positive influence on my, in the art. She's also been able to remind me that not to just go train with you know just these big burly guys but to train with all different people and learn different skills and that's been very helpful. A lot of my Brazilian jujitsu instructors are small guys and their technique is flawless and amazing and that's been very helpful then I can go back and share that with my students cause I know that it's a technique and you know it's the application of that technique is important. So, I really have to say my wife is been a huge influence and I know somebody probably ooh it's so cheesy but, it's reality.

Jeremy Lesniak:



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It may be cheesy but I'm gonna guess anyone that's going to say that doesn't have someone that understands your passion for the martial arts in the way that they would like. I think any of us that train, you know as a single man I'm gonna say that the dream is someone who is as passionate about martial arts as I am but, you know, that's not it's not common. Even among martial arts practitioners I mean, this is my career. I think anyone can understand that it's gonna be hard for me to find somebody that it is on that level. But second to that is someone who understands that level of passion and while that may not be still easy to find, likely easier to find and you know it's nice to have different perspectives different as your articulate in different sizes different experiences within the home to share both in and outside of martial arts.

Mikel LaChapelle:

Yeah, definitely. Unfortunately, my biggest regret is actually teaching my wife some Filipino arts because once in a while she thinks it's funny to use it when I'm least expecting it and that we still to this day I have to explain to her hitting me while driving is not a good idea. You know, she think is funny and I keep telling her you know doing a gunting is not the right, is not the right place or time my love so, she feels very empowered as well.

Jeremy Lesniak:

I can just see it. I could just see it. Now, if you could train with anyone that you haven't, I mean you've got quite a list of people and arts and everything, but if there was someone that you haven't trained with, they could be alive, they could've passed away, anywhere in the world, any style, who would you wanna train?

Mikel LaChapelle:

That's a tough one. I've to think about there, any style, any person. I guess for me growing up, I was always in love with the Japanese arts first and foremost because they're kinda more readily available and I remember reading the book of five rings by Musashi Miyamoto and I would love the opportunity to see the man and if there was not a language barrier for some way to communicate to see what the real world experience was and how did he develop the skills and just his philosophy from a younger age to older age, that would be my first choice next to definitely be [00:41:53.53] I think okano, okano sensei would be definitely the other person I would love to have an opportunity to spend some time with

Jeremy Lesniak:

Great answers. Let's talk about competition.



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Mikel LaChapelle:

Sure

Jeremy Lesniak:

You know, as martial artist we like to test ourselves whether that's you know with our training partners, in the dojo or you know, head out to a competition, have you done any formal competing?

Mikel LaChapelle:

Yeah. When I was younger I did. I actually, in Korea I was the only Caucasian in about 50 what they call their [00:42:26.41] that taught judo and my teacher was actually, for a Korean person, very big. Not saying they're not, but most Koreans are tall but thin, he was just massive. His training partner was the 1998 gold medalist in judo and he was a big guy and he never wanted me to compete while I was training. And then what ended up happening my first competition ever, which was crazy, was going for my 2nd degree black belt. The way they do it in Korea, because you can go to university and learn a martial art is your college degree it's kinda like a pre background but you focus on specific martial art you go to this what they call university, which is the [00:43:08.14] and I went to Pusan [00:43:11.01] which is Pusan national university and what they ended up doing there was you take everyone in the city was competing to get on the rank of 2nd degree and you have to win two out of three of your matches to go to the next part of the testing. It was my first time ever competing and I actually did very well I was able to get my 2nd degree black belt and I was able to get full points. And I enjoyed it actually a lot it was like the first time ever really competed in martial arts and when I came back from Korea I did a couple Brazilian Jiu jitsu tournaments, some judo tournaments, I did a couple nogi tournaments. Probably my big biggest overall, kind of well-known ones I compete in the us jujitsu championships in 2004 and I received the bronze medal for heavyweight division and that was kind of a neat competition you had to score full point with a strike, a full point with a throw and a full point with the submission. And if you had one of each of those you'd win. So theoretically you know, you hit the guy, you throw him and submit him, you win. But if you, with somebody who's a karate practitioner kicked you a bunch of times, they score points but be missing points of the two areas. I had done really well except I had lost a ton of weight I went down to 207 pounds weighing in and I found out after the weight limit was 207 and above I needed to lose one more pound and the next smallest guy my division was 245. And I actually had beaten the first two guys to get the gold and silver but the third guy, I hit my arm literally popped out of socket. So, he was a big boy, I think he was around 285 and after that I decided, you know what maybe this is not competing is for me. So, it's been quite a few years since I've done. That but I've gotten a lot of second places and a few first place.

Jeremy Lesniak:



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Cool. Let's talk about entertainment, pop culture if you will.

Mikel LaChapelle:

Sure, yeah. Definitely.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Martial artists, we tend to get pretty passionate, one way or the other, most of us are really in the martial arts movies and wave had plenty of folks on the show who say the cheesier the better. Where do you fall?

Mikel LaChapelle:

Every Saturday, I remember those.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Tell us about your favorite martial arts movies.

Mikel LaChapelle:

Some of my favorite martial arts movies are actually, I love Tony Jaa, I think is awesome. His Ong Bak in that series, just to see a different type of martial arts been great and it took me many years to admit this but Keanu Reeves actually is a decent martial artist. I have to say the John Wick series has been pretty good to watch as well but it's kinda, not really the martial arts more of the style being shown, I really like any of the Bourne movies. I've fallen in love with the Filipino arts for the last 15 years, 16 years, maybe a little longer, and I love watching Matt Damon do some of the stuff that you know, that's influenced by Dan Inosanto. Those are definitely some of my favorite but the ultimate movie for me in modern times would be The Raid. I think The Raid is an amazing flick that shows Indonesian arts in a very different light and my wife refuses to watch it with me. So, when I have guys come over and we watch it, you know, there's a lot of yelling and stuff and she just, she actually works in the field where they deal with head trauma and she says how many stuntmen did they go through for that movie that's just ridiculous. And I keep explaining, they're very cheap so don't worry about it. But I would have to say The Raid is definitely my favorite flick. As a kid, The Five Deadly Venoms I mean, that was the ultimate.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Bringing up an old one.



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Mikel LaChapelle:

I know, I'm old.

Jeremy Lesniak:

But it's certainly a classic and anybody that seen it knows why it's fantastic. Tony Jaa of course an amazing martial artist, an amazing martial arts actor and somebody that I wish we had seen more from. He seems to have, you know had that early success and for some reason he doesn't seem like he's getting the castings that he deserves. Is there anybody else that you look at on screen and say that guy or that gal, they really know what's going on.

Mikel LaChapelle:

Oh my god, I can't think of his name, Michael jai white. I think im saying his name wrong. Yeah, jai white.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah, that is his name. That is how you say it.

Mikel LaChapelle:

Okay. He is amazing. I mean that guy, the way he moves, the way he just kind of, you can tell is a martial artist and actor not an actor martial artist. His skills are very impressive. The fact that his cover multiple backgrounds he's able to combine the two and it's just his athletic prowess is very impressive. I have to say that I enjoy you know, it's not always the greatest plot what I've enjoyed watching all his movies. So yea he's definitely very impressive gentleman as well.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Certainly, one of my favorite folks to watch on screen and hoping that one day were gonna get him on the show. Anybody that knows his history and pays attention when I dropped the little hints about what's going on in my life may understand why that may happen. I just like float and stuff out there and just driving people nut. There are people that write in and they're why aren't you more explicit about what's going, uh because I like teasing everyone. It's fun. Greatest joys in the show. You mentioned early on that you are passionate about reading, do you read martial arts books at all?

Mikel LaChapelle:



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Slightly I have a library and 1/2 downstairs. My family literally makes fun of me now, my in-laws are from New York and they come up and they're like, how many books do you have? So yes, I read quite a few.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Are there any that you would recommend to the people listening? Maybe, some that they've heard of or some that they haven't.

Mikel LaChapelle:

Sure. One of my favorite books and many people have never read before it's called the magic of conflict by Thomas Crum. He was an aikido practitioner and he talks about how conflict actually can be used as a great tool for growth for an individual, for yourself but others as well. Fascinating book, I read it and I was about 12 and I read it every for five years again just to kind of remind myself. If you have an opportunity read the book, it's very impressive in the sense of he talks about just how the martial artists themselves kind of not only influence your life but lives around you in a positive way if you use it correctly and that's a great book. Another book that I just read recently, oh my gosh I cannot, I apologize. This is what happens when you've been hit in the head too many times. What the heck can't even remember the name of it, it will pop up in a second I'm sorry. But I am kinda switching back and forth between European martial arts now as well, trying to, oh I could've think of it oh there it goes, I'm gonna say it wrong, barit jitsu. It's the gentleman came back from japan studying judo and jujitsu he made it with savant and some other European martial arts specifically the cane and I'm reading all these old articles that were published to put together one book and it's absolutely fascinating. It was supposedly what Sherlock Holmes character was based on as far as their hand to hand combat system he had. And the gentleman was definitely an egotist cause he named the art after himself, but it's very fascinating he combines some of the European and eastern philosophies together. So, I just started reading that it's interesting, also reading backing we're talking the 1800s the clips are coming out of early 1900s or early 1800s. So just the language they use to describing things is kind of hysterical talking about the secret arts of the orient and the deadly techniques and things like that. So, it's a good book right now so far what I've read.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Cool. Great choices and of course for everybody that might be new to the show, we put links and name all this stuff so if you're driving or running on a treadmill right now you don't have to stop or right hand on your forearm. Whistlekickmartialartsradio.com is where we put all of our show notes. You got a lot going on and in clearly or you're just as maybe even more passionate about your training now than when you started which is not an easy thing to maintain for 35 years I believe you said. Its long time to



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do any one thing let alone enjoy it as much or even more than when you started. So that brings me to why? What's keeping you going? What keeps you interested and passionate about martial arts?

Mikel LaChapelle:

I think to be honest my students. If I didn't have students you know, I've not had a formal "dojo" and probably five years being a principal and trying to run a martial arts school is very difficult and then having little guys so I'm literally starting tonight, I'm starting a new class at the gym for the first time. I have a partner for the gym to start teaching and that's what I've enjoyed. I enjoyed the students having conversations and part of the last five years I've been teaching privately I have a group of like four- five guys who come over and I teach a couple females you know, self-defense but I keep hearing over and over again you know, you need to go teach the public again and I think for me it's always growing. The fact of moving from different arts and having different teachers has been very helpful keeping interest but also just the fact of I love when I step into a dojo or training hall, whatever, having that interaction that conversation and then having someone say to me well, wait a minute, why are we doing it this way? I don't, I never take is a challenge, I take it as when we think about this and we'll talk why that's, it's happening this way? Why are you shifting your hips over here? Why is your foot placed here? Why is your elbow coming here? I enjoy that I enjoy analyzing things and my biggest challenge for me is I love being able to share that with someone who I can see they get it and they get excited about it that's incredibly exciting to me. There are times where I definitely had the blues as many people have been in anything for a long time, where I've kind of lost little interest and I've had friends who say hey listen, we haven't trained in a long time, let's get together again and we do that and it revives you know, our friendship it also gets the interest pumping again. I am incredibly fortunate to have the people around me in the arts that I do. I have had some fairly well-known instructors and I've had some people who train on their garage still to this day whose skill levels are beyond most anyone I've seen in the public view. And I even ask them you know how did you keep doing this and they explain it's not a choice. I have to say at this point my life is not a choice, it's ingrained in me. Anywhere I go the world, anywhere I'm traveling the first thing I look for is some martial arts school. You know my wife and I went to Amsterdam about seven years ago, and we got into the city and walk around I'm like, oh there's a Muay Thai school over there or she's like oh my gosh, we're in a European city is beautiful, stop. Look around the place, I'm like okay okay will. You know from Mexico that's what I'm looking for. Any place I've been it's just that excitement, there is a certain bond I think we all have for this passion and it's never left me and I hope to continue to do it all the way to the day you know that I can't.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Well said and I bet we have some folks listening there nodding along. Certainly, I was., what you're saying resonates really deeply with me. If the folks out there want to reach out to you or you know, get a hold of you, you know how would they do that?



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Mikel LaChapelle:

Either through email or my phone number not a problem at all. I'm very comfortable if that's okay to give that.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Absolutely

Mikel LaChapelle:

So, my email they use all the time is an old one it's haragei@hotmail.com or 603-479-6007 and no I did not choose it cause it's like James bond it just happen to be the number they gave me. But I am happy like I said I just, tonight is my first night I'm going to teach my krav maga class and I'm actually in the process now of opening up a school in Hudson which is little bit further down the road more from where I live this gentleman wants me to actually teach all different types of arts to this place and he's trying to, he's doing an excellent job of enticing me right now so hopefully continue to go that path and the that something I look to do. You know, I have probably another 5-10 years left in public education and after that I would love to be more full-time of just teaching martial arts that's my dream, my passion.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Awesome. Well, I hope that you do and I hope you continue to find ways to work with people whether it's youth or adults. Clearly that you're passionate in it. Pretty clear to me at least that you're having a strong impact on I'm sure nearly everyone if not everyone, and that's the goal and that's one of the wonderful things about martial arts. I really appreciate your time today.

Mikel LaChapelle:

Thanks very much.

Jeremy Lesniak:

You're welcome. If I could trouble you for just one more thing, we always go out on a on a high note. A nugget of wisdom if you would. You're' an educator, you're martial arts instructor, I'm sure you've got dozens of them. But if I could if you pick just one, how would you send us out.

Mikel LaChapelle:



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I have to say probably the big thing for me is you know, as you're training the martial arts allow exploration. Allow individuals to figure out what works for them and encourage them to continue to have that exploration. Not everyone is in a fit in a certain pattern or certain way but everyone still can enjoy the art itself.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Sensei LaChapelle is just an awesome guy. Yet he continues to learn what I find really inspiring and it's something that I wish more martial artists were known for doing. I wish it was more common. He's just an amazing person and I hope you took as much inspiration from my conversation with him as I did. Thank you sensei LaChapelle for being with us today. You get the show notes at [whistlekick martial arts radio.com](http://whistlekickmartialartsradio.com) and you can check out everything we've got going on whistlekick.com including those sparring gloves that I mentioned during the intro. Seriously, check them out. You won't regret it. Remember you can find us on social media were [@whistlekick](https://twitter.com/whistlekick) would love to hear your thoughts on this episode or any of our other episodes. If you want to email me directly at jeremy@whistlekick.com is the best way to get to me. Thank you for your time today, thanks for tuning in thanks for sharing the show and all the other wonderful things that you as an audience do to help this show grow. We have more great stuff on tap in the coming weeks and I hope you will come back and join us again. Until next time, train hard, smile, and have a great day.