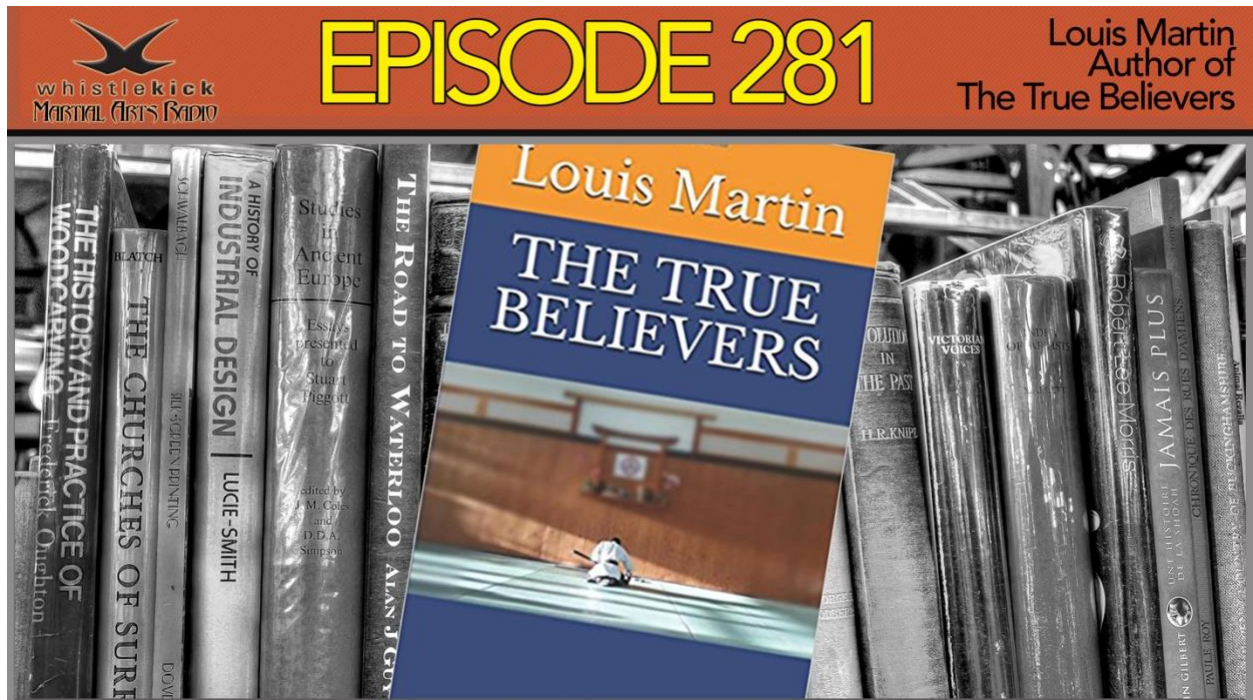




Episode 236 – Louis Martin: Author of The True Believers | [whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com](http://whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com)



**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Hey listeners! So, we've got a little bit of a different episode today. You know quite often on the show, we talk about books, we talk about the books that some of our guests have written and one of the things that you may not know is that I received books all the time. People are mailing books and most of the time they don't follow-up, they don't ask if they can send a book they don't even let me know that they're going to send a book is kind of grab the address from the website and send a book and awesome and I appreciate that. I read those books when I can but today, we're gonna talk about a book that's a little bit different and I am joined by the author, Mr. Louis Martin, thanks for being on the show.

Hey thanks Jeremy for having me. I'm super excited to be here, you came highly recommended.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Well, we have to get out there and fix all that. Can't be known as a good place to go to.

But you'll get more books.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**



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Oh, I know. I will be, become Marshall book cast or something, I don't know. But it's important I think that the listeners know why you're here and why so many others aren't. We've had plenty of authors but honestly listeners the number of books to come in is kind of ridiculous. But there was something really unique not only in your book, in the subject matter, but also in the way that you wrote it and I'm doing my best to to raise some anticipation here. So, let me step back and why do you tell the listeners about your book and what's in those pages.

I will. Man, I'm anticipating it now, you built it up good. You know, this is a book about kind of the darker side of martial arts. It's a side that exists. Everyone you know within our Gyms and dojos we acknowledge it and we talk about it but there's far as I can tell, not a lot of books that have been written on it and it's really about fanaticism and obsession and maybe a little bit of abuse of power in martial arts. I was part of a martial arts organization for about seven years, was a really large organization. It existed primarily in California, Northern California but we also were international we had schools in Puerto Rico, Europe with a couple schools in Alaska, there is a, it's headquartered in Japan now. It used to be headquartered in Monterey California, that's where I trained. And on the outside, this was sort of a traditional Japanese jujitsu, aiki jujitsu school and that's why I joined and that was my interest. I had never done martial arts before I started when I was 19, but over the years what I learned is that this was essentially a New Age self-help system that was packaged as a martial arts school, but the more you got into it the martial arts sort of faded a little bit more in the background and this like I said, kinda self-help system really came to the forefront and it became more of a spiritual journey of kinda realizing your potential. The martial arts teachers were became sort of spiritual mentors and it wrapped a lot of us up in it including myself and that's why the book is called the true believers because we were not just a dedicated martial arts students. I mean we felt like we were on a greater mission to enlighten the world, fix everybody, fix ourselves and in the process, you know a lot of us inadvertently destroyed our lives because we sacrifice so much in service to the system and its teacher who was our our martial arts master.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Now the things that you're saying there are folks listening and and I'm gonna guess that they're coming down on one of two sides. Cause there's not a whole lot of gray here, they're listening to your words and their thinking I've heard people talk about martial arts schools that way, maybe they've even heard others speak about the school they attend that way and I have attended schools where people will say you know oh this place is a cult and you know everybody is kisses the instructors butt. And then you know but it's a cynical approach that that's really not what it is that you know, he's just he doesn't understand and then there may be others listening thinking oh, I've never been to a school like that or maybe I have and I can totally see what he's talking about. Now I've read the book so I know what you're talking about and I would love for you to give the listeners a bit of context without giving too much away because listeners, I think you all should read this book. If we talk we only think, take a step



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back, when we look at a lot of the subjects that are coming up on the show over and over again whether it's a Thursday show or a Monday show, ego and self-delusion the authority of rank and that whole ball of wax. This book is a perfect example of how it can go wrong. So, I'd love for you to give the listeners a bit of context for the reality that was your life for seven years.

Well you said some interesting about the gray area and I think that, why this book was importance and why it had to be written the way I wrote it was that there was a lot of gray area, it was seven years of gray area and it was me and others constantly questioning is this normal? And we had just enough reason to say eh it's probably not that big a deal to sorta keep going. And's because of that when I wrote the book, I realize that it deserves some nuance because it's a nuanced thing. I didn't you know, I felt like the story deserves to be told in a fair way I mean, I didn't just call the book, hey I was in a martial arts cult. And actually, I never call seibukan jujitsu a cult in the book because I really don't think it is. I was just reading this morning about this crazy cult where they were branding people in New York and it was a whole sex slave operation and that I read that article, I was like, that was a real cult you know. I'm not sure we are on that level but we were just on that line you know, where it was it was something that I think a lot of people can read it and maybe think about schools that they've seen or been involved with them and like yeah, I could see a little bit of that but we were probably a little bit more extreme than what your listeners are thinking of. Like I said, we had a whole philosophical system that you know, we treated like a religion and that the martial arts training was a part of that. So, you know we were training a lot, getting promoted learning really good Japanese-style jujitsu but as we advance in the system, you also kind advanced in these steps of Enlightenment where you had an incentive to keep training not just because he would acquire new physical skills, but that you would get to like a deeper level of understanding and a lot of it was you know, kinda wrapped up in Japanese Shinto mysticism of you know, spiritual animals and elements and there were seven gates and 21 concepts. I mean it was really deep and of course the founder of the system was the man that we trained under and he was the one that he had created it and he had meditated on a rock for seven days or something in and gotten this vision from you know, the powers of the universe and we really look to him as as our sort of spiritual leader. There's a lot of competition for his time and his attention and I was certainly a part of that. I mean everything I say I'm kinda point the finger at myself to. But I was a kid you now, as I was 19 by the time I left I was 27. I had started to kinda figure things out think a little bit more independently but a lot of us were kids and we jus, we didn't know any better, we want to be part of something.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

When you look at that time that you were in this school, what changed if anything? Was it, because if you if you, I'm going to guess, that if you had the same knowledge and perspective that on the day you left at age 27, you would've made it past day one at age 19.

Yeah, it's a great point.



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**Jeremy Lesniak:**

So, was it just your knowledge your experience or was the way things were being done different over that time too?

That's a great question, it was both. So, there were internal things that were changing and they were external things happening to me. Internally I came to this school in 2006 and at that point it was just starting to really intensify in that. The martial aspect was always there but the philosophy of the martial art was really starting to ramp up and become kinda intertwined. We were starting to treat our art teacher with kind of a sort of a mystical reverence and attributing you know, pseudo-magical powers to him. And's by I'd say 2009-2010 that stuff hit its peak where we were, I mean, we were really really deep in this philosophical system and you know we are attributing that it was changing our lives and that we were going to change the world with it. We were kinda isolating ourselves from other people that were outside the system. I was isolating myself you know maybe a bit from my family and you know, even from my girlfriend who would end up being my wife and I attribute her for you know, saving me from a lot of this stuff. So that was the internal, it just got way more intense. And then externally I was really into martial arts Jeremy, and I wanted to cross train and learn other things and cross training was generally frowned upon in our style as a way to sorta insulate ourselves we cross trained within the dojo. So, we would train another kind of martial arts but it was all the same people and it was our same instructor master you know, cross training us it wasn't a real cross training. But I was doing that and I was coming across one other schools that were not like we were, you know they didn't have this this true believer vibe going around. And then two, you know I came across some people that were really good at real fighting arts that you know, physically could just destroy me and that was a big eye-opener that in all these incredible things that I thought I could do weren't really working at all on them and it started to kinda sow the seeds of doubt over the years.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

What was it about where you were at age 19 that allowed this to have and if and if you go into this in the book, you know, I remember the generalities of the book, right, I've read the book but certainly you know the book better and I do, I'd like for you to tell us, I'm gonna ask this a different way, I'd like for you to describe to the listeners what kind of person you were at age 19 you know, just before you stepped into the school.

Well I think there was nothing special about me. I was were a lot of 19-year-olds are which is I was starting this process of individualizing. I was moving away from home, leaving my parents and my family and I was open to new things and I was... You know, when you're 19 your feeling now okay who am I gonna be? Like what is my identity? What are my personal values? And a lot of us you know when were young like that were thinking and realizing all the values that my family had or that the group I had





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before that kinda socialized me, doesn't have to be my values, I could be a whole new person. And that's why I think when you're young enough, people talk about being young and impressionable and that's what I was, I was, I wanted to find a new identity a new sense of belonging and I walked into a martial arts school because that was something I thought that I want to do and I saw this incredible community and they had a sense of unity and they kinda leaned on each other. And I was just ready and I wasn't you know worldly enough to question a lot of it, you know it seems normal to me, I had nothing to really compare it to and that's something that over the years as I got older, I realize that our martial arts organization was really tending to recruit younger people like I had been and I don't know if they done it nefariously, I don't think they had done it nefariously honestly, but I think that it's just something about younger people and true believers go hand-in-hand and that's why the average age of the students over the years tended to get younger. Like when I walked in, you know it's a pretty well-balanced people of a group of people, somewhere older in their 40s with families and then they ran the gamut from you know the 30s to the 20s the teens but by the time I left, I mean it was a lot of early 20s students that were basically the heads the organization seen as kind of spiritual leaders. I mean 23-24-year-olds that were 7th degree black belts you know seen as Masters.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

And in your voice, it sounds like you have an issue with that.

Yeah sure I do I think you know, this was sort of a key trait in our system was that we promoted quickly and that you could get your black belt in a year, you could get in less than a year, sometimes I got mine in nine months and then you could keep getting degrees of black belts at a regular pace. Some people can get their second 3rd degree within six months and they can be you know a tenth dan within you know, 4-5-6 years and I mean, do I have a problem with that? Yeah of their skill doesn't correlate to that but two, that's you know if you really young and you're 7th degree black belt year the person that gave you that is not setting you up for success and credibility throughout the martial arts world. You're gonna constantly be in this position of defending yourself, defending your belt, defending you know your experience and I've kinda come to believe that you know I'm an instructor, a big part of me promoting the students is I'm putting my name on the student and then I'm gonna send the student down to the world and they need to have credibility otherwise it's going to affect me and my integrity and my reputation.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Why did you write this and let me explain why I'm asking that question? Because in writing this there's a tremendous amount of vulnerability, you're telling the world here's what happened, here's what happened with you, you're opening who you are and talking about a very nuanced time in your life and saying to everyone 'hey, this is me, this is what happened, you can learn more about it, you can see who



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I am' because of who you are now of course is in part because of what you've gone through. So why in a day when so many people will keep their vulnerabilities tucked away would you do this?

It's funny my editor asked me the same thing Stephen, that was the very first thing he asked me why? After he read the first draft and at that time I didn't really know why I had written it and I told him that and he said his response was I can tell because it comes out in the writing you're not really clear on everything that you went through and your lack of clarity came through in the writing and that's why you know I had to write several drafts but I've got honed it since then. So, there's three people I wrote it for an to go in this order one is the students in seibukan jiujiitsu I wrote it primarily for them. They deserve to have the story told and they deserve to have it told in a way that is that is fair and honest and I hope that I've done it within integrity that they can be proud of it and hopefully experience some healing from it. Second person I wrote it for is myself this was a year-long process of writing it and I'm sure you can imagine, it was a healing process for me because it forced me to walk myself through a lot of things I hadn't thought about and I came to a lot of revelations about myself and you know, what is it about me that I need to address because I'm not going to just point fingers at everyone else I mean, I need take some responsibility and say you know there was something in you that you are drawn to this that you needed this and you are participant in this and I think I figured out a lot of what that was. And the third group of people wake on in the back is everyone else. You know this is not uncommon thing in martial arts, I think my situation was uncommon but this is stuff people talk about all the time, people kinda whisper about in the, in the backs of the dojo's, I heard about this group or did you see these people on YouTube and you know when you see these crazy kind people on YouTube doing crazy techniques, you know it's funny but you also have to have some empathy and realize you know some of those people could be really brainwashed and they can be really putting themselves in danger like mental danger of you know surrendering their identity to you know, someone that is a con artist or doesn't have their best interest intentions in mind or they could be physically putting themselves in danger by being completely delusional and then you know going forth in the world with this false sense of security.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

It sounds like you don't hold really anything against anybody in this story. Just the way you wrote the book, the way you're talking now it's it's very kind a matter of fact and that's striking me as interesting cause I think a lot of times if someone well, I don't put any more words on that. I just turn the question over to you, am I reading that writer you are you not blaming anyone for anything?

No, not really. I mean these were all good people even Concho, our master, I think he was essentially a good person that things sorta got away from him, things sort of got out of hands. And there's reasons for that I mean he had he had hundreds of adoring students that thought that he was essentially more than a man and we put a lot of pressure on him to not just teach us martial arts but to kinda fix us and



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fix our lives and he was forced into this role of therapist and then spiritual leader and he stepped up to the plate in all the wrong ways. But and again I don't want to give too much of the book away, there was a couple people I think we're that were objectively bad because at that the very high levels of the art, there was in my opinion and other people have made similar allegations, I think there was some serious abuse going on, abuse of power, abusive people and then even some sexual abuse.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

But you've stopped short of calling it a cult. So, imp curious where does that line fall for you?

It's tricky. I, you know, I looked up definitions of cults and things like that and you know where we on that level I would say no especially when I read about like real cults where people are dying and you know, all sorts of you know, incredibly abhorrent things are happening but I think that's you know we were treating seibukan and its self-help system in a religious way. I mean it was he was filling a slot in our lives that most people would assign religion to that slot. It was it was a vehicle of kind of salvation and you know, we didn't have any deities or gods or anything like that but we certainly had a guru that we saw as you know, kind of the all-knowing guy that had everything figured out and you know, do I think it was a cult, no, do I think that we stopped just short, yeah.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Well, listeners will start to wrap up here but one of the things I think it's important to say, because I don't believe I said this yet, we do not take anything ever for the folks who come on the show whether it's you know someone who very plainly has something to plug or even if it's a little more subtle. It is always entirely based on our own internal decisions who comes on the show and it is exclusively because we want to present the things that we think are going to best resonate with you the audience. There are some podcast popping up now where it's starting to become pretty clear that they've made a name for themselves and I'm not, this is not in the martial arts space so don't speculate there. And the guests it seems pretty clear that there is a financial arrangement there, that is not us, it's never been us, it will never be us, so I just wanted to make sure everyone knew that. So, Louis, as we start to wind down here why don't you tell folks where they can get the book and maybe there's a way they can get a hold of you, if somebody wants to follow-up with you or anything like that.

Yeah, I meant to ask you do you want cash or check?

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Bitcoin.



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I'm kidding, I'm kidding. No money. Okay I what you asked where people can find it?

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Yeah. I mean the most important piece of information where can people find the book. Let's start there.

You can find it on Amazon the title of the book is the true believers by Louis Martin my name is LOU IS everyone calls me Louis but my name is Louis Martin. There's an e-book available you can get it and download it on the Kindle app on your phone or your actual Kindle and then there's the paperback version as well. I, not making hundreds of thousands of dollars from this, I think some people think I am but I'm not making very little money from this. It's it's really something that its, everyone that I wanted and to read it already has and has messaged me so everything from here on out is kind extra credit.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Yeah, everybody that thinks authors tend to make a lot of money are not authors. I have written several books and as I tell people, the book division of whistlekick brings in dollars every month. Like 8 to 9 dollars it's amazing, I put in that year of work on that book and whoo. It's gonna pay off one of these days.

Yeah, I read the other day in the in the book space about 10% of the authors make about 80% of the revenue. And there's like 100,000 books written every year something like that.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Well yet it doesn't surprise me actually. And if people want to get a hold of you are you willing to be the public with some manner of communication? You know I have an author page on Amazon, I think you can get a hold of me that way otherwise you know I'm pretty low-key. I don't have an author website or anything, you can find me on Facebook, I'm Louis Martin I think on Instagram, I'm like LJM three or something like that, you know if you want to get a hold of me, you can just gotta hunt for me.

Sure, and our audiences is pretty kind, if anybody's connect catch the hate it's generally me and fortunately we don't see a lot of it coming in. Yeah everyone's been really great I haven't gotten hardly any you know blowback or negative feedback since I wrote this.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Because the story as I read it you were painfully objective at times. It was really clear how important it was to you that you be fair to everyone involved and that's something that as someone who helps





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facilitate others telling their stories, I know how much of a challenge that can be and that was part of the reason I wanted to have you on the show. So, I appreciate you being here. Listeners of course as always you know, we'll drop the link to that book over on the show notes [whistlekickmartialartsradio.com](http://whistlekickmartialartsradio.com) so if you're driving or something, you don't have to crash while you write it down.

Yeah it's funny when I was a kid, my mom and sister used to fight a lot and I remember you know they did finish fight and then I go to my sister's room and she would complain to me and you know was put in this position that like have to be between her and my mom and then my mom would drive me to school and she kinda complain about our sister and I was in the same position and I really attribute that to where I got my sense of objectivity, neutrality that that's something I really value as a as a characteristic of me and other people have commented on that the like oh wow you're usually really neutral and that was a challenge of writing this book was that I would probably throw myself pretty clearly and one can't. And in some ways, I did I mean theirs's definitely some bridges that I burned but not nearly as many as I thought as I worried about.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

What was the hardest part about writing the book?

Definitely releasing it. Though the book itself writing it was really enjoyable. I loved the editing process which I didn't think I would like, I love just rewriting it over and over and just making a little bit better a little bit better but once I got to the you know the 5-yard line and it was, it was like okay there's nothing left to do but publish this in and click that button. That was really tough for me because I started mentally thinking of almost every person individually that I knew and what would they think and what would they think and my need to come to please people and get along with everyone kicked into overdrive and I had to admit to myself that you can't make everyone happy. You can't make everyone like you and like the book and you just need to be okay with putting this story out there and everyone's going to react how they did and again that was I mentioned this earlier that was one of those sort of self-growth moments for me when I really was confronted with you know my need to make friends and keep friends and to kinda a set that aside for a second and say okay this is bigger than you and you know, wanting to always be in the club. And actually, it you know it all worked out because I published it and basically every single day for about a month, I had someone that I used to train with contact me and say I read the book and you know all of them thanked me for writing it and not a single person was like 'oh I think you really overreacted, I think that you're just your reading too much into this' like no one said that all. Everyone was like I thought the same thing that you did and I never said anything because I didn't want to be that person.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**



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Awesome. Well I appreciate your time, thanks for being here, thanks for talking about the book and listeners again the true believers, go grab it on Amazon find the link at [whistlekickmartialartsradio.com](http://whistlekickmartialartsradio.com) thanks for tuning in. I'm just gonna finish up the the outro here, we'll make it one seamless piece. So, thanks for tuning in and anybody that's new, anybody that's old, we in the show same way every time until next time. Train hard, smile and have a great day!