



Episode 308 – Sifu T.W. Smith | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com



Jeremy Lesniak:

Hello thanks for coming by this is [whistlekickmartialartsradio](http://whistlekickmartialartsradio.com) episode 308 today we're joined by Sifu TW Smith. If you don't know my voice I'm Jeremy Lesniak I'm your host on the show here. I'm the founder at whistlekick we make sparring gear we make apparel we make training accessories we make a bunch of stuff but to be perfectly honest the thing I am most proud of the thing that we are probably best known for is the show because we put out two episodes a week we bring you an interview every Monday we bring you some kind of topic on Thursday whether it's something I feel compelled to talk about or maybe it's a profile of someone famous from history or just something else that you should know. Here of course this is a money release were joined by an amazing guest and I know you're gonna love today's episode you can find the show notes as well sign up for our newsletter at whistlekickmartialartsradio.com you find all of our products at whistlekick.com and a number of them are even available on Amazon. Now if you're a fan of martial arts podcasts in general you probably know today's guest. Sifu TW Smith is the host of kung fu podcasts which is an exceptional show and I was so honored that he accepted the invitation to come on to our show and had a wonderful conversation with him. It was from an episode with Sifu Smith and sensei Ando that I really kind of escalated my goal in bringing Sifu Smith on the show. I wanted to have them on it he's been on the list for a while in fact there are a lot of people on the list it's a growing list you would think it would be shrinking over time but it's not because I become exposed. I hear about I read about listen to all these wonderful martial artists but there were some things that Sifu Smith said in this episode with



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Sensei Ando that just made me say you know we have to move this guy up the list it has to happen soon soon as possible and that brings us to today. Sifu Smith is as open as anyone we've had on the show and he connect dots about being a martial artist in a way that very few others do. It's approachable it's insightful and it's entertaining if you haven't listened to his show I hope you will but for now I give you our conversation.

Hey Sifu Smith how are you?

T.W. Smith:

Hey doing well and please just you can just call me Tim or TW whatever whatever works for you.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Okay well now that I have your permission to do so you know the irony there is that I don't really need to refer you because were just you and I.

T.W. Smith:

Oh yeah. Hey well you know first before you know kinda get getting along of you know just gotta did a few minutes of looking at some of your work and I had heard you once or twice on another program I can't member exactly which one it was but I was really impressed with your approach and then it what it really wasn't until just a couple days ago that I realize that whistlekick had its own apparel and you know a whole another model that were operated with it and I that was and it looks really good.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Thank you it means a lot.

T.W. Smith:

So I'm interested it at some point whether it's through this conversation or a little bit in the future is to explore that because you know I have my own kung fu school my own martial arts school here in Raleigh and getting gear is something that you know I need and also, I need and currently I've been working [00:04:03.09] for years but to be honest with you I had to assume work with somebody who I can get to know and know a little bit better.

Jeremy Lesniak:



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Sure what you know that that would be an honor. Yeah, it's it's a whole different business model and to be perfectly frank the podcast started out of necessity because I couldn't find a platform that we could leverage to get exposure because as martial artists were so fragment.

T.W. Smith:

Yes.

Jeremy Lesniak:

And you know honestly a friend of mine was slated to host the show we were just gonna put the resources behind it and then just before we really got going he had a near-death episode of a stroke at 45 and and so I ended up stepping in and here we are three years later and my life is changed completely.

T.W. Smith:

Well so you started your podcast by the same time as kung fu podcast started and at about 2013.

Jeremy Lesniak:

You're before us [00:05:14.14] I think just about everybody came before us. But but the one thing I I think we might make up for in in age is frequency.

T.W. Smith:

Yes and while you're on the when we're actually hit the record button but you can hit any time, that'd be something that I would really enjoy picking up to as far as kung fu podcast and how how am I trying to workout content because I have gone through some really stressful times of managing the content for Kung Fu podcast and is edged as you well know besides trying to deal with technological issues that you know you get ready like today I get ready crank up my my Skype and this is all you have an update to install and that always makes me shiver because I'm always concerned about what's not gonna work after that happens but to trying to make make a podcast run regularly and consistently is tough.

Jeremy Lesniak:

I have 15 years of IT I have a full-time engineer person on the backend dealing with you know everything that happens outside of the recording and then we just brought on a part-timer to do some scripting for some of our Thursday our content episodes so I don't know how I would do it



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otherwise at this point because just the when I when I first handed off some of the backup backend stuff it became I mean I got back 20 hours a week.

Yeah, the it was insane how much you know I didn't I don't think I fully realized how much time it was taking me.

T.W. Smith:

Yeah are you have you already hit record because to me these things are the things I'd love to have people out there you know you get to know a little bit about you too.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Sure you know to be to be perfectly honest the record starts the moment I call you.

T.W. Smith:

Oh perfect.

Jeremy Lesniak:

[00:07:20.11] automatically so we can just kinda leave this in and I know you probably know just as well as I do that listeners kinda love this behind the scenes you know they feel like they're getting some some secret info so we'll just go ahead and leave this stuff in and

T.W. Smith:

Sure sure that's great because I do I you know one of things that help me a lot was getting to talk with Ian Abernathy a few times because I had heard his podcasts or there was one podcast that really triggered me and then I had to start getting some education as it kind of relates to martial arts what I did is I took my previous training and worked in the hospitals and clinics and then the martial arts training and try to work out a methodology to to develop a podcast and I chose podcasting because I seem to have more of a knack in communicating through my voice than I do through writing and part of that is because I write like I talk and that's not always you know the voice that you can use and the fact that I have a little bit of a North Carolinian accent that is not to to rash I have some of my relatives where I can barely sit in the room with them for too much time before my ear start to scream for for some peace you know and I explain it to folks in the sense that you know I was growing up here in North Carolina and we had about three TV stations and I was told my students of the day I remembered one of my first and favorite gifts that my mom and dad got us was back in the day we lived out in the country my dad was working out the turkey farm in a gas station out Ray from North Carolina and anytime we wanted to turn the channel from like channel 5 to channel 11 I had to go outside



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and back in those days we had what looked to be the starship enterprise antenna on top of the house it was a massive looking you know tubular looking thing. It literally looked like something on a on a battleship back in the old days and it was on a tubular steel pole that ran all the way to the ground and dad will say okay were gonna go turn the channel or so well maybe we're gonna watch football game or something right or watch Mohamed Ali boxing and so I have to go outside and grab it with my two hands and turn that tube in in a direction to where the channel will start to come in and Dad would be at the window where I have the front door open he'd yell to the screen door you almost got it you almost got it and the when I had it he said no no go back just a little bit boom and we'd get the antenna. Well one of my favorite gifts was one day dad came home and he had this little thing a little like a little black box with a bunch of wires in it and it was a rotor that you connected and you put aside your TV and I had like a compass on it and the other end of had this motor that connected to a wood pole that connect to that tubular thing and when you would turn say from northeast to south he would actually grab a hold the pole and turn it and I remember thinking all of my days of antenna turning is actually over now I was so grateful for for the advancement of modern technology and I don't know what I don't know why that triggered trigger my thought into it except for the fact that you know martial arts to me was always this systematic work through work through certain things and every now and then you might have this advancement you know in regards to your ability to do something faster or your ability to do something with a different type of objective and I just recall that being one of those reflective moments when I was telling my students that no the three were the are certain times in your life you have these little epiphanies and these little moments that bring a lot of happiness to you and that just happen to be one of mine as I reflect back.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah, I had a similar set up not not that we had to turn outside but I also grew up in a rural area in Maine and I I remember distinctly there were shows that I wanted to watch badly enough that it wasn't unless I was physically touching the intent that the signal would come through well and I just stood there you know stretched back holding on to the antenna much to my mother's chagrin because you know I'm gonna go blind standing that close right. But

T.W. Smith:

Well I remember I recall now because what I have what had triggered my thoughts into as growing up in the country was is that I used to watch the Andy Griffith show and when I was growing up I for whatever reason even by the time I was eight or nine I used to watch that show and I used to think to myself you know when I grow up I want to be able to talk more like Andy because I had a lot of relatives who talk like Gomer and Goober and their voices their their over countrified voices which are not you know they their characters had these voices that I just didn't want to sound like that it's not that it was wrong or bad but that's not how I wanted to to present myself and so I used to watch Andy Griffith show not just for the stories but to listen to Andy how he would tell a story to OP or explain things and he always resonated with me and



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part of the reason that had triggered a mind is because I used to have to go turn the antenna in order to watch that show but kung fu podcast my voice and trying to develop me a platform to express my thoughts and feelings about martial arts I have like said at first I thought about trying to do a blog work but it didn't really work out for me that well and when I found the voice of learning how to do podcast I heard Ian's pretty much is call of responsibility is how I would put it is basically where he was making a comment one time in a podcast that if you know if you're not out there trying to support the as you put fragmented individual good martial artist who are trying to get doing a good job then your contributing to the problem and that really resonated with me because there's one thing that I do not like to do and that's contribute to my problems or to anyone else's so I thought you know I've got to figure out something that works and I started studying Cliff ravens craft and I exchanged some emails and I was stating him on how to do podcasting and he's a professional in the area and has taught a lot of people so you know I just can't work in that area.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Sure you know it's a lot of times will will get some feedback you know some questioning whether that's people on our team or people that are you know paying attention to what we're doing and they'll look at something like you know us me having you on our show you know and in a sense you and I we could be termed competitors we both have a martial arts podcast and very akin to someone who might say go out to dinner with someone who owns a martial arts school in the same town you could look at it as competition. But there are a couple things that I always respond with and the first is where do you see every Burger King restaurant right next to a McDonald's there's an awareness that happens when more people are doing similar things in the area at the rising tide lifts all ships and then secondly our business model is really simple if it gets people in the martial arts or keeps them in martial arts we'll do it and that means the more good martial arts podcasts that are out there the better I would love for there to be so many great podcasts out there that nobody pays attention to us. I would actually consider that in a sense of victory cause it would mean we we help elevate the awareness of martial arts podcasts to that point.

T.W. Smith:

I would agree it's not always easy to see that type of relationship with one another when I think of you know when I was talk of sensei Ando not long ago are I have had Ian on the program and some others occasionally not the awareness that bringing martial arts to a different place as far as culturally and in the society in the 21st century is you know it is not an easy responsibility to take either mean is it when I say that you know you anytime you put yourself out there your putting yourself out there and there's a lot of folks who still will still like to I had to guess like what you're saying before is a hold on to their little share of the world with gritted teeth and gouging fingernails into it so that you know it's like that they own the martial arts and everything to do if for example self-defense or history or whatever else and they don't want to share and



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those part or the beauty of like work [00:17:16.27] a lot of scholars that do a kung fu podcast is no Dr. Ben Judkins Dr. Paul Bowman Kevin Tan I've got got a laundry list of new folks that have been talking with over the past gosh well several years but it's taken me three years to get my next podcast actually when you doubt when you called I was putting these finishing touches on the programs I've been working on literally for at least two years and I know I talked to Ian about it over a year and 1/2 ago to two years ago when I saw them up in Franklin North Carolina and this about the blend of Christianity in the martial arts and some of the sum the things that have gone on over the years with that and how martial art how martial artists can participate in a number of different things but no matter what you decide to do in your life whether it's becoming a Christian or Buddhist or practicing martial arts or not practicing martial arts you know there's always going to be some who are gonna be before you and there's can be some who are not gonna be before you and then there's gonna be a few who are kinda throw you under the bus for making a choice at all.

Jeremy Lesniak:

One of the things it seems to happen and it's not certainly not just in martial arts but you know this is one of the reasons you were someone that that we invited that I invited personally onto the show because you in in my mind you get it and pretty early on you you already articulated that you found a way to improve your craft. You reached out to someone who was an expert in the industry how could you become a better podcaster and when people are confronted with with challenge with other people that are good possibly better than them at something there are two responses people either go and figure out how can they improve how can they occupy a better place in the landscape or they clamp down and they try and build a fence and I don't I don't click with people who are building fences

T.W. Smith:

As I said yeah I can see at I can see how you would say that because I would have the same feeling I never thought about it that way but you know in my in my world there's a few things that I don't do personally I my students sometimes when we're talking is that you know I'm I wasn't always the fastest and there were many times that I had my martial arts classmates were better than I was in some cases a fact when I first began all of them were better than I was they were many of them had several years of martial arts training from from a variety of places every one of them except for one were Delta force, special forces or of some other form of military where there's Marine or whatever else so there were also active they were also very very used to hand-to-hand combat of skills where I was a wrestler and a football player and very used to get in you say tangled up from time to time but they would they would hound me into the dirt but I have one thing that always worked for me and that was I don't quit I just keep working I'm not as smart as some of the other guys I'm not as fast but I know I know that the two things I have to do is first have that work ethic that I just keep working on it and then two make sure I'm working in the right direction that I'm looking at the things that help me get from A to B and my pace how



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fast together doesn't really matter to me. As long as I know I'm working in the right direction being effective in what I decide to try to work on and then if I can get some help you know about listening to someone like yourself who you articulate yourself so well and and people who are really good and say for example in the martial arts are really good in podcasting or like Dr. Ben Jenkins is really these guys who are really good at researching in fact they make their living as professors and going out there and you know scrubbing off the steelies and digging in the digging in the in the dirt they are to find you know real artifacts and putting putting translating things that most of us can look at for the next three years and not be able to make anything of it. Those kinds of guys are I guess part of the reason a kung fu podcast got started was because I was already doing the work and I was sitting there and I wrote to Dr. Jenkins one time and I said you know I'm already reading your work and to be honest with you it's hard to read because he writes in a very scholarly tone and a very you know that's what he is and so and he wrote me back and he said yeah I can see how that would be a problem and I said cause I'm kind of a bricklayer I'm kind of a layman and so would you mind if I started taking some of the works that you do and putting my voice to it and kind of translating your scholarship into what I would translate into a martial arts boy stood to someone like me who would make sense to for example Andy Griffith that he could explain it and and he was like no go for it and it just kinda started from there.

Jeremy Lesniak:

We've already talked about the hard work that having a podcast that requires the time the effort and it's pretty clear why we have our podcast you know why am I doing this but why are you doing, what what made you say you know taking this work from others and in translating it and making it approachable to others why was that important to you?

T.W. Smith:

You know so it I like knowing what I do has meaning I also like to know that what I'm doing has a real fire behind it and in some cases like I'd I don't wanna say the word heritage but more of a merit behind it in some cases it's also that so I can learn from the past. There are many times where I never really have the answers to how am I gonna move forward with this and in some cases, this is being able to look at how others have handled similar circumstances in the past. You know I tell my students that you know technology has changed a lot over the past couple thousand years but people really have not you know people people as a as a whole haven't really changed it's part of the reason that the old documents like the Tao Te Ching the Bible the Koran or whatever other ancient sacred texts you like to point to still has meaning because the soul is the soul and people's behavior and how we think about things a lot of times in the deep core of ourselves haven't changed a lot so when I started kung fu podcast I wanted to be able to tell stories and share scholarship and understanding and in some cases you know I would slip in and like this next one here would have a lot of my own personal viewpoints where I can point to things and myself and my training and I actually had another podcast for a little over year was



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called the podcast at the back of kung fu that was all just me personally and a lot of my personal stories and the things that were going here at the school but I wanted to have something that I could share with others they could take it or leave it. I was very very I did I purposely called it kung fu podcast because I didn't want I didn't want it to be tied to my school at the time. I wanted to do something that was just how I I don't want to say I just want to do something that was there to support people who had an interest in understanding more than just the fastest way to throw the punch or the best techniques or what's the best style or the sporting world of the MMA you know I wanted some and people who are already doing work in the area and it and it resonated with me and I know that was a long-winded answer but unfortunately I am a little long-winded from time to time.

Jeremy Lesniak:

No worries at all long-winded answers and tangents those are the hallmark of this show and for anyone that hasn't seen it hasn't really dug back what episode I'm trying to remember when Tony Blauer came on we probably got two or three questions and it was two and half hours. I mean them I just I just stood back and the man just went and he gave a master class on his entire philosophy and we we ended up splitting it into two parts it was and I love that because I feel strongly that when people kind of wonder when people have the space to just talk they end up in places that they don't always realize are going to go which is good for not only me as the interviewer and the listeners but also you were the guest. I can't tell you how many people maybe you even had this happen where after we wrap the show the guest will say to me I hadn't thought about that story in 20 years and to me that's fun that way everyone is benefiting from the [00:26:53.12]

T.W. Smith:

We here the school we call that following the Dao which basically means that you know River has a natural flow sometimes just getting out of the way of it is the most effective way to use it. Letting it do what it needs to do when it needs to do it and in fact any time I've ever had anyone on the program I've tried to take a very you know I try to take a professional approach to it but even preparing so for example for this program I've always found that I prepared better by just settling on my make sure that I feel comfortable with who I'm talking with and what we're gonna be talking about and I'm always comfortable about talking talking about kung fu podcast or martial arts or some of my personal theories are history in the martial arts so I don't really have to prepare a whole lot for that except to and and to be honest with you I don't really have any sort of agenda except to shouldn't to continue to try to share in a sincere and authentic manner that you know long after I'm dead there's gonna be people who are going to still need to carry a torch for martial arts and I don't mean just martial arts like in schools I mean the spirit of martial arts. Trying to make yourself better you know I Sensei Ando and I were talking I have the I have the blessed curse of having an addictive type of personality where I can get hyper focused on things and in many parts of my life that was an absolute blessing because I could use that to



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become a very good wrestler and get wrestling scholarship so I can use it to be a football player and when I'm playing football season I saw what I'd do the way I train the way I breathe way I eat that's what I do. Then when I got in to college I you know managed to scrape my way in to be one of the first man in my entire family's history to make it into college you know it was really you know just work on it and try to try to make my way through it.

Jeremy Lesniak:

If you consider where you are is a martial artist now and all of that investment of creating your podcast and the people that you've spoken with the conversation the hours of conversation and and likely even more hours of behind-the-scenes time between research and understanding and editing and everything, how have you as a martial artist changed from you said 2013 to now?

T.W. Smith:

Well the first things have happened is I've become much more mindful of various approaches to similar styles of martial arts that's one. Two is also made aware made me very aware of some of the oceans of differences to the same styles of martial arts for example Chinese martial arts and then on the other side it's also made me closer to people who I would have never thought were closer to my martial arts family and I would've never known otherwise so as a martial artist I've grown and the relationships that that I have and the nature of those relationships that I have. Those relationships have helped me better become a better communicator in some cases a much better listener and as far as being something that was tangible it's allowed me to look at application of martial arts from a variety of different reasons and historical reasons and objective reasons that I would not have had otherwise because I had strictly came from a Chinese martial arts background and the Chinese martial arts in itself has its own click so to say you know you got people who are you know it's all about the movies. When you say kung fu today you know it's almost like is associated with the movies or some other type of presentational type of stuff works out there in the looking at it from up from a movie screen perspective but you know when I was learning kung fu it was the three versions was for health [00:31:23.08] and we were we were taught several like the lion dance or the Dragon dancing that you might see that's for show but you knew what you were doing at the time when you're practicing it today or not today but when kung fu podcast just started primarily one of the things that I was having a real issue with was how much when you said I want to color poor translation of saying you know you're taking what is in sport and putting that over here and and it's not that this isn't similar but the objectives are different and if you don't make that clear to someone when you're teaching them it can become a real liability and not an asset knowing what you're trying to do is is probably first and foremost more important than knowing a list of techniques to do. So as a martial artist when the things that's happened since I started kung fu podcasts is it's put me in direct conversations and in direct interactions and in cases and in some cases direct physical contact with the other martial artist who you know you get a chance to share as we would say it and it's made me better in that way.



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Jeremy Lesniak:

When you think about those relationships if we consider all of the assets that we have as martial artist whether it's you know experience and certain I guess it's all experience but if we think about you know knowledge of of forms or basics or practical application or any of the other things we can consider that are resources to us relationships certainly is on the list but it's not something and I think most people most people would consider as an asset I as a martial artist am a better martial artist because of the people that I know they can help me and support me how important would you say those relationships are to you as a martial artist?

T.W. Smith:

You know it reminds me one of those commercials you know you a new new kung fu jersey a hundred dollars a new kung fu shoes and some other stuff you know \$50 you know the relationships you have during the process, priceless, because they're extraordinarily important to me because these are people who one like most relationships go. You need people who are not in a place of authority but in a place of sincere authenticity that they know what they're talking about they may not be the you know the chief of some system or something but they know what they're talking about that's one. Two is that they are sincere when they share things with you and then three is they allow you to massage yourself back and forth with them so that you can figure out how to you I think it was Dr. Kevin Tan who once was writing that you know as martial artists one of the biggest things that we do is we find ourselves. At some point in every martial arts journey that I've ever heard of and you you know you can probably tell me better than anybody else because of all the folks you've spoken with over the years but you know I've never had anybody to practice martial arts and not find out something about themselves whether they are afraid to get punched or they are afraid to administer pain or they afraid to be injured whether they didn't quite understand that there's more than just one objective and every combative situation and if you don't know your objectives you're more of a liability than an asset and our ability two massage ourselves with someone else is what helps us define us you can't find yourself on an island by yourself you have to be able to communicate and have relationships with others and rub yourself against them so to speak metaphorically in order to define who you're going to be and that's how important those relationships are to me.

Jeremy Lesniak:

It's clear that something that you thought about so how do you take that knowledge into your school with your students who don't have the luxury that you and I have of getting to interview to speak with people from all of the world?

T.W. Smith:



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You know it's funny well first is that I generally will take and we do a couple different things and so when I'm teaching for example an objectives class so we'll have an objective martial arts class and in that class I may come in and say okay this month we're gonna working as a with the idea that you're a bodyguard, that you're protecting someone else not bodyguard necessarily that you're working for a senator but you're a bodyguard today and I occasionally have these students will I'm never gonna be a bodyguard and in and of course I'll remind them that hey you know you're a son on occasion you take your grandmother out over to the mall or look I thought you are a dad you know when you signed up to be a dad you signed up to be a bodyguard whether you knew it or not so so in those cases when I take an objective an objectives class I will refer to basically your background of skills. Do you have the ability to subdue someone do you have the ability to you know translate any of your previous katas or styles into something that will help you get through this particular scenario that we set up in class okay that so we have an objectives class and then we also have just a what I call is basically the inverse to that it's is a personality class? So we're gonna say okay here's a technique that you're gonna get and so you showed them demonstrated technique and immediately you'll see personality the people who like to strike will take it and you'll see them administer in some way that's more of like in [00:37:42.25] or they'll use it as a some sort of joint strike others who are more of a grappler or wrestler type background and their personalities tend to be a little bit more get a hold and stay a hold they'll take it and translate it into their concepts and so usually my way of communicating the important relationships is first know yourself who you are today a few more of a striker yet we can see that very clearly if you're more of a grappler we can see that very clearly and then I have them rotate through with one another so they get used to having what you know a relationship understanding other people's personalities throughout the class and so they you know and everybody's responsible for taking care of themselves and their classmate at all times but is that exchange because as you probably have witnessed before you know when you go to a lot of places people will partner up of someone who they're familiar with and they're always working with someone who they're familiar with and they don't really explore past their own personality boundaries or the ones that they already have relationships with because were more comfortable with relationships that we already have and as compared to okay let me get a little bit further out there and see how you know this guy translates things and of course then you can also you gotta be careful to because of the martial arts I had this recently happened you know where some folks have little bit more of an ego and they put a heavy hand on you you know just because they want to have a little bit more what you say like they're not they're not watching out for who their who their sharing with at the same time which tells you a little bit about their personality at the time to. So you know all my students when I'm translating that kind of concept into a class it's always going back and forth between personalities what you typically like to do in the martial arts and then objectives irregardless of your personality here's the objective and you have to meet you have to be able to go back and forth between these two things.

Jeremy Lesniak:



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So far today we've been talking about you know kind of where you are now where you've been and in more recent history I want to go back on the back to the beginning and give the listeners some context for how you started on this journey you know what where were you how how old why you know fill in some of those gaps for us if you will

T.W. Smith:

Well some of it had some of it began my dad died when I was really young. I would buy really young and as far as a man goes this really young I was 21 and it was difficult because it is best about the age of life as a man you generally think you know everything that you need know it is not until years later you realize you don't know anything. I had to and in fact you're probably more of a liability to yourself than an asset at the age of 21 and a lot of times but there were there were things that I didn't know what to do and so I started looking into the church and I found some good relationships that good teachings there and I also found some difficulties there which is something I'll be bringing up into the next podcast that cover [00:41:13.20] but the so I moved from those challenges and I knew as I said before that I have a personality I cannot not be doing something. If I don't have something to be working on I tend to get myself into trouble and so by getting myself into trouble I mean just basically not not working on things not as productive as I could be or not doing things the way I would like to. When I was younger that was could have been even more type of trouble so by the time I was in my mid-20s I knew that it wasn't working I wasn't finding my way I've done bodybuilding for a while and had really enjoyed it but my body was breaking down and so I decided that I needed something that I needed to focus on and I decided to start looking into martial arts which I had never done so I'm about 25 at that time. Of course again we're back out in the country of North Carolina so is not easy to find anything including a magazine about martial arts much less a martial arts instructor but I've bumped into a guy who I had met through one of my church relationships who was practicing tai chi and he started sharing some thoughts and philosophy with me and and and invited me over to his house on Sundays and I started there and he declined to be my formal teacher but more of just an introduction to some of the Chinese martial arts and studies. From there I began looking further and deeper which took me about another year and 1/2 to 2 years to find a teacher out in Fayetteville North Carolina who was kind of teaching. He had a restaurant out there and he really wasn't formally taking students per se you know it wasn't like a big martial arts school like you would I had bumped into along the way where they had a shopping center and all that kind of stuff that was already kinda happening there in the late 80s or so and but once I got there and he said why do you want to learn kung fu and I said I'm just trying to get to know myself and he invited me to come over. Pretty much tortured me the next day of class with a long set of meditation and some tai chi and but it was so difficult because it was supposed to be so easy in the sense that if you're comfortable in your own skin and you can sit down and get your mind to calm down and channel your thoughts it's not really that hard I thought I was going to die. I ended up going okay obviously whatever this is this discomfort that I'm feeling by trying to be quiet and peaceful is something that I need desperately because I don't have it and I never stopped so that got me started I was probably in my late 20s by then but when I was very



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formal in the training and and I just never stopped and later on I moved to Texas and met developed another relationship with a gentleman named [00:44:24.07] and he was interesting because he was a teacher of martial arts of martial arts at Shanghai University and he and I used to go out and we would teach each other how to speak a little bit he didn't know English I didn't know Mandarin we would take he was teaching me the long staff the shaolin long staff he used to watch me practice and he's come over and watch me and then he would invite me with his small group of other folks who lived in the same community to come over and practice Bagua, Xing Yi, Tai Chi Chuan but he would personally like to practice the long staff shaolin long staff so he would torture me with that and now by torture I mean my body was not designed to handle that long staff in the beginning. It took a good eight or nine months of daily practice just get my shoulders limbered up be able to articulate my waste in a way that I can move the staff around me it was it was it was like his own kung fu teacher all by itself but that's how I got started was just pretty much needing a path to stay on finding something that eventually resonated with me something that met me with a personal challenge not a physical challenge a personal challenge in the sense that you know I could fight and I mean I mean the guys who I was training with yeah they were better than I was physically but with some training on you know eventually I was as good as they were but it was the personal challenge of staying calmer keeping myself more focused learning learning how to express myself in a way with confidence and not being a not feeling like I needed to attack any sort of threats or backing down because someone didn't agree with me or was putting me down I needed some I need to be armored with the ability to respond to things in a way that I had not been taught to talk previously.

Jeremy Lesniak:

It's these origin stories that really, I feel mean a lot to me to the listeners because they give us context but I also think and I'm curious your thoughts that so often what seems to be subtle when someone starts martial arts you know almost a nuance when we project out over the next you know few decades can be kind of a real-world example of you know 1° of difference in our trajectory applied over miles and miles can really set you on a completely different path? Do you think there is any of that in there for you I mean had you not you know trained long staff with this gentleman you know would you be a completely different martial artist now?

T.W. Smith:

Oh well there is no doubt in that sense from a physical understanding and a I mean just a biomechanical understanding of of things. The other thing to for example just using the long staff as a as a as a variable in my training past when I'm teaching the long staff one of the things that I teach and share with folks and it's great to witness addendum for example is that to use a long staff you can have the physical technique so I can physically show you this is what my hand is doing okay and then you can objectively watch and see what the staff is doing but how that works how am I making that happen it's the internal comfort it's not anything magical is that you can take this physical objective technique that you can see tangibly and translate that



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into a mindset and it was the mindset that when you grab a hold of that staff if you grab it grab it and try to be too loose with it off it flies. If your little even slightly trying too much to control it it looks clumsy and choppy you have to put your mind in a very fluid place that you're not trying to in the same way like when we when you do trying to apply a lot of your techniques you can't look to force a technique to happen you have to flow through and then when that opportunity opens you sink right into it as that opening happens. If you if you wait to see the opening you're too late. If you're trying to force the opening you're too early and the mindset of in using the long staff when you get one hand or both hands on it has to be in a very fluid state and that you're gonna move from from phase to phase as it presents itself and your intention shows so yeah what that the long staff is a perfect example of a variable that changed everything I knew at that point time.

Jeremy Lesniak:

One of my favorite things I ask guests is around stories. I've told you anyone that's listened to even one episode of the show knows the it's really, it's the stories that drive what we're doing here. So I'd love for you to take a moment and tell us your favorite martial arts story from your time as a martial artist.

T.W. Smith:

You know I had thought about that and and to be honest with you my favorite martial arts stories were the ones that didn't happen when we were I had without what lack of better word just beating on each other. My favorite martial arts stories are the fact that over half of the martial arts or my understanding of the martial arts and how to apply them occurred at the dinner table after practice. We would sit down as a group and usually after you know there was 5 to 7 of us and we have been outside and sweated it out and then we would kinda wash off out there by the hose pipe and we would sit down at the dinner table and see if [00:50:40.22] cooked maybe a meal some rice and just something simple but it was usually you know fill with some vegetables and a couple of meats or something and we would have dinner together and during those times we would talk and it was during those talks that you would learn even more about each other sure I could tell you that you know the hardest I've ever been hit to this day to this very day was by one of my good classmates Paul who was probably about 5 foot 745 pounds and he hit me one day with the [00:51:15.17] hand that literally pick me off my feet at 220 pounds and pushed me against a brick wall that was about three and half foot behind me I have never been hit that hard in my life and I could tell you that George was clever Kevin was fast and all these types of things but to sit there at the dinner table and talk about life and that your ability to have perspective and so Sifu would say things like what you know you're sharing your story and he would point to for example a flower vase on the table and he'd say is a Tim what you see and and you know I said well there's you know I see these three flowers and is this colors in this way and you know the vase has this design at me and then he would look over Kevin who was on the other side of the table from and say what you see and he did that and



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then he would always remind us that you know whenever you would take anything in your life you have to take a moment and look at it from a variety of different perspectives and through numbers or perspective what does this look like from if you are up at the ceiling looking down at it but would look like if you are from the floor looking up at it's through these perspectives that you actually get a real real idea about what it is that you actually thought you were looking at and that speaks very much to what you and I were talking about earlier it's the relationships I've built through the martial arts of the years of kung fu podcast is provided me even more depth and understanding and perspectives on things I thought I knew but when you talk to someone like yourself or Ian or Ando or some many of the other folks who are in the studies in the practice of the martial arts you you get to look at for example this flower vase metaphorically from a number of angles but those were my favorite stories it was the relationships and the conversations and saying okay this is how you're going to use what you are just out there sweating on and you gonna use it like I tell my students you know in a good kung fu class or a good martial arts class you know training isn't from 5 to 6 what you learn is from 5 to 6 your practice. If I teach you properly you'll be able to apply what you've learned in many many places of your life and that's been invaluable to me and I can put a price tag on.

Jeremy Lesniak:

I know from your conversation with since Ando which was absolutely wonderful listeners I'm gonna link that on the show notes I don't usually do things to give context via you know in that way I don't generally prepare but I I feel that having that conversation to tie in to this one will give you an even better understanding of today's guest. I knew going in to our conversation today about that dinner conversation and how much you value that. Do you think that something that other martial arts school should implement not necessarily getting together over meals not that that they couldn't but is that time outside of formal training, is that really that important?

T.W. Smith:

Well you know it's one of things I believe that is important if it's important to your propagation of the martial arts and so it may not necessarily be something that's important to a good martial arts instructor who propagates him his way or propagates himself and his teaching in his own ways. It's kinda, like what you and I were saying in the beginning is you know I wasn't a very good blogger so I found podcasting as a platform. You found podcasting is a platform somewhat by necessity to get exposure. Your ability to take what works for you to make sure that your message or your teaching gets across is very individualistic and I wouldn't step across the line of saying this is where you should do it I would say that being able to propagate yourself in a way and share your message sincerely and authentically with your students is extraordinarily important and if you found that by having quarterly meetings or sharing more things to a group form and things like that then so be it. For me because of how I was raised and how I value things sitting down for a few minutes face to face and whether it is for 20 minutes work for for two hours I you know there's I guess you may have heard you know there's nothing more



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valuable to me than my time and so sharing an hour with you for example is very important to me because I respect you and I respect the work that you do and I'm very appreciative that you enjoy the work that I've done but whether or not someone decides to find their own way and sharing their message you know I like the idea that people have relationships with one another and it's hard for me to imagine me not having relationships with folks who are important to me but not just sitting down and just havening some time with them

Jeremy Lesniak:

A wonderful parallel to what we were talking about before the idea that these podcasts by you and I exploring martial arts in this way we've become better martial artists. We've established these relationships and it's been I think I hope I'm not putting words in your mouth cause it certainly holds true for me that it's been worthwhile. It's been a tremendous return on that investment of time.

T.W. Smith:

Yes sir you know there is no doubt you and and as to your point there there's nothing that you're gonna gain whether you decide to do it through martial arts or being a blacksmith or anything else or a scholar for example without that initial investment of time there's a lot of inertia that has to be overcome in order to develop momentum, knowledge base is one of them physical skills is another getting the tools to implement those skills and knowledge base is another one and that's true in the martial arts you know it if you find out that you're not as fast as some of the other people then what you have to do you have to be able to feel better you know in the sense that you can you can sense what's happening but better than others because you may not be as fast as in as a reaction time you know there's a number of things that we find out about ourselves in the martial arts that whether you're practicing karate or kung fu or tae kwon do doesn't matter you know you're gonna have to develop your skill set develop a knowledge base, understand what the theories and objectives are of that style and find your way to express it to the best of your ability and and hopefully that will either make you better or one day you know you're carrying the light for someone else and you're teaching them how to keep themselves safe or how to use their training to help them better themselves in other places of their lives.

Jeremy Lesniak:

We've talked today about the importance of research and history and adding context to the martial arts, you've mentioned a few books a few authors Drs. are there books out there that you might suggest to the listeners as a beginning into that that realm or say want to explore that side of the martial arts?

T.W. Smith:



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You know I don't I I don't have any books off the top of my head that just pop right out and say hey yeah you definitely need to read XYZ I think of it more than this point is people there's people that you might want to follow or research you know I would definitely recommend Ian Abernathy as one Jamie Club is another yet you know you do you know at Jeremy as as another. You know people who have put in whether it's through their writing through their voice have put in sincere time and effort to share a real objective without trying to just over glorify something or beat someone else down with it you know turning they're sharing authentically authentically and sincerely and the only books that really changed changed me coming to the martial arts first had nothing to do with martial arts per se it was called the Tibetan book of living and dying and at that time in my life I had some things going on and you know that book really help me kind of reflect and it continues to help me reflect is what I you know I just I pick the book up about once a month I flip over over open to a page I don't think I just pick open a page and whatever it is on that page is something I put it my put in my thoughts for that month and if I had anything you know to share or and encourage any other martial arts to do is find people who are authentic and sincere about the work who are good at their work and follow them. Whether it's through the written word or their voices but to to just stay in touch with them and watch how they conduct themselves and how they demonstrate themselves through their work and you'll learn what you need to learn.

Jeremy Lesniak:

When you look out into the future what is it that's you're hoping to to achieve many you've done so much you shared so much of continued the legacy of martial arts in a way that very few people have done and and you should be commended for that and I hope you recognize that but obviously you haven't stopped so I imagine that there are things that you're still hoping to make happen. What are those things?

T.W. Smith:

You know I sometimes have a flaw and that might be one of my biggest ones is that my purpose generally is a little too shortsighted I'd say in the sense that I don't think about things way too far out front because I live with this idea that I don't have a promise that I'm gonna be here. So I tried to to attack a month or two in front of me so currently and sincerely you know I I keep wanting to do my best job with kung fu podcast and share things and and I appreciate your compliments I you know and recognizing that you know have perhaps filled some gaps here and there but my my goal is to try to continue to share those messages and share things and help people practice in the martial arts. I have gotten a lot of joy here over the past couple years of working with folks in more larger group settings which I had not done before because I've been you know because of some of my other work I've been involved and asked to come out to teach at a jujitsu kai, I type of conference or you know bring the Chinese martial arts the fighting arts to a combative platform and teach okay can you show us some of the [01:03:25.28] and how do they approach things or how how do you use the Shaolin longhand systems in order to make



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your martial arts better. I would like to continue to do that because I'd be honest with you there's a lot of times I don't feel like the Chinese martial arts from a practical technical combative system guess as much exposure as I would like for it to be like I said earlier a lot of times the kung fu becomes more dramatized in the movies and things like that than I really have an interest in but I must say based on some of the things I read that one of my favorite kung fu martial artist in the years past was not Bruce Lee. I like Bruce Lee but I will love to watch Bolo he was my man right you know and I would watch him practice or practice in the martial arts I would just watch him and go man that guy just looks like he would be a terror to walk in and go okay that's you that's who you're sparring with today Bolo Young but in regards to my future I want to just keep doing what I'm doing. See what opportunities start to present themselves hopefully by getting around the country who knows maybe even I told Ian I was going to go up there one day and I see him over there one day I have never been across the pond but I would think probably just sharing the message on continuing in a bigger platform would be one of my goals.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Well hopefully you pick up a number of listeners because folks if you are not checking out Sifu's show you really should be it's it's a wonderful show and one that I listen to my not not every time because there a lot there's there's a lot of stuff I'm trying to collate into my brain and I don't drive as much as I used to he is not left for work and could listen to everyone's everything it was great but now I'm stuck my desk in my pajamas most days.

T.W. Smith:

I can appreciate I can appreciate that very very much.

Jeremy Lesniak:

If people want to get a hold of your website social media and whatever else your show how do they find you?

T.W. Smith:

Well the easiest way is just go to kungfupodcast.com and shoot me a note from there. On social media I pretty much have it streamlined down to TWsmith.info as my handle on Facebook Twitter Instagram wherever wherever it is that. I have the same same social media handle on every platform in fact just so you know I went over there on Facebook today and made sure that kung fu podcast, TV smith was linked up with whistlekick so I want to make sure that I get more and more connected this is actually social media something that I've had to take some real time to invest on how to how to learn to use it more effectively but yeah that's the easiest way to find me it's kungfupodcast.com or TWSmith.info



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Jeremy Lesniak:

Great and of course we do link all that stuff over at the show notes whistlekickmartialartsradio.com so folks you don't have to worry about jotting notes while they're jogging on a treadmill or whatever else I really do appreciate your time today and I would just like to ask you for one more thing if I could be so bold and that is what advice what parting words would you give the folks listening today?

T.W. Smith:

You know what Jeremy first thank you very much for the opportunity come on your program it means a lot to me and if I had one thing that I would encourage any martial artists to doing that is to remind yourself everyday about why you practice and sometimes really remind yourself about why you practice. I think I saw something where you'd posted you know why would a school reprimand a boy for standing up against a bully you know being of being a civilian and a civilian martial artist in my mind carries responsibility and that responsibility is not that you just know how to punch and kick and fight. It is that you know how to conduct yourself with some sense of degree of honor, some sense of behavior of respect and that you would stand up a bully even if you did get reprimanded and after after you got reprimanded you would do it again because you knew it was the right thing to do. So practice every day remember why you practice every day and then apply it whenever you get an opportunity without hesitation.

Jeremy Lesniak:

It's no secret that I'm always looking at how to improve the show whether on a technical level or honesty more so the way I conduct myself the way I speak to the guest and just the various ways that the show can become better through my involvement. There are a handful of people that I look to as inspiration to become better people that are my sort of mentors in the martial arts podcast base. Sifu Smith is one of those folks. His demeanor his humility the way he conducts himself in speaking with a guest or talking solo. I find all of it inspiring and motivating and I hope that you took some of that same feeling from our conversation today. Hopefully you're leaving motivated and inspired about being a martial artist. Thank you Sifu Smith for coming on the show today. You can find the show notes at whistlekickmartialartsradio.com where we have some photos links to websites we talked about. Sifu's social media and a bunch of other stuff. You can get a hold of us social media wise @whistlekick pretty much everywhere you can email me directly jeremy@whistlekick.com and remember you can find our products @whistlekick.com or on Amazon. Thank you so much to everyone who has supported us whether that's sharing out an episode or making a purchase truly I'm honored. That's all I've got for today until next time train hard smile and have a great day.



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