



Episode 244 – An-Shu Stephen Hayes | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com



Jeremy Lesniak:

Hey there! Thanks for tuning in, this is episode 244 of the whistlekick martial arts radio. My name is Jeremy Lesniak, I'm your host here for the show, I'm the founder of whistlekick sparring gear apparel and if you couldn't guess, I'm a pretty passionate martial artist. We make the show, we have this company where we make products, sparring gear, apparel, the growing line of other things because the martial arts is awesome. I owe so much of my life to it but were not here to talk about me, were here to talk about today's guest An-Shu Stephen Hayes. If you've ever done any research or bumped into anything on ninjitsu or you wanna check out everything that we do the best place to start is whistlekick.com. If you want to check out the other 243 episodes of this show, you can find them at whistlekickmartialartsradio.com. We have show notes over there with photos, you can sign up for the newsletter, links to our guests, social media and all kinds of other great stuff, it really is a good place to go. If you're a fan of the show, it will bring you that much deeper into who our guests are, the subjects that we have for Thursday shows and just a whole bunch of other great stuff. I want to thank you again for tuning, thank you to all of you who share the show who have signed up for the newsletter, who write in with your comments and your feedback, it all means a tremendous amount to me and I appreciate the time that you put in to helping this show, this community grow. We featured a couple of guests who traveled to Japan to pursue their martial arts career, and our guest today is another one of those. He's An-Shu Stephen Hayes known by many as an American authority on ninjitsu. He's an exciting person



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listen to which made me lose track of the time we were talking. His martial arts story is inspiring, from his humble beginnings in Ohio where nobody taught martial arts when he was a child, to where he is now having traveled and taught throughout the world. Let's welcome him. An-Shu Hayes, welcome to whistlekick martial arts radio.

Stephen Hayes:

Hey, it's great to be here.

Jeremy Lesniak:

It's great to have you here I am looking forward to learning more about you. You're someone that you know, I've always known a little bit about. Your spoken of in circles and I've seen you it at Alan Goldberg's event and I'm excited to learn some more about you but I've got to ask because it's a title I've never heard before, what is An-Shu? What is the, I guess, lineage or history on that?

Stephen Hayes:

Well yeah actually that's a funny question. On shoe is a title that was created for me back in 1996. It's kinda long story, is that okay?

Jeremy Lesniak:

That is quite... I have all the time of the world.

Stephen Hayes:

Okay. Well you know, I four years practice the classical ninja martial art in Japan and you know, I always knew I would have to come back to America and when I get back to America in 1980 you know the truth is, people thought differently, people slight differently in 21st-century America than they did in 15th century Japan and I knew I would have to modernize. We're keep the principles the same but change maybe the attacks, make it more relevant. So, in 1996, I created a new martial art called to shin do and people said to me; well you need a title, you need a title. I said oh you know I could just be Stephen Hayes, they said no, no you need a title, something that's gonna sound impressive and you know maybe you could be dai shihan, the great master or oh come on that sounds so pretentious. So, I came up with an-Shu, on is a very small, like retreat hut in Japan. It's where a warrior or a monk would go to leave behind the world and just kinda regenerate his powers are his focus or his strength. So, the An is actually my house, my home and it's called the kasumi an. Kasumi means haze and that's associated with the ninja lore of Japan, pretty predominantly but it's a play on words for ajyes Hayes Hayes An and Shu it is



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like the person in charge of, so my title translates as the person in charge of the retreat hut. You know it's funny though because there are couple of people who saw that title and they style themselves as ninja, no they don't have a real lineage, but anyway you know need a lineage right now, I needed lineage when I came back but anybody can say they're a ninja now and everybody goes with it and anyways so people have copied that thinking it means great ninja master or something like that. Actually, the caretaker the retreat hut that's my, that's how I got my title.

Jeremy Lesniak:

I love it, it sounds so impressive. It sounds so grandiose but there such humility in that title I just, it's fantastic. Yeah. And if the rest of our conversation today are these sorts of stories then, you can take all the time in the world that you want because I was chuckling right along with you there. That was fantastic. Yeah.

Stephen Hayes:

Actually, there's another title that we use for the practitioners of our martial art and that is to shi, to shi. To is sword, and shi would mean like I mean, sounds kind of funny but it was like night K N I GHT. So, it's the shi of bushi which Japanese martial artist might recognize as another term for samurai, so to shi, when a person gets to 3rd degree black belt in our martial art they're actually given a unique Toshi name. There's a Japanese kanji that's put on the beginning of that to shi and everyone is different. In English, we only have 26 letters so there are couple that sound the same in English but in Japanese there is a unique kanji for everybody makes it the 3rd degree. And those are the only two titles we have in our martial art an-Shu the retreat hut caretaker and this to shi which anybody who's got you know the desire and the time and get through all the frustrations they can earn this toshi title.

Jeremy Lesniak:

It sounds like you're very thoughtful in creating the style as you came back from Japan. Is that you're a cerebral type, a thinker. Is that fair?

Stephen Hayes:

Well yeah, that's fair, that's fair. You know I think, how to phrase this without offending people what the heck.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Go for it. Go for it.



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Stephen Hayes:

But I mean you know, in America, there's so many flamboyant wild titles and all this kind of stuff and you look at a person has maybe 20 students but they've got this grandiose title and wild looking belts and I just thought for an American audience, we just keep it simple, just keep it simple; you qualify as a to shi and you carry that for the rest of your training days. I don't know you know when I get old and all over on the mat, I tell my students, when I get old and just fall over, just drag me off the map you keep training, but you know, what kind of title would the new head to shin do be called an-Shu or you know, maybe they would have a different title. But I'm 68 right now, I figure I got about 30 more years so, will work that out later on.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Then you mentioned going to Japan, you mentioned coming back and clearly there's a before, there's a prequel to what you just told us. So, let's roll back how did you get started in the martial arts?

Stephen Hayes:

Well, you know, when I was a small child growing up in Dayton, Ohio I saw a couple of TV shows, I'm using way back in the ancient days when there were just three TV channels, but they featured martial arts and this is only like 10 years after World War II and you know martial arts or something very exotic almost forbidden. This just electrified my little spirit. You know I've been to school, I went to get out typical middle-class Midwestern school, there were no gangs in those days but you know we had a couple of bullies that would pick on kids and you know I didn't think that was right. I didn't get picked on my cell but I saw the kids picked on and I didn't know how to deal with that. I did know how to hold myself with command. I didn't know how to fight if somebody took a poke at me. So, the martial arts represented a body of knowledge that I could learn, I could become one where you know, normally I was intelligent and articulate but hey if I got dragged down to the gutter, I could emerge on top from that and that became like an obsession. When I was a small child, I remember a time in the fourth grade, my mom took me to the library I looked in the card catalog and they had like three judo books. Oh man I was good to get these judo books and study those and try to teach myself and but I couldn't find the books, so we went to the counter we asked the person, they said; oh, those books aren't out on the regular stacks, they're not. Those are on a special shelves in the back. The manager of the library has those because they're kinda dangerous, yeah, they really said that so my, I couldn't check out as a fourth-grader, my mom had to actually check out the books for me. It's that deadly, it was that deadly. You know, I got some friends we tried to teach yourselves judo in the backyard, I mean, I was obsessed. I was obsessed with learning the martial arts only problem was no schools in Dayton, Ohio back in those days.



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Jeremy Lesniak:

So here you are, I mean this this is like straight out of a movie. Here you are, you know, a child with an interest and you find these ancient tombs of wisdom but you know you're not in the inner sanctum so you're not allowed to read them or you need the Codex to decode them or something, right? There's a movie plot here.

Stephen Hayes:

I think you got it. You know, I laugh when I say this but, you know all these cornball ninja movies that came out in the 80s and 90s and you know where they tried to tell a story of this one white kid who's adopted by a ninja family and their all so cornball, hey I really did that, I really did that. Make a movie of what was really like, I mean it was much better than these corny, funny ninja movies that you know people make and yeah, you're right it's uh, make a good movie, make a good movie.

Jeremy Lesniak:

So here you are, you've got your hands on some judo books and you and your friends are trying to work through them because there's no schools in Dayton Ohio. What happens next? Because I'm sure you don't just hop on a plane after a couple years that go to Japan.

Stephen Hayes:

No, no. I, you know, the next really important part was I went to look for colleges in the mid-1960s and I had picked a couple of colleges in Ohio and I went to Miami University and the guy taking you know my friend and I around we saw this person in a white gi walking in the gym. What man I grab this does? Who? What is that? Oh, he's on the judo team, judo at Miami University that did it right there. I'm going to Miami University and my friend who became my roommate he went to Miami University, well it turns out in the fall and we showed up in Miami, they don't have a judo team. This guide was wrong there was a tang su do Korean karate private teaching by a commander in the Navy, this is back when we were in Vietnam and they had ROTC on campus and it was strictly for the Navy midshipmen and oh man you know, I was a theater major, I was about as far away from being a Navy midshipman as you could be and I managed to talk this commander and allowing me to study even though I wasn't a Navy midshipman, that was quite a sales job and I began training in tang su do and yeah I just you know, I'd like, 18 years of pent up desire to study, I think I was the best student they ever had. I went all kinds of classes, my parents really worried, we didn't send you there and major in karate you know but I took all his classes and within three years, I had it achieved a black belt in the tang su do Korean karate. Yeah, I just loved it, I just loved it.



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Jeremy Lesniak:

So, you at this point you've kinda realize that childhood dream of learning martial arts and now you have a black belt and shortly after a degree in theater? It sounds like.

Stephen Hayes:

Yeah well, my senior year, I had a black belt so I helped teach classes and started to discover there's like a big world out there. There are all these styles of martial arts and people who run the different styles and all this kind of thing, I taught karate by now it became a phys ed class at Miami University we had huge classes, huge glasses of people. I graduated from Miami in 1971 and man I gotta find a way to do this full time and I eventually started a small karate school. I mean, I was totally unqualified I think I was like a 2nd degree black belt. At that point, I was really unqualified but it was too important to me, I had to do this and you know by 1975, a bunch of political things happen in Korea, not important to go into but the Korean government nationalized the martial arts in attempt to get it into the Olympics since they all agreed on taekwondo, taekwondo and they had some made up forms and that left the tang su do people out in the cold and I got lost in the shuffle so I was without a teacher and decided based on having read a book about the ninja, I was going to go to Japan find this Ninja teacher and become a student. I was going to go to Japan, I was going to do that.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Okay. So how long did it take you to realize that? You've got me on pins and needles here, I'm usually like this as I'm speaking with someone, if you like you're, you got me eating out of your hand, maybe that's the intention, maybe that's how you're presenting this but it's working. I'm entranced. How do we get from there to Japan?

Stephen Hayes:

Well this is crazy now, remember this is 1975, there is no Internet, there is no email, I sent letters to just noda city, I figured it's a little tiny city in Japan, to this guy, I never got a reply, I had the letters translated in the Japanese. I had studied Japanese for a year at Miami University, in my senior year you know. But you know, so I could speak a little bit of Japanese, I could read and write it without the you know, extensive kanji. So, you and I have like a first grade 1st grade education in Japanese and it just was... You know in the mid-70s in the martial arts, there is no such thing as Brazilian jujitsu, karate was the hot thing and you know there, we didn't have any seniors. The seniors were people like Chuck Norris and Joe Lewis, Mike Stone who were all in their 20s. We didn't have any old people, so we all train like young, aggressive, contest winners and I was always interested, I enjoyed that, I enjoyed that but what I really was interested in was back to me being a kid. How do I step in? Somebody's being bullied there



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being picked on maybe by even more than one person. How do I step in and get that resolved in the most dignified manner possible? And that just wasn't priority and karate at the time, you know it was these contests and young people training vigorously. I needed a some kinda senior, so I went all around America trying to find teachers and you are looking for ways to bring this about, I just couldn't find anybody that really talked my language so, I just held my breath and bought a ticket to Japan on an airliner and went over there. Now looking back, I was crazy I couldn't even read signs in Japanese. I couldn't even look things up in the Yellow Pages. What did I expect? You know, I arrived in Tokyo, haneda the airport the sun was coming up and then it really hit me, I have no idea where I'm going and miracles happen. Just miracles happened. I ran into an English-speaking guy in the train station, I went in to Tokyo, to the train station and then he guided me down to the iga, iga oueno the homeland of the ninja and so I took, you now bullet train, then catch a little local train to catch a little spur train and finally made it to iga and no they didn't have any ninja training anymore. That was their history but it was just a tiny little out-of-the-way town and people took me on a tour. They took me through this these neighborhoods where I could see on the mailboxes a famous ninja family names, but they were ninja anymore. I was so you know, disappointed. I saw Museum, they had a little museum there now that little museum is become quite tourist attraction since I wrote these books and I mean huge tourist attraction and they have ninja shows and everything now but back in those days, no, it's a tiny little obscure museum. And I got back on the train and I went to try to find this guy named hatsumi in this notice city and that was way northeast of Tokyo again just miracles happen. I found my way there, I arrived there late, late at night, tiny little town and that everybody staring at me, you know nobody saw foreigners out in this area and I asked if there was a hotel and everybody just laughed oh gosh. There was a girl on the train who spoke very good English and she said well we don't have hotels out here we have ryokan, these are like little inns and I know of and inn behind the railroad station my boyfriend is coming to pick me up, we can take you to this inn. Oh man, so I got to the inn and I checked in, a little inn so I was talking of the innkeeper, this little lady and she's what you doing in noda city now and I said well I came here to study ninjitsu, she just cracked up. Maybe like you know somebody and going to Bristol England then they saying oh yeah, I am here to study the mystical teachings of Merlin the wizard you know you're in the modern Bristol England. Oh gosh you know that was just something we made up and funny story you know or like somebody's coming from Japan and they come to light Dayton, Ohio yeah, I'm here to study with Batman. You know it's just unheard of so I said yeah, this guy Masaaki hatsumi, she says well, I know Masaaki hatsumi but he is not a ninja. I said, what is he? He's like a therapist. Hey and that's what I read in the book, he was a therapist. Really? Yeah, yeah. I said but he's not a ninja and she's said I mean I've known him since he was born his mother and I are childhood friends. I mean, what are the odds you know I end up in an inn, run by a childhood friend of the mother of the guy I am trying to track down. I'm amazed she said so yeah, I'll give him a call. You know, really? I mean, just magical stuff like this happened then she called him up and he came over in about half hour and we discussed, I thought I'd have to like prove myself and go through all these tasks, I even brought a, back in those days mid 70s everybody wore polyester suits, so I stuck the polyester suit in my duffel bag and he came out without any wrinkles you know what's was nice about polyester suits. So, I had a



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suit and tie on to meet this guy, he said oh yeah you can the start tomorrow night. I can? You're not gonna like test me out or make me wait outside the dojo or anything? No, no, no, just come on in and then so my training began. Here's one funny story, years later, years later I got married in Japan, then years later I was back in America we had one of the seniors you know, these were guys in their 20s when I was in my 20s and he was Japanese military man and he was over my wife Rumiko said; oh yeah Stephen was so honored, you know that you guys would accept him so easily and this guy looks at her kind of funny and says is that what he thought happened? She goes what? What? Oh yeah, she told him I was so honored to be accepted as a trainee oh no, he said in our generation he's a pretty big guy and so the headmaster said hey let's bring this big guy in, we'll try all our techniques on him, after about three or four days he'll be so fed up to leave and then we can go back to training. I didn't know that, I didn't know that, I just stayed on for years.

Jeremy Lesniak:

You were an imported uke, the throwing dummy.

Stephen Hayes:

You bet, yeah. I mean, the training was rough but it was tough that I'd never seen before I mean, there was all this grappling and you know scramble around on the ground and you know, a sword would be pulled out and even the striking was so different from karate, it was just overpowering, I just, unbelievable man I'm totally committed and you know not all the Japanese guys like me. Some of them told the headmaster a should be showing this to a foreigner, you know by now I'm sticking around I'm actually taking part in classes and learning and you know apparently the headmaster didn't agree with them Monday not everybody like me. There was one time I remember I had to hold a pose with my arm out my fist out and this one guy just practiced, smashing my fist out of the way you know, one hit after another and then again it was totally made up, no way I'm gonna stand there with my fist out and this guy is just whacking away so after about three of these hits, I learned how to move my arm just tiny little bit so that the impact was reduced and then I'd let my arm fly out of the way like this guy really hit me. But I remember thinking you son of a gun, I did think actually those words I thought proper words that you son of a gun, I'm going to get everything that you have and more and that was the tone of my whole time in Japan. You know, you think I'm some funny guy to get everything you've got and more and I believe I did.

Jeremy Lesniak:

How long did you spring-training there?

Stephen Hayes:



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Well I was there on a special cultural visa and I stayed there for five years and then for the next 15 years, I was married to a Japanese and we had we had daughters and so we would go back to times a year we'd go back in the fall in the spring all through the 80s and stay for about a month and 1/2 to train and then I mean like I was way overloaded after that month and 1/2 and then I come back in practice and then go back and left all we did that for about 10 years. And then the 90s came in my girls were now school and I couldn't just, they would not let me just pull them out of the school so we would go over in the summer for two or three months every year and I did that till about all the late 1990s. So, I mean, I was over there every year but I was not a resident of Japan.

Jeremy Lesniak:

So, at some point you decide that you want to start teaching again cause as you said earlier, you had been teaching so you come back to the United States and you start teaching what you learn while you were there. Is that how it went or were there more steps in between?

Stephen Hayes:

Yeah it is an interesting phenomenon because when I came back in 1980 there were the beginnings of like a little ninja boom. People were interested in ninja; Chuck Norris can remember the name the movie now but he had a ninja movie that he brought out and you these spooky ninja guys were in it this is a 1980 and there was a novel called the ninja written by Eric van lustbader. There was a beginning of this ninja boom, I was the only one who had been trained in Japan by lineage holders. You know there were a couple other people claiming to be ninja in America, but I was the only one who had been trained in Japan by legitimately traceable lineage and so I became very interesting to Black Belt Magazine. I was on the cover of the 1980 black belt Yearbook, I mean I was this unknown guy but, they are really, black belt really took an interest and supported me and they publish several of my books and this thing just took off like crazy. I was doing seminars, I didn't have a school, I didn't have a martial art school. I needed to be free to come and go, you know, do different things and but I didn't even have a job for years. I mean the book sales supported me totally, I mean I wasn't a billionaire but, I mean I can buy super home out in the woods of yeah that countryside and I could take my family back and forth to Japan then I didn't even have a job. It was just totally, totally remarkable but that ninja boom lasted until kind of the end of the 80s and I remember by then there were some other people you know, who were claiming enough to be students of this hatsumi guy and you know, other people trying to sort of imitate what I was doing every stupid karate school head ninja on the window. Ninjitsu had really become kind of a, you know, a laughingstock really just funny little people doing this running around the backyard at night in a black suit and then Stephen Seagal came out with his aikido movie and it captured a lot of people's imagination then they kinda went on from there and Brazilian jujitsu came in and became very popular so I kinda stated into the background at that point. But the 80s were just amazing, you know, I did seminars and I was teaching this 15th-century Japanese martial art for a little while but you know that



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was in the heyday of kickboxer's and catch as catch can fighters and I mean you America is really the martial art capital of the world. We have everything, Chinese styles and Korean styles, Indonesian styles, Brazilian style, you know, and everybody who attended the seminar, I mean there were some sincere people there but there were a lot of questionable people. You know they figured on the guy on the cover of the all the magazines, if I beat this guy all be on the cover of all the magazines. So here I am teaching, in teacher mode yet and some sneaky guy decides he's going to try some technique on me or something like that, it was very dangerous but you know here I am at 68, I was never defeated I was able to catch on and yeah but those 80s were very, very wild years for me. Now, I paid attention to my development as opposed to my marketing and so when the ninja boom ran out, oh it ran out and so I needed to find something to do for a living you know, in the early 90s.

Jeremy Lesniak:

So, what did you shift into doing?

Stephen Hayes:

Well as I mentioned, my kids were in school and I could just take him out so Rumiko and I decided to open up a martial arts school in Dayton, Ohio and we did that but oh, we had to completely revise the curriculum. We had to create beginner lessons for new people would never done martial arts before. See all the seminars in the 80s, everybody came in they have already have black belts in other martial arts so what I thought of as the basic lessons really weren't basics at all but they were basic lessons for black belts in fact there even became a kind of like rumor all you have to have a black belt and some other martial art to study ninjitsu, no you didn't have to but that's kinda what it was and now here we are in Dayton, Ohio teaching lessons to beginners we had to completely redo the curriculum that's when we created to shin do. And I'm just delighted. I mean, at this time I'm so happy you have the was able don't you miss teaching the old classical way, I teach a few students but people don't really want to learn that, they would they want something that is valuable, that provides real crucial lessons for self-defense, but most of my people don't get in the multiple fight a year, they're successful business people so they can use the lessons and the principles in their everyday life. That changes their life, you know I mean studying this martial art, you really become a different human being is not some you snap on, or strap on to learn this is a very unusual martial art. Instead of teaching complex techniques, we in effect stripped away those things that get in the way of people being successful so it's a minimalist movement and that's your challenge for the rest your life. Make it even more minimal, more minimal and producing greater results. And you know, people find this to be of enormous value in their own life, just organizing their homes, running their businesses, running relationships with other people become a much more insightful person. We have a series of five elements earth, water, fire, wind, then you know what's called the void or the emptiness and you know that's classic all but it has to do with kind how your personality works, which one of these elements is kind of predominant. Oh, people think that's fascinating, you'll



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learn that not everybody is like me, there other approaches to life and how do I fit in with those other approaches to benefit that person and bring benefit to myself and that really goes back to the original purpose of the ninja. How to work my will without the other person being aware at all that I'm involved in this conflict. The old ninja families that's why they call them the invisible warriors, because they just didn't know what was going on. Things definitely were taking shape and taking form but you had no idea that somebody was actually engineering this. And you know, these are lessons that modern people can really take to heart and can use in their everyday life.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Awesome. This may go down as one of the most exciting if not the most exciting first where we're at while 40 plus minutes of an episode I'm absolutely transfixed I just looked at the time and went wow. But there's more that I want to know, so want to keep going. And the first thing that I am interested in is, are there things you are interested in outside of martial arts? Because it sounds like very early on this was sort of your destiny and you realized it. Is there space for things beyond?

Stephen Hayes:

Well, I don't yet maybe not a lot of people are aware but, the other thing that really dominated my attention when I was a small child were things that we could say maybe of a spiritual nature. You know is a little kid, you know just questions why are human beings here? I mean what happens when you die? Is there any sense to this? And you know I was very active in my church when I was a small child but kinda out grew those answers these are bigger questions and that has followed me kind of in the background through my whole life. So, I became very interested in Japanese spiritual systems. When I was in college, you know I read those books, I took courses in philosophy. When I got to Japan I made connections with these Japanese monks and early 80s back in America I met Tibetan monks and they were much more willing to teach than the Japanese monks. I think the poor people of their country have been invaded in the 1950s and they were refugees. Tibet went to war with China, oh man was that a bad deal. Japan went to war with the US, what a good deal let you know we rebuilt their economy and we left all their temples in place and left the Emperor in place so if you're gonna go to war with the US, we'll give you everything you know and so, the Japanese I guess, didn't have as much of a need to disseminate they weren't like fighting to keep their culture. So, I got involved with the Tibetans and did after 20 years and not a lot of people know about that but I mean I went to India many times, Nepal several times. I still have very good dear friends who run monasteries in India and Nepal and I'm planning to go back not this year but next year. And then I've also gotten involved in recent years with a very forward thinking Japanese Shugendo master. Shugendo master is called the Yamabushi, they are the spiritual seekers that go up into the mountains and seek answers the big questions from just direct experience in nature. It's not a very intellectual kind of thing, it's a very experiential thing and I've got some of my students involved in that as well. And that's about it I don't have a lot of time for other



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things. I collect old automobiles, I enjoy that. I have a couple of classics that my wife wonders like when are you gonna sell that? You know, I hang on to those that's may be slight interest.

Jeremy Lesniak:

You can't mention classic cars and not the tell us what you have. I can't be the only one listening to this right now well, I'm the only one listening right now, but the others listening later will shoot me, I'll get hate mail for don't ask you what cars you have.

Stephen Hayes:

Okay. Ever since I was a little kid, this stuff always back as a little kid, you know, the ninja, the spirituality and even cars. When I was a little kid, I was fascinated with Rolls-Royce automobiles for some reason I mean that grill that looks like a Greek temple and so I have 1988 Rolls-Royce Silver spur that's been completely restored and I think I'm the only one in Dayton, Ohio you know, people stare at it when I drive it around the 88 Rolls-Royce. I have a 1985 long wheelbase Cadillac Fleetwood. It is in its original state is never been restored and it's like in pristine condition I bought it new in 1985. I was doing my personal security escort for the Dalai Lama of Tibet, it is before the US government State Department got involved and so I bought this car just to have to take him around in and I'm gone 68 years old, I no longer did bodyguard work but I still have the car and the it's not really a limousine, it doesn't have the glass panel in the middle but it has extra jump seats and you know my wife and I used to drive, we had a driver for several years and so we would take that car around. That's fun. Yes, that's kind of my and then we have some regular Lexus cars that are our daily drivers and so that we had to have a you like a five-car garage built to handle all these cars. So that's yeah that's an interest of mine but that's it, that's it. Ninja, shugendo, and Rolls-Royce automobiles.

Jeremy Lesniak:

I can appreciate the love for cars and I'm curious, which gets more crossover? Do you end up looking at you are doing kinda, I'm guessing you have a dojo as well, if a five-car garage, I'm guessing there's a training space?

Stephen Hayes:

Yeah, in our house. You know when we first built the house, we had our daughters living there and Rumiko sister was over from Japan to help raise our daughters and people come in and going all the time it was, but now it's just Rumiko and me. Our girls are living at other cities and have children of their own and so it's like two little marbles in a in a packing crate. But we do have a dojo that's build on merits like 28 x 26 and it would handle maybe 16 people, but it's fitted out like a traditional Japanese dojo and I



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do occasional private lessons there. We live way out in the woods just outside of Dayton, Ohio in our woods goes down to the Little Miami River, Ohio's first designated scenic river back in the 1960s so I'm just so blessed, I really am. I'm just so blessed, the way I get to live my life, I deal with the people that I like to deal with and if there are people I don't like to deal with, I just don't deal with them. So, I mean it's just wonderful to be able to say to somebody you know I'm just not your guy, goodbye. You know, I hang out with all my staff here at the dojo, they are all wonderful people, beautiful, transformative individuals they get my message they're other half my age but you know they deliver those kind of lessons to people and I have a series of friends around the country that run, you know I'm kinda like Col. Sanders, you know, these people have dojo's that use my image of my curricula and we got maybe 30 to shin do schools around the world and Rumiko and I go there and do long weekend, advanced teachings and every one of them is beautiful, beautiful people. Creeps, insecure, thug types, big mouths, they're just not attracted to what we're doing. I'm just so fortunate for that. Everybody's a beautiful person, very, very capable martial artist. So were small, small network you know, when you think about me doing this for almost 40 years you know, creepy people just don't last. Creepy people just don't last in this martial art.

Jeremy Lesniak:

I love that, that's great. That says a lot about your authenticity with what you're bringing to your teaching and how you select the people around you. One of the things that I am certainly not the first one to say or anywhere close but what my favorite quotes the notion that you are the average of the people you spend your time with. Some people put a number on it, the five people you spend the most time with and it's sounds like you've been diligent about making sure the people around you are on a similar path, so you don't have to stray. You have to make a decision between that relationship and where you're headed.

Stephen Hayes:

You know I'm so lucky. I'm so lucky with that and I have been, well not like 80s I dealt with some questionable individuals but I was testing myself out I wanted to know that I had something that could work so, you know, there were questionable individuals that came in and out of my life back in those days but I was just testing out my heart to see if, make sure that I had something of real value. But you know ever since the 90s, man I just less and less time I think you're absolutely right, you know we are a product of what we spend time around and you know I'm just so lucky we get money, I don't even think about money, we have a beautiful collection of several hundred people right in Dayton that love this martial art and you know, I find that stimulating. We have schools around the country go to LA or Tampa or Chapel Hill I mean, and you know, very successful schools teaching our to shin do martial art and all the people are alike, they're all I mean, they're all very individualistic, but they're all beautiful. They want to get the essence of this art and yes, I'm just repeat myself but beyond I'm a real blessed



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individual. And that I just get to hang out where I like to be, and where I find it to be most stimulating and most encouraging, yeah.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Well, I can certainly relate to that feeling of being blessed because I get to train and talk to martial artists and make it a part of my job. You know, it's an absolutely fantastic thing so I certainly get it. We spent a lot of time today talking about good things really positive things, one of the things that I enjoy talking to martial artists about most, is actually the other end of the spectrum. The way that martial artist handle adversity. I love for you to tell us about a time where things didn't go well and how your martial arts training, in whatever way you wanted to find it, allowed you to overcome?

Stephen Hayes:

Well now I gotta really scratch my head on that one. That does, interesting question. Interesting, I wasn't expecting that, so I have to think. I have had several, you know I mean, I emphasize the positive and I don't like to whine around or complain or bellyache about the negative so you know, I deal with that and you and I take it as life lessons. So, one time there was a guy, he was an affiliate and he sort of tricked his way into getting toe shin do school affiliation and just a bad guy. Bad guy. Didn't understand me, didn't understand what I was teaching he came from this raging ego standpoint, we were trying to get rid of him but he had a license that he'd tricked his way into getting and that he sued me. He sued me for an enormous amount of money claiming that I was supporting some other guy and his town instead of him the other guy had a poster up in his school that he bought for \$10 on the website. You know, anybody can buy these posters. A picture of me and my teacher. But you know so I said well you give me 4 1/2 minutes in front of a judge, you now explain, not gonna work that way. Well, this is crazy, this lawsuit, this is absolute, you know every man needs his you know moment in court, you know of course all the attorneys are going to vote that way because that's how they make their living, you know. And oh, he sued me in his town and it was just infuriated me. You know, made me very angry that I had to take my time to deal with this nut. But I talked to one of my Tibetan friends, a Tibetan monk friend in New York City and he said to me said; I got swindled once my so you did sweetly swindle the Tibetan monk? Well it's New York you know, okay. This is yeah is a computer thing I was out \$2000 and you know jobs out \$2000 that he was going to make it right so he says to me, I figure you pay that much money for a lesson you better learn a lot from it. So, okay I'll learn from this lesson so I went back and got involved with an attorney and we played these attorney games with this guy and turns out we kinda tricked him into a settlement thing where he didn't win. I started to pay my attorney but now you pay that kind of money you learned a good lesson, so that's the way I handle that. I got the opportunity to be egregiously sued and I learned a whole lot you know about the justice system and now to work in that whole world. So maybe, that was my ninja ingenuity, I tapped into and turn that into a learning opportunity shall we say.



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Jeremy Lesniak:

Your own ninja-nuity. I couldn't let that one go by that was too easy. I love the idea that the that you, took what you could from it and it's something I think is maybe not articulated as well as you just did but it's a common occurrence in our martial arts training isn't it? The idea that you know we fall, we falter and it's from all of those mistakes that we slowly pieced together not necessarily what is right but at least what will work.

Stephen Hayes:

You know I think that's really true. The older we get, the more experiences we have so a very young person you know would be, kind of you know, just starting out is not have those all those experiences so I find lots of experience is very important but it's also matched by an extremely bright awareness. I'm aware of what I'm going through, I'm changing is a human being. I went to that lawsuit, I changed as a human being. And my changing in a way that is going to make me a happier more fulfilled human being? Or am I becoming little more cynical, a little more bitter, well that's very important. How to come out of something like that with the bigger storehouse of knowledge, a brighter sense of who I am, self-awareness on one hand and lots of experience on the other hand, that's the key for growth, that's the key for growth.

Jeremy Lesniak:

If you have the opportunity to train with anyone that you haven't anywhere in the world anywhere in time, who would you want to train with?

Stephen Hayes:

Oh jeez. Is this like an anytime, anywhere...

Jeremy Lesniak:

You name it, yeah. Any anybody, I guess we'll put the qualification on them, do they have to be a real person. They have to have existed.

Stephen Hayes:

You know I think it would be fascinating to get in my time machine, get him go back and experience Miyamoto Musashi. You know, for people on familiar with the Japanese martial arts, this guy lived in the 1600s and he had like 60 duels to the death. He started out as an abused kid, you know, abuse kid, he



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was angry, and 60 duels and toward the end he just with a with a wooden sword. I mean, he was fighting people with razor-sharp steel sword but isn't that a wooden sword. And at the very end of his life he retreated to a cave you can see this cave from my wife's house in Kumamoto and we been to the cave several times and he wrote his treatise on fighting. The book of five rings the earth, water, fire, wind and void. And he wrote this down, I mean he didn't write it down, he dictated it, someone wrote it down and then he died. But I think you know the stories of this Musashi and how he evolved into pretty spiritual guy at the very end he was carving these Buddhist deities in his cave and he really got a whole lot about what life was like by facing and he didn't do it in like, not all these were honorable duels, sometimes he had to sneak up on people, like gangs would be against them and so forth. Yeah say I'd love to go back in time and hang out with miyamoto musashi.

Jeremy Lesniak:

That would be awesome. And if had... You know, it's been a while since I read the book but if even half or even a third of what is in that book is true still mind-boggling.

Stephen Hayes:

Yeah, yeah. Really, and to think those that story has been handed down for 500 years? 500 years that story is been handed down that's amazing, it's amazing yeah.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Makes you wonder what stories from now will be told in 500 years.

Stephen Hayes:

Don't you wonder about that yes, yes, yes.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Now you mentioned your books and we just talked about a book so maybe this is a good time to talk about books in general. Tell us about some of the books that you've written and some of the books that you've read beyond book of five rings that you might recommend to the folks listening.

Stephen Hayes:

Well I'm not a very well-read person. My mom when I was tiny, she used by me storybooks but she said I was only interested in mechanical how to do it kind of books and she was little disappointed. I've written



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22 books now since 1978 and the original book, the ninja and their secret fighting art. It was recently cover redesigned title company still settles that book. This is 1978 and that we put a new cover on it I did a new introduction, that's the story of how I went to Japan and began to study this ninja martial arts. It's one might favorite books even to this day. You know, I think people find it interesting because I weave stories, now I'm the butt of the joke and a lot of the stories and then the stories turn in the teaching methods and I think that's one of the reasons that that book has been so popular over the years. It's not just how to do it, it gives some of my motivations and people can identify with those motivations may be and then my newest book is odds available on Amazon as an e-book and we have some you know bound books that we sell on our website but it's called Vajrakilaya, heart of light, blade of thunder and it's the story, it starts in 1993 I'm traveling with the Dalai Lama and I recapture the same kind of writing style. There are 36 chapters in the book and I start each chapter with a little story involving me and the Dalai Lama are some other lamas and how I got involved in this [01:05:24.45] or kilaya. It's a spiritual dagger, a three-sided dagger that is used for spiritual purposes and obscure Tibetan lore. And so, teaches, it starts with the story and then it teaches a little bit about it and then each chapter ends with a series of questions where the reader can kinda compare his or her life and so forth this as to the lesson that's just gone by and so I'm enjoying trying to promote that book right now. Its available on Amazon, I mean, easiest way for people to find that if they're interested black belt bodyguard for the Dalai Lama kind of book, and its 300 pages and no little pictures of black guys in suits fighting or anything like that. You can go to Amazon and just type in Stephen K Hayes and it'll come up with all my books there. Yeah.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Sure, you and of course folks, if you're new to the show or you know, just as a reminder we do link all this relevant stuff at the show notes whistlekickmartialartsradio.com don't forget. If you're driving down trying with this stuff down the crash, no need. Let's talk about the future. You're still active, you're still training, you're still teaching, you're still writing books. And it's clear from our time today at least to me, that you're still really passionate about this stuff.

Stephen Hayes:

Oh yeah. I long ago, made peace with the fact that I'm in a run out a lifetime before I run out of lessons. You know, don't have to come back again and start over again. Yeah, I'm just so happy I'm trying to decide whether to tell the story or not so anyway I guess I'll tell it. I recently went, I recently went to my 50th high school reunion. 50th high school reunion and a little depressed with all these old people there. I'm retired you retired, what you do? Oh well, you know I read a lot and oh god, this sounds awful, just last night I was wrestling teenagers with knives on the floor, retired and you know kinda old not in shape, you know, I remember that high school big shots you know the athletes, oh gosh they've all got guts on them now. The gorgeous girls were little old ladies no, oh man, you know I came away



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from that 50th high school reunion. Oh boy, I am a lucky guy, aren't I? I'm still in the game, I'm still in the game but you know I think, I think there is some truth to that, I spend all my time with people in their 20s and 30s. I forget I'm 68 and so I'm kinda used to the way young people think, no I don't always agree with that you know, but I'm used to the way young people think and its very refreshing to be involved with people who are I mean, totally engaged, just starting out in the life and I'm there is an advisor, I'm there is a participant. So yeah, I think that is my passion for the martial arts and spiritual arts as I say on when a run out a lifetime before I run out of lessons and you know my mom is 94 she lives in Phoenix. Impeccable shape. I mean, I get on Skype with her she's all dressed up very clear thinking. 94, so I figure that bodes well for me, I figure I got another 30 years here in the game and gotta make the best of it you know.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Absolutely, I love the approach. I love the openness to just what you said there just a couple times, you're gonna run out of life before you run out of lessons. And really for being honest we all will, regardless of how one will live. There are always more lessons.

Stephen Hayes:

You know that is true. It's just when do you check out of the game? When do you just give it all up and man I just hope I never do, I just hope I never do.

Jeremy Lesniak:

And that's kind of universal sentiment among the guests that we've had on especially those guests that have been training for 30-40-50 plus years. Folks that look back on their life and say you know, it feels like this just started. I'm still passionate about training I'm still passionate about teaching I'm still learning lessons and I hope that that everyone out there listening can take some inspiration from that and realize that doesn't matter who you are, doesn't matter what you've done, there's always more to learn and don't take any moments whether the moments now or the moments later for granted, because you want to make the most of them. You want to use them in the best way you can.

Stephen Hayes:

Very well put.

Jeremy Lesniak:



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Well, thank you. I had to get a couple goods good things in on the on this one you know. You set the bar so high I had to rise in the occasion.

Stephen Hayes:

It was a delightful talking with you. I really enjoyed this opportunity to be on whistlekick podcast, I enjoyed it.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Thank you for being here. Thank you for being here. If I could poke you for just kinda one last bit one Golden Nugget of wisdom to wrap it up at the end, what parting words would you leave for everyone listening?

Stephen Hayes:

Well, you know I think this is kind of mundane but is not mundane but really, why are you involved in the martial arts? Why are you doing this? Why are you doing this? I went through two major changes of martial arts because I just kept asking myself that question. Is this martial art that I'm doing right now? Is satisfying totally, why am in the martial arts? And if it's not, this is America, go out and they go thank your teacher but you know, move on look around. I don't think enough people ask themselves. You know, they may remember why they got started but no, now why are you in the, why are you doing this? Why is this rewarding? What benefit does it bring to you? Is it possible you can get more of that benefit by being a little open-minded looking around trying something, the trying something new or maybe your current martial art totally satisfies you but take stock, take stock why are you doing what you're doing and allow that to inspire you.

Jeremy Lesniak:

I found An-Shu Hayes to be a dynamic storyteller along with his funny stories which made the interview that much more enjoyable for me. I felt I was right there with him on parts of his journey. I'm sure that many of you were listening right now have been inspired by not only his humility, but his perseverance to learn not just any martial art but one that so difficult to learn even, difficult to find someone to teach. His inspiring story shows both his eagerness to learn and his dedication to the martial arts. An-Shu Hayes, thank you for coming on the show. This is where you should check out the whistlekickmartialartsradio.com for the links to an-Shu Hayes websites, social media, our social media we're @whistlekick all over the place, other episodes, signing up for the newsletter and so much more. We put a lot into the show and we hope that you enjoy it and the best compliment we could ever receive from you is to share this or any of the other episodes with your fellow martial arts friends. Let



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them know that you enjoy the show and help us, support not only the show, but the martial arts overall as we chronicle the stories some of these amazing folks. As always, I appreciate your time today and lending me your ears. I hope all goes well until next time, train hard, smile and have a great day.