



Episode 286 – Sifu Ken Gullette | [whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com](http://whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com)



### Jeremy Lesniak:

Hello thank you for tuning in and welcome to whistlekick martial arts radio episode 286. Today, I'm joined by fellow martial arts podcaster Sifu Ken Gullette. If you're new to the show head on over to [whistlekick martial arts radio.com](http://whistlekickmartialartsradio.com) check out all of our other episodes all available for free with show notes including videos, links, photos, lots of great stuff. And from there, you can sign up for a newsletter, you could head on over to [whistlekick.com](http://whistlekick.com) check out the amazing products we make and you can find links to our other online projects like [martialjournal.com](http://martialjournal.com) [martialartscalendar.com](http://martialartscalendar.com) [martialartsmemes.com](http://martialartsmemes.com) [karatetournamentbook.com](http://karatetournamentbook.com) so many great stuffs. Great stuff, that's terrible grammar, so many great things there we go. I'm just gonna do this in one take because that's how we tend to do the show, we just kind of roll and let whatever's gonna come out of it, come out of it. It's a fun style is something I appreciate doing, we don't edit too much on the backend. We dislike to let you listen in on the conversations that I am so blessed to have with the amazing guests like today's guest. I've honestly lost count of the guest we had on the show who started martial arts because of Bruce lee. Our guest today is a proud member of the group that started training after seeing his most iconic work, enter the dragon. Sifu Ken Gullette is a fellow podcaster and I really enjoyed talking with him today. We talked about titles, rank, teachers, the concept of mastery, and so much more. It's a great conversation and I hope you enjoy it as much as I did. Let's welcome him to the show.



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Hello Sifu, how are you?

**Ken Gullette:**

Good at just call me ken.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Well okay. I mean when we when we kick off, you know, it's become kind of a hallmark to use titles you know and the deeper we get into this, the more I just wonder, I wonder if I'm just looking at it wrong.

**Ken Gullette:**

I don't know I take a nontraditional approach into some things.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

You know, honestly, I think I do to. But I operate from this what I've always called the least common denominator of offensiveness.

**Ken Gullette:**

Respect is always a good thing.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Well titles don't always mean respect sometimes it's compulsion.

**Ken Gullette:**

Sometimes it's ego.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Yeah and so, when I started the show it was, I need to make sure I use titles because what if there's somebody out there who tunes in and they hear me refer to somebody you know, to be honest, you know and this is the example I always come back to when I talked about on the show, Bill Wallace wanted me to call bill and this predates me becoming friends with him and you know just the fact that I had him on the show, I was twitching and I said I can't



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do it sir because I had this vision of someone listening you know this is episode 13 I think, listening and saying, who does this guy think he is calling super foot bill? You know, they wouldn't have context of that conversation how you handle it on your show?

**Ken Gullette:**

I call them by their name rarely, even if someone calls himself a master, I know that's usually and I don't use it. There are so few masters I just, I'll say instructor, teacher and that's fine but yeah, it's very difficult for me after I got into chen taichi to buy into all that, I used to in the but there's so, it's kind of sickness.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

It can be. What, how did that change when you started that you said chen tai chi?

**Ken Gullette:**

Chen style. There that's the original style of tai chi, I don't know I had a teacher were very good teacher Jim [00:04:28.23] made mention him but to he said call me Jim and that was a really eye-opening for me.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

I have this theory and I've to do some research to dig it up, I've got this theory that started from the way I was looking at Korean martial arts and one of the, I think we can say that the prime art I'm training in right now is taekwondo and when someone reaches 4th degree, they're considered a master and forget the potentially false symbolism in using that title, yes, I wonder if there's a slight I'd almost call error in translation. Because when I look at the title in Japanese that is used more than any other it's sensei and there's there is no indication really of mastery in there, it's really just I'm the guy that knows in theory more stuff than you do so I'm gonna share with you the stuff that I know. It's not about competency, it's, I think that translations a lot of people are using now is one who came before, I kinda like that.

**Ken Gullette:**

I use Sifu, I look at it is marketing on a DVD or something and some of my DVDs just as Ken Gullette because people, I thought Sifu meant teacher, I've seen some translations that it means master and that horrifies me I don't want that out there because I will I don't have time in this lifetime to become a master.



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**Jeremy Lesniak:**

If you follow that and I forget who said it but that the 10,000 hours rule, you know the idea that it takes 10,000 hours to truly master something I mean

**Ken Gullette:**

And it also takes good instruction behind it, 10000 in hours because there are a lot of bad teachers out there.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Absolutely.

**Ken Gullette:**

So, I could practice 10,000 hours and still not know much.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

But if you assume that you've got amazing instruction that 10,000 hours I mean, if you're training full time that still like 20 years. Most people by that definition never master anything.

**Ken Gullette:**

That's right. That's right. But they sure need to think they did.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Where do you think that comes from?

**Ken Gullette:**

I don't know we all need to be important, we all need to be king and there a lot of the ego is drawn to martial arts and actually I think some studies show there are controlling people are drawn to the martial arts. And so, I think they need to have that out there. In tai chi, I think a lot of people are drawn to who want to be mystical and they want people to think they had mystical abilities and that's why I think a lot of the myths have grown up around tai chi which I've spent the last 20 years trying to dispel.



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**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Did you have any of those false impressions when you started taichi?

**Ken Gullette:**

A little bit yeah. I studied acupuncture for a couple of years and bought into the you know, I gave the chi a shot. Li still practiced chi gong I just interpreted differently.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

What you mean by that?

**Ken Gullette:**

Are we recording by the way?

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

That is up to you because we've got a good conversation going and we can we can let it run from here if you want a more formal start we can do that too.

**Ken Gullette:**

It does not matter to me I just do you do any editing like coughs and things like that?

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Well you just coughed and so all make a note there but

**Ken Gullette:**

I will try to mute my mic. Okay but to be. I'll be really honest over the last couple episodes we've had more of a dive in, head first starts fine with me I loved the gene Ching interview.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Yeah. The feedback coming back from the guests and the audience has been phenomenal it's felt a lot more organic and you know honestly, I think I'm ready for that as an interviewer night and I love that label but early on I needed the structure.



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**Ken Gullette:**

Yeah and this is the kind of thing type of conversation I like to have so, keep it rolling.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Cool okay.

**Ken Gullette:**

Where were we?

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

I don't remember that's okay. Well listeners, well you know I'll take the opportunity now that were you know, seven changes in listeners were here with Sifu not that he wants me to use that title, Ken Gullette and you have a show so maybe we should do a little bit of context stuff since we kind of broke off honor flow. You've got a show and you've got some stuff going on so maybe we'll take a moment, you can tell listeners about that?

**Ken Gullette:**

Well I love your podcast. I just discovered it a few weeks ago and trying to promote it a little bit you're doing a great service and I try to do the same. Mine is devoted more to the internal arts and it's called the internal fighting arts, that's the name of my website and the name of my podcast. And it's available stitcher and odello and itunes but I try to interview martial artist are devoted to the internal arts and have good ties to Chinese masters. And try to get them publicity and at the same time it to helps promote me. It's a win-win situation

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

And you're doing great work. Of course, you know I hope listeners realize you know you are not the first person to have a quote unquote "competitive podcast" that we've had on the show and I don't want, I never want the show to feel like something that is restrictive. You know, I never want people to think well you know it's whistlekick so, you know there's gonna be a hard line between this show and other martial arts podcasts or this show and people tied into products. I mean, we are in discussion with bringing people on from companies that sell products directly competitive to ours because I'm very much a rising-tide-lifts-all-ships kind of guy you know.



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**Ken Gullette:**

I don't look at any other martial artist as a competitor there other people who have do online training as I do and sell dvds as I do and I look at all of us as martial artist who I just I love the arts and you're not taking away from me and I'll promote everybody's on my show I promote their web websites and dvds and books and it's a good thing but there is a lot of that isolationism in the arts for you build the walls up and anyone who is not me does not get my praise or whatever but that's silly.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

And to me there's a bit of a parallel there with the way martial arts has and I feel should develop, it should be tempered by other people looking at it and comparing it to other things and testing it and seeing what works. Just like you know if you put out a set of DVDs and everyone hates them and you know 20 other people come and make better dvds, that's gonna do one of two things you're either going to improve hopefully most likely or you're going to step away and either way it's kind of this does great free market sort of outcome. I listen other podcasts like yours and how can I take what you're doing, what Sensei Ando was doing, what Sensei Wilson is doing and make this show better by taking it all in and analyze it. That's what I do.

**Ken Gullette:**

Yeah that's a good show.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

How did you get started?

**Ken Gullette:**

Well I was part of the Bruce lee boom. I was 20 years old, 1973 in college, I've been watching the kung fu tv show and was fascinated by it not just the fight scenes but also the morality, the philosophy, and I'd grown up in a fundamentalist household in the south and so that was a very interesting way to look at the world that I'd never been exposed to and then Bruce lee head and when I saw enter the dragon I said, I've got to start. So, a month or two later I had my first class and have been at it ever since. It was in Lexington, Kentucky. I grew up in Kentucky.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**



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I've had a few folks on, from and around Kentucky. What was it you found because I was like the outcome of this question. The perception and the reality of martial arts is generally a pretty big gap in there. But inevitably, if you go and you stay, you find something that resonates for you and often that's something that's missing from your life. So, what was it for you step in, you're on the wings of the Bruce Lee phenomenon that brought so many people into training. Why did you stick around?

**Ken Gullette:**

It's interesting that I grew up getting into a lot of fights I was picked on and I was scrawny and I was also friendly and when a bully would come up to a group of guys they would, he would pick me out inevitably is the one to pick on and so I ended up being in a lot of fights and what I discovered was I tried to put the fight off as long as I could. But eventually I said after getting hit a few times I said, okay I might as well go down swinging and I would beat the guy up every time. And once the fight started once I got into it, I realized how much I enjoyed it that this was the one on one ultimate competition. The ultimate sport, and so I got into the arts too because of the self-defense but I didn't realize at the time even though I was drawn to the philosophy the Taoism and the Zen Buddhism, I started reading about that and overtime I think the philosophy, once you I knew how to fight already but the techniques, I've learned over the years hopefully has just made me a better fighter. I haven't been in a fight since I was 18 other than tournaments because you get wiser too and who wants to go to court? Who wants to go to jail? Who wants to lose their job? And so, the philosophy became an important part of it for me and has probably shaped my life as much as the other physical discipline that you put yourself through. The guy I started there were the place was overflowing though September 20, 1973...

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

You remember the day.

**Ken Gullette:**

I remember that. That's how important it was to me and that the teacher was in Lexington, one of the only ones at that time the legendary and still teach us today it was not a good art it turned out he misrepresented himself, but it got me in and I earned a brown belt over the next two or three years and it got me started on the way. But it was, the crowd was flowing into the parking lot from the building. There were so many people interested that night and the curious after 45 years I wonder how many of them are still practicing I have a feeling not many.





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**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Statistically zero I mean, other than you.

**Ken Gullette:**

Yeah but if it was that's why got into it. But the philosophy is really a bit an important part, I'm fascinated though by the internal arts especially tai chi and how the movements in tai chi everywhere your hands are, everywhere you move, everywhere your legs are, there's a fighting application and using the body mechanics for that that is really kept me inspired over the years.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

When did that fascination with the internal art start?

**Ken Gullette:**

1987. I was in TV news, I used to be a producer for Jerry Springer when he was in news in Cincinnati.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

I bet a lot of people don't realize that at one point, he was a legitimate newsman.

**Ken Gullette:**

And the nicest guy, a very nice no ego. I worked with him for over three years and just had a good time with him and a very smart Kennedy-esque thinker. I just really can't say enough nice things about the guy, but TV news is crazy and they hired a little guy from New York and he came in he decided he didn't like me and wanted to fire me. So, I ended up quitting and got a job a month or two later in Omaha and that's where I met my first internal arts teacher. I was looking through the phone book, they had a ninja school, all kinds of schools in 1987 but I'd never investigated tai chi jing yi and bagwa, so I investigated that and that's what I've been studying ever since.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**



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How did your perceptions versus the reality come up there? You mentioned knowing in your initial school and just bite by saying brown belt I'm gonna guess it was some Japanese school possibly karate school.

**Ken Gullette:**

It was a shaolin supposedly shaolin school they called a shaolin do. Shaolin karate and we were karate gis. Yeah, there it was, I was a good student and I actually [00:20:24.18] inspiring techniques that one tournaments as late as 2005 in my 50s. But in 19, we were not allowed to go to outside tournaments and that's a good sign that you're in a bad school. And no one from the outside was allowed to our tournaments. So, in 1976 doing the rebel that I am I went up to Columbus Ohio to compete in the tournament and saw things that blew me away. Some kung fu competitors and so I decide to step back at that time and I left the school and started studying taekwondo and then two years later moved to Cincinnati, studied with Karen Vaughn briefly [00:21:10.27] kung fu and then moved to Omaha and that's when my studies really got a little more serious and they got even more serious and 98 when I met, I decided that the internal I had learned was quite empty and external and I decided to investigate chin tai chi and I was introduced to Jim and Angela Krisha Many in Rockford, Illinois and they had been studying with fong and with George Schu and [00:21:47.53] now they were studying with [00:21:50.18] and that's when I, that made all the difference in and my martial arts journey.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

As we get deeper into this show we've seen more and more folks pop up that have some time logged with the internal arts and I think I've mentioned it on the show, back in the fall I took a trip I was invited down to a dinner, honoring Sifu bow sim mark who some listeners will know the name others will not but it's Donnie yen's mother and I'm finding this very interesting and granted I have a very limited sample set but the folks that I know that have some time and some skill with internal arts there's just different one way that they present themselves a different way that they walk the earth its almost seems magnetic. People just seem drawn to that, is that something that in your experience happens a lot or have I just been lucky in some of these folks that I've met?

**Ken Gullette:**

You might've been lucky but see, I take a pretty down-to-earth view of these things there are a lot of very heady, jealous people in the internal arts. I have had an experience or two



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that with instructors and teachers who were fairly well known one in particular, who it was just horrible.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

If you leave out the name, are you willing to tell us about it?

**Ken Gullette:**

Oh yeah, those one of my, was my second major chen tai chi instructor who introduced me to [00:23:52.14] others. I've written blog posts and made some enemies in the tai chi world doing that but I believe in being honest and letting people know. Don't check your brains at the school, the door of a martial arts school. Maintain your critical thinking, don't put your teachers on pedestals. And this guy asked me to be his disciple after I trained with him for a couple of years and I didn't want that, I just wanted to study. And so, I politely declined the next week he called me and went off on me, called my employer, act, the college test, I had a very good six-figure job and he told them I'd hacked into his website using their computers and made some disparaging remarks about my wife. So, there are people in the internal arts who are not what they appear to be. So, buyer beware and I ended up separating from him very quickly and that's the point I decided to go independent. I'll study with everyone, I'll learn from everyone but I don't need that relationship anymore of a father-son. I'm 65 now, who needs that? I just want to get better. So, there are a lot of people who are, who do had their heads together, there are a lot of people who made you think they have their heads together, but I think you just have to beware and I don't wanna make that sound you negative either there's some really good people but a lot of us you know, the martial arts draws people who want to be king, they want to be top dog and there is a lot of the pissing on trees when guys especially get together and that's true in martial arts as well. There have been people in the internal are two of put gotten second mortgages on their home so they can pay a master to come in and do a workshop and the master expects that money. It's, you can't, you have to keep your eyes open and realize you're a grown up and what do you want? Do you want to learn the arts there are plenty of opportunities to do that without demeaning yourself?

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

So, it sounds like you're saying that there really is little to no difference in the overall participation in internal arts versus external arts versus I think we can even say the world at large. I think that's true.



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Hopefully martial artists become better people I believe that over time that they do, but certainly not all of them.

**Ken Gullette:**

That is certainly the image that we have. I know that that is something that I tried to do in my life, there is a guy who started a business and he's selling shirts right now and I saw one a few weeks ago with the shirts just say "do good be kind" and that just struck a chord with me and that's been on my mind every day, I bought a shirt and I wear it as often as I can. [00:27:39.22] and people do respond to it but. It's a very simple thing to just do good be kind, but at the same time you have to be a critical thinker and not accept things that are not quite on the level there's a lot of that in the art. I've had, I spent a lot of money and I think other people listening have to on teachers who turned out not to be what we thought they were, who embellish their backgrounds. I certainly have spent thousands of dollars on those instructors and I think a lot of us need to and I think some people got upset when I spoke about my instructor after he passed away as something that you shouldn't do in the internal arts but I believe that we should do it in all the arts. If you know, I was as respectful as I could be while he was alive mainly because he kept harassing me on online forums under assumed names. That's the. So, you know there are people like that but there are a lot of wonderful people too. I've interviewed a lot of people on my podcast who are great teachers and great people and are really trying to do the right thing and grow as they go. But your philosophy really should guide you in your arts and your life and how you deal with people.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

I developed this saying in my last career which was it and I talked about that at times on the show because the correlations between it and martial arts are they're there and there seems to be a surprisingly large percentage of people in it who end up in the martial arts and I've been quite put my finger on why we talked about a little bit, there some theories we kicked around but I said when I was hiring I would always choose to hire the person who knew more than they thought they did rather than the person who knew less than they thought they did. Because the person who knows more than they think, is far less likely to get into trouble and I've seen something similar in the martial arts, there are people who as you've said, over represent their skill their lineage their achievements and then there are those who tend to be far more humble and I find that it's those folks who have more to teach in a better ability to teach it.

**Ken Gullette:**



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You know my first chen tai chi teacher I mentioned Jim [00:30:33.11], when I met him I had bit in one situation after another where people are telling me they were masters when they weren't I'm sorry I think I have the siren going off in the background.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

As long as they're not coming for you.

**Ken Gullette:**

Yeah. And he said I'm just a hobbyist. You know, the first day I met him I've been studying tai chi mor yang style for over a decade. I had won a gold medal doing the yang 24 forum at the 1990 kung fu nationals. So, I thought I knew tai chi and then one hour of meeting Jim, I realized I had to start over, that everything I learned was empty and he said one thing he said just call me Jim, which was shocking and he said 'I'm just a hobbyist.' there are no masters in the united states, there are no American masters it's you really have to... The difference between us and a master [00:31:48.58] some of these people is the difference between you and I going out to shoot basket balls and going up against Michael Jordan. That's the difference they live it and eat it and have this physical skill that is beyond what we do because they've trained it from childhood. And so that that was eye-opening for me and that's the mark to me of a good teacher that humility but the striving to get better and another thing that Jim did and my other tai chi teacher was they looked under the hood, they asked questions and didn't do it or they want to know why this movement is done this way, what are the body mechanics, how do you deliver power through that and the applications of this movement were important. It's good.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

And I suspect that you said it differently but because this has been a recurring theme I want to poke at it I suspect also that these folks that you're lifting up with your words were perpetual students. Looking under the hood, they weren't, it wasn't that they started looking under the hood they were continually looking under the hood.

**Ken Gullette:**

Yes, and still are. Yet despite us getting older and I lost along due to a side effect from medical procedure in 2009 and nearly died at Cleveland clinic, I was, had a breathing tube and chest. They pierced my heart accidentally with a wire and the cardiologist said there's nothing more we can do for your husband to my wife. She would be going out into the



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hallway to cry thinking I wasn't going to make it and I was in the hospital bed thinking 'okay, my friend John Morrow's having a tournament in six months I think I can make it.' and by god I won first place doing the Chun 38 form at the tournament. That's the last one I competed in, it's not as easy with one lung and being 65.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

I do hope you're gonna back and unpack some of that because you can't just leave, you can't just drop the synopsis of a story like that and move on. You're in the hospital bed they...

**Ken Gullette:**

Drop it my son, drop it. Walk on.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

You're in the hospital, it's that grim. It appears that this is final.

**Ken Gullette:**

Breathing tube. My voice is never, I used to be a broadcaster and that my voice is never been the same when I practice. I still can improve but, I have to stop and gasp and the viewers, listeners can probably tell that I breathe a little heavier than some of your guests because I'm working with one lung and when I get excited and start talking about I tend to need to breathe a little bit harder.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

I just assumed you were a Walter Cronkite. There's a little bit of that that quality care voice.

**Ken Gullette:**

He was my hero. I started in radio news and I would read the news two people were killed today on [00:35:23.37] road and a DJ one day, Randy Davidson said Ken go home and watch Walter Cronkite tonight and notice the way he goes down and has inflection. Pres. Nixon went to Capitol Hill today to deliver a message and I thought it was a light bulb went off and so that that did influence me in my news reading from then on. But yeah, the philosophy has helped me in many different crises in my life and that was one of them where I did not fear death, there is nothing to fear there are no monsters under the bed



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waiting to get you when the lights go out, you return to what you were before which was nothing but an eternity of peace. And so, I lay in the hospital bed near-death, drowning in my own blood every 20 minutes, but I didn't I wasn't ready to go, my wife and I, had only been married about seven years at that point and I'm my daughters and then the kung fu I wanted to continue getting better and so I didn't worry about dying I just focused on what's next. There's this tournament down here I need to, that's my goal, I wanna get there and compete. So, part of that is the philosophy where you accept what's happening and you don't fear as in you don't hold onto it but you keep going. [00:37:39.20]

### **Jeremy Lesniak:**

So, tell us a little bit about the I guess that the mechanics. How did you move from that point drowning in your own blood every 20 minutes to recovery despite losing along and all that? We've had a few folks on the air who have these death-defying stories and I always receive a lot of feedback from people about how inspiring that can be, so, if you could share a bit more of that story, I know the listeners are going to appreciate it.

### **Ken Gullette:**

Well just gradually somehow over the two weeks in intensive care I got better. I went from 206 muscular pounds working with a personal trainer to 156 when I walked out of the hospital. I looked like a skeleton comparatively, couldn't do anything, actually at one point in the hospital I was so weak, I couldn't even lift myself up they had to put a bedpan under me and there's nothing more demeaning when you have been so strong and fit, I never smoked a cigarette and suddenly the nurse that has left the room and you're laying in your own crap unable to lift yourself out of it and it really gave me a lot of empathy for older people because I was laying there thinking what a lot of older people probably think, how did this happen to me... This can't be me... I have a neighbor right now across the street he's 96 still has his mind, lives alone, his wife died six years ago, he's become one of my best friends. And I visit them all the time I call them all the time, my dog and I walk over, he said two weeks ago he said I just really appreciate you not treating me the way other people do as just the old man down the street and I think, part of what I went through made me look at all that a little different. The old people I see walking through the store and old ladies who their eyes don't meet you they look like everyone's looking through them and they look up at me and I smile at them and meet their eyes and the light in their face that comes on someone's actually seeing me, it's a, you know because inside they're 18, they don't know how they got here in this old body. So, I think that's one thing that that experience taught me but I think I just continued to get better and I was joking with nurses, I had to do it, they had me zonked out on all kinds of drugs because with the breathing tube, I wanted to gag it so they had me



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drugged up and I just got through it, got a little better, got home and tried to see when I could get down to the basement to practice again and gradually very gradually. It has been, the last nine years have been a struggle, I just got over a couple of weeks with a long issue in fact I might cough a little bit on this program and today I started taking a medicine, I'm going to get my first injection that supposed to help with lung irritation. That cost hundred thousand dollars a year it's \$8000 a shot, 12 shots a year so that I start that today a couple of hours and hopefully that'll allow me to work out even more [00:41:31.42] and that continue the progress it's all a journey and you know we love the arts we don't want to stop. But when all this happen I think doctors were shocked that I survived but a year later I sent them a letter and thank them, with the picture too, saying I'm still teaching, I'm still practicing, and I've continued to teach and practice since just at a reduced level.

#### **Jeremy Lesniak:**

There's always this dichotomy seems to come up with someone has an incident like that. On the one hand, no one wants to go through that, the pain, the suffering especially for the people around them often times the costs. These are unequivocally negative thing, but on the other side when I talk to people who have had an experience like this, they're always changed and it always seems for the better. Now maybe you could speculate that the people who are going to change for the better, don't make it through those situations so were working with a limited sample set, but the way I hear you talking about this, it's not with any sort of regret it sounds like it was a transitional moment for you.

#### **Ken Gullette:**

Maybe so I think it was more a continuation. This has been something that I've worked into my life for quite some time four 40-45 years since I left the faith I grew up in a started exploring more the Taoism and the philosophical Taoism and Zen philosophy. So, it I think once you really embed that in your in your personality and then bad things happen, it's not anybody's fault, it's part of life. I also lost a daughter in 1980 and that's the first time that I realized that my philosophies gave me a perspective that the other people that I knew in Kentucky did not share or did not have. But it's, that's why the arts are more than just the martial aspects and the chi gong to me tai chi is a martial art it's not moving meditation chi gong is the meditation part. So, I practiced chi gong for the centering impact that has on me and as a result because of the stress management, I think it produces an improvement in the health. I'm a bit of a heretic, I do not believe chi as a scientific reality but I believe these practices have benefits and tai chi the main benefit is the martial art and the physical health you get from a good exercise.





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### **Jeremy Lesniak:**

I wanted to talk about that for a second because you are undoubtedly on in a small group and the only person I've ever heard it practices internal arts we said they don't believe in the scientific reality of chi and I'm going to speculate you've come a lot of flak for that. If you are open in your writing and on your show as I suspect you are as I've heard you already, you're probably catching some hate for that stuff.

### **Ken Gullette:**

Oh, I've had even threats, physical threats, people saying they're going to come to my school back even 2000 to 2003, I saw people who were being published in the magazines and they were showing themselves knocking down their students without touching them and we don't need to go any names, but I sent a challenge to inside kung fu and I said I will give \$5000 cash to anyone who can do that to me and they put it on the front page on the cover. I had people threaten me I had one tai chi guy and an instructor named Wong in Tennessee who sent me a video where he's on stage surrounded by about 18 young students who are pushing on him and he makes a slight move and all the students go flying back and falling all over the place and I said if you do that to me, I will give you \$5000 cash on the spot. We'll tape it will have reporters there I will publicize you worldwide because that's what I did for a living. His student threatened me, now come on you've tapped into the universal energy, this truth and you can't demonstrate in on someone who is a skeptic? And it turns out that the randy foundation that offers \$1 million to people can prove psychic phenomena and is true our mystical or supernatural, he took one of the guys who became famous over this and tested him. 18 people who did not know what this guy was going to do tai chi chi master, he said he could do it through a partition so they put a thin partition up so that the person couldn't see what he was doing had no idea and they were just told stay in there. Well he's behind this partition doing his thing not one of 18 people wobbled none of them and that a jury of scientists looked at it and it's a double-blind clinical trial, the way you eliminate cheating. No one has ever gotten that million dollars from the randy foundation and yet their student's will fall down that command and you see the video on YouTube the type, the chi master knocking a student's down, then he takes on an MMA guy gets the crap knocked out even that's good stuff and that unfortunately is what is happened to the internal arts. Now there is a growing number of people like me who because of Facebook and because of social media, I think it's like religion, younger people are growing in their atheism because unlike when I was a child, you can't, you couldn't go online and discover quickly how the adults are lying to you but now there are other, there are voices online that gave you the truth and I think as a result the internal arts hopefully will be dragged kicking and screaming away from the mysticism and what they actually are which our martial arts.



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**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Is it and I'm going to play devil's advocate here, I'm going to be [00:49:54.00] to not let my personal beliefs influence any of these questions. So were talking about a pretty extreme manifestation of chi. If chi is real, the extreme far end of the spectrum of its application, of its understanding, of its use would be the ability to externally manipulate matter.

**Ken Gullette:**

Correct, I agree. That is extreme.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

The majority, the typical way, I hear chi discussed is as a purely internal, in a purely internal way the idea of manipulating energy within your own body, are you discounting that possibility as well?

**Ken Gullette:**

Well I am completely open-minded to evidence and so I still practice chi gong and I use it, I even discussed chi in my classes. My students know what I'm talking about I'll say hey, sink your energy your chi is in your chest and they know what I'm saying. But I know also know that there is no way I can know or anyone can know that chi is in my chest, I'm just carrying myself too high and not in a balanced way where I can defend myself. That's all that means sink your energy, lower your center of gravity, root yourself. So, I do you interpret but I had a guest on my podcast, Herriot Hall, she's known as the scap doc and she is part of the fact-based science, I think that's in [science-basedmedicine.org](http://science-basedmedicine.org) but they investigate. They are doctors, researchers who investigate clinical trials and there is really not a lot of evidence that a lot of the traditional Chinese medicine is any more effective than placebo. There are some pain management benefits to acupuncture, but it's pretty limited. Nothing like people think it is and I studied acupuncture for two years, I could do it, I had the equipment and decided not to after a while. I just didn't see that it... It's like prayer, if you have 10 people and you pray for 10 of them who are sick and nine people die but one recovers you say see prayer works and acupuncture is the same way a lot of people are not helped but if this one person because I have a migraine that is cleared up afterwards we say see it works. And there have been recent news stories that [00:53:22.17] you can't trust clinical trials from china. They manufacture facts and they will bury the trials that show ineffectiveness. If you google that, clinical trials china scams you'll see you were talking legitimate news stories here and so I didn't realize that until I talked to Harriet hall and then I



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did some more investigation but there is a lot of stuff out there that makes but they do make it sound very possible, they're experts. I just, I'm open minded it would be nice if it worked but the evidence still isn't there, after all these years.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

And I want to beat this up too much. You know, you have expressed your opinion and I don't want the major take away for the folks listening to be that note that this is the important piece because that that's not it. This is a part of your story and I think it is interesting because it's, while you're not unique, I think it may give some confidence to people in other arts who you know, maybe have a different perspective, maybe some of their core beliefs don't jive with the people they train with or train under and that's okay.

**Ken Gullette:**

But not only that, when you do tai chi if you follow the correct body mechanics, you have chi flow whether it exists or not. I can demonstrate what, I can demonstrate chi flow and just whether you have the ground, whether you have pung, which without the ground and pung working together you don't have anything.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

What's pung?

**Ken Gullette:**

Pung is an expansive kind of a feeling that you train yourself to do. Pung jen ward off energy is sometimes called but energy in tai chi has been misinterpreted, the eight energies of tai chi are eight methods of dealing with incoming force. It really has nothing to do with any kind of invisible energy in your body. There are eight methods, you can repel it, you can brush it aside, rollback. You can split it by taking one part of the body one way, the other part the other way, that's what energy means in body mechanics. If you have, there are six main body mechanics I teach, if you have those you will have chi flow it's the ground path pung, whole body movement which is amazing how a lot of people don't do even in tai chi, opening and closing the gwa, silk reeling spiraling energy and dan chi in rotation and if you put those together you have the body mechanics for quality chig yi tai chi and bagwa. But I meet people who have studied tai chi like I did for over 10 years they studied 20-30 years and they don't know how to step behind me and take me down with their body mechanics. They don't know how to move but they have been told for 20-30 years there cultivating chi



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and it's just not they're just not cutting it, that way so what is chi? If you, you know, that's like if you want to believe it's there, fine. If it helps you fine, but there are ways to accomplish what you want with the body mechanics of the internal arts without going into the science that has never really been proven through means that can really be independently verified and double-blind situations.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Stick a hard left. At this point I want to go back on to talk about competition because you've alluded to that. We talked about some competition you did early in your career and you kinda hinted as to some competition in you forgive me, your middle years which is not something that tends to happen most people compete in their teens, 20s I mean, anybody that's been new competition sees how quickly it drops off in open competition. Talk about yeah, what was competition mean for you?

**Ken Gullette:**

I love competition. I think it sets, it helps you set goals and it always drove me to get in good shape. I loved sparring, even points sparring the first video I made in the days of vhs was a tournament point sparring tape that I still sell on dvd and that it's just that I think maybe I felt the way I did when I was young and picked on and got into fights. I think it's just the ultimate competition where you have to size of this opponent in his strengths and weaknesses very quickly and try to score. And you know as we get older we can't be beating the hell out of each other and breaking bones, so to me point sparring still enabled you to develop techniques and test your coolness under pressure and look at timing and all of that I just loved it. As I got older I would get in shape by for a tournament by going 12 or 13 rounds on a heavy bag alternating rounds for I would punch as fast as I could as many times and in alternating rounds where I kicked and it enabled me to when tournaments up until I was in my 50s. But after I lost a lung, I still want to compete. They had tournaments around here occasionally and I just want to go up and do the chun 38. Starting in the late 90s when I was competing I started doing tai chi in open tournaments against all styles I would do the chin 38 especially and I would punctuate the slow graceful movements with bursts of [01:00:44.00] and it I think it surprised a lot of the karate and tae kwon do people [01:00:54.27] and other artists who were there and it really raised the respect. And I have a student who I've been teaching for over 20 years now I've only had 4-3 black sash students in the curriculum that I do, one of them Chris miller went to a big tournament in Dubuque two or three weeks ago, all styles he was only internal artist there won first place in forms against about 10 other black belts and that just is thrilling to me to get the message out that these are martial arts. So, but I just think it note things like that give you the opportunity to



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make friends, gets the art out and also gives you information about yourself. There was a time when I would go to these outside tournaments and I was doing [01:01:53.52] form, 12 animals and there was a woman from karate I believe and she kept scoring me low tournament after tournament and I went up to her after one competition I said, could I ask why you score me hello and she said yes, you burn through this like a house on fire there's no pacing and I went back and looked at a video and I thought she's right. You know at first you think of what the hell do you know, but I went back and looked and she's absolutely right. And so, I started developing more pacing in the form putting more of the body mechanics into it and slowing down here and there and it was very good advice and actually I started winning more after that. So, there you can learn a lot from tournaments the only full contact match I've been in was the tough man contest in Sioux city, Iowa in 1991 and I had to do it and I was 38 years old, the cut off was when you're 39 and I did not know if I have a chance again and I got in with the guy who was about 10-15 years younger, taller than heavier and I was scared to death I thought, what the hell am I, I was news director at the local TV station and what the hell am I doing here? These guys are coming and they looked ripped and they were like 250 pounds, I was 185. But as soon as he threw his first punch, I knew I had him because he was slow and I had fun, I did a bolo punch and just had a good time he almost rung me up in the third round, he hit me on the side of the head of my brain was like a tuning fork just numb, but it cleared real quick and I've got all the video. I put it up online before I think... It was, I was so glad I did it but I didn't return for the second night, I could have but since I won my match, because I thought, who the hell needs this? There was a pain in the center of my head after the match that I couldn't identify and I thought who needs to go through this time after time? That's enough I proved to myself I did it, that's good so I'm not done full contact since.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Why did you do it?

**Ken Gullette:**

Oh it's, I tried it once before but 10 years before went to Kentucky, I was in Kentucky at the time and they tried to put on a tough man contest in Richmond where I went to school, and I went down in my best, one of my best buddies was with me as my corner man and there was this ripped guy sitting in front of us and turn to me and said, why are you here in the he looked up in grand and he was missing half his teeth and he said, 'I just like to fight.' and my friend looked at me and said you're going to get killed. And so fortunately they didn't get a doctor that night to commit to certifying the fighters so they had to cancel it but I had to try later just it's a macho thing you know. I like the MMA fights and even though I see



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something very ugly there, I love it as a guy, you know you want to get in there. I was at a sports bar with my wife a couple of nights ago having a bite to eat on that MMA matches on and I was mesmerized every technique they were throwing I was thinking, what would how would tai chi handle this? What would I do against this? And I wish more would get out there and do that more in taichi.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Do you feel an obligation? You almost strike me as someone who's kind of on this cutting edge, this transitional point in internal arts because as you alluded social media and the internet and the ability to share this information so quickly, do you feel any kind of obligation to the art that you love to make it practical to make it real and to be honest?

**Ken Gullette:**

Yes. My, I don't want to turn this into a plug, but I just completed a dvd, I've never seen this done on video. When chin cha shing visited my home for a week in 2006, he didn't speak a word of English, I didn't speak a word of Chinese, but we practiced every day, he held a workshop at my school, I owned a bricks and mortar school at that time but we would practice push hands in the basement and there is a pattern where you step toward your opponent, I would step in and before I knew it I was on my back and I got up thinking how the hell did he do that? So, would start again and step back step forward, boom on my back again. Second time I kind of laughed, happened 3rd time and the fourth time, but that time I'm laughing, he's laughing I have no idea how he's doing and it was about the 10th time that I realized he was taking control of my center and this disrupting my structure in a subtle way that I couldn't even feel at first and it took me 11 years to finally start piecing that together. How do you use the eight energies of tai chi to take people down who come up and grab you? When they're trying to take you down how do you take them down instead without using muscle, without using wrestling and I've I developed a step-by-step approach and it works. I invited younger guys in from other arts and said take me down and they couldn't do it. It's not I need to I'm going to keep pushing it and I want to keep inviting people and because when they test me it tests the principles and so what happens when you do meet someone new? I'm sure they're out there, there are a lot of, the guys that I brought in were good martial artists who have done different things including judo, but you know I want a young strong MMA guy to come in and let's work on the stuff. I try to do that in a friendly way to share information and test each other and show each other what we do because I respect all the yards but there's something about the internal is really there but there aren't too many people get to that point where okay how do I use these energies which let me repeat, energy means method. How do I use this method on this technique?



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It's fascinating to me and that's what I spend a lot of my time working on how to decode these movements to what they really mean. Inside tai chi inside, every movement and tai chi you'll find [01:10:30.47] you'll find elbow breaks, takedowns, kicks, punches, gouges, it's fascinating and I have been working on this. The first dvds I put out on [01:10:44.33] were in the 2008 on the fighting applications and there are more than 700 fighting applications I put on these dvds for one form. And there are more since then.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

let's talk about the stuff you put out. let's talk about the dvds to talk about that and then let's talk about more about your podcast and let people know how to find all these things.

[01:11:10.07] the main thing, I have an online the school where I've made over 800 video lessons and in pdf downloadable documents and people get online they stream it on any device 24 seven. The dvds you know I, you keep trying to figure out okay what technology is good I started on vhs then went to dvd I think dvd sales are slowing a little bit and streaming is probably where it's at in the future. But I'm always trying to be aware of the new things that are out and I do everything myself from the content creation, to the video editing to the dvd burning to Photoshop and created the website.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Do you enjoy doing all that accessory work?

**Ken Gullette:**

You know because I was in the news that I started on the high school paper, photographer and writer and then radio news, so the podcast comes easy and then TV news, so the video comes easy and I use premiere to edit the video site I do, and I do all the marketing and so every day for me is a creative explosion. What do I need to do? What can I do for my members and for people out there? What knowledge can I impart on Facebook? Not just promoting but what value can I give them? What can they walk away thinking 'oh I didn't know that' and that's my goal every day and then just the creative process of doing all. But the dvds are on amazon and they're on my website [kungfu4u.com](http://kungfu4u.com) which you have to forgive me that I was in the 90s, I created that. Kung fu

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Is it a number four?



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**Ken Gullette:**

Number 4 and the letter u. And then my blog is [internalightingartsblog.com](http://internalightingartsblog.com) my main website for the school is [internalfightingarts.com](http://internalfightingarts.com)

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

And of course, folks will link to all that at the show notes [whistlekickmartialartsradio.com](http://whistlekickmartialartsradio.com)

**Ken Gullette:**

Yeah and I've been promoting your podcast and will continue to do so. I put up of the Jean Ching one this morning which I thought was really good. Bill Wallace, one was great.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Yeah, I have and you get it and most of the listeners, we have a few listeners who also have martial arts podcasts but the vast majority people listening do not, we are lucky are we not to be able to call what we're doing I mean this is work for both of us right now, we get to hang out and talk about martial arts and call it work.

**Ken Gullette:**

You know what fascinates me about the people I try to interview, is the pain they go through, the journey and the trouble, the hard work they go through to learn these arts. The dedication, it's admirable and these people, one thing that frustrated me over time was that you didn't see any anyone but Asians on the cover of the magazines tai chi and others now that's changed a little bit. I want to develop a podcast because I knew there were a lot of good internal arts teachers out there, I wanted their stories and not just focus on the masters there are some really good people teaching and working and trying to get better. What have we not touched on?

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

We we've talked about pretty much all of it. I mean, we've got what you're doing, how people can find you, we talked about how you started, we talked about some of your core beliefs, I mean, we've gone pretty deep is there anything that you wanted to chat about before we start winding down?

**Ken Gullette:**





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You know I think one of the ways that the arts and the philosophy of helped me was, I mentioned briefly that I lost a daughter in 1980 that was I got up to go to work and she was dead and in her bed, six weeks old, just absolutely devastated. Went to the funeral home and they took us through to choose out these tiny little caskets and had services the next couple of days, visitation and I took her out of her casket and held her and I think people thought I was going crazy, but I was into these philosophies at that time and I was at such a deeply low level but there was a little voice in my head as I was holding her when people were coming up and saying she's in a better place and I would say, no the best place for her was with her father, politely telling them please back off with that.. But a little voice in my head was going 'you cannot accept the joys of life without accepting this, this is part of life. It's not fair but it's part of it and I was devastated but two days later after it was all over and I was driving down Georgetown road between Georgetown where I lived on Lexington, it had been raining for two or three days and the sun came out and boom the ray of light hit the car and I thought I can, I felt life's journey what a journey throw anything at me you can, I can deal with it. And to me that moment illuminated the rest of my life and it's because of taking to heart not only the arts but you know this centering, calming, self-discipline that were supposed to be developing through these hearts that so few people really do, but really should work on it and so by the time the illness came around in 2009 and that sort of thing, you know how, you asked how I got through that or recovered but that's why say it was a continuation. The worst had already happened to me and so anything else after that I knew I could handle and so you know throughout the rest of my life, 65 now, and doctors are surprised I'm still here, I'm in a go as long as I can and if I can compete in the tournament again but to you just keep going and enjoy every moment because that's just, this is a journey and everything should be instructional.

### **Jeremy Lesniak:**

I found see if you can call it to be straightforward. An individual who seemingly never gets tired of telling interesting amazing stories. His view of the martial arts clearly transcends the physical and that's something that I value a great deal. Thank you Sifu Gullette for coming on the show sharing your wisdom and being so generous with your time. Listeners you can head on over to [whistlekickmartialartsradio.com](http://whistlekickmartialartsradio.com) to find show notes including links to what Sifu Gullette has going on, some photos, our other episodes, you can sign up for the newsletter and all that other great stuff that we have going on all to serve you traditional martial artist. If you want to reach out to me you can do so directly, [jeremy@whistlekick.com](mailto:jeremy@whistlekick.com) I love getting feedback. You can find us on social media we are @whistlekick and don't forget our products you can find on [whistlekick.com](http://whistlekick.com) or amazon and number of other places. Were out there, were all over the place, were doing well for you. That's all I've got for today. Until next time train hard, smile and have a great day.



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