



Episode 55 – Sensei Andrea Harkins | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com

Jeremy Lesniak:

What's happening everybody? It's episode 55 of whistlekick Martial Arts Radio, the only place to hear the best stories from the best martial artists like today's guest, Sensei Andrea Harkins. I'm the founder here at whistlekick but listeners know me better as the host and my name is Jeremy Lesniak. whistlekick, in case you don't know, makes the world's best sparring gear as well as great apparel and accessories all for practitioners of the traditional martial arts. I'd like to welcome our new listeners and thank all of you returning fans. If you're not familiar with our products, you should check out everything we make like our baseball caps. These are fairly new to us and they've been selling like crazy. Lots of pictures of these and our other stuff over at whistlekick.com. If you want to check out other past episodes of the podcast, those are at whistlekickmartialartsradio.com. And while you're at our website, go ahead and sign up for the newsletter. We offer great content to subscribers and it's the only place to find out about upcoming guests for the show. Now, let's move on to the episode.

It's episode 55 and we're joined by Sensei Andrea Harkins, a martial artist and writer from the sunny state of Florida. We talked a lot about Sensei Andrea's time in the arts and her perspective on the martial arts as someone who came to it as an adult which is unlike most of our guests. As usual with our guest, Sensei Andrea goes deep and really opens up with some personal and private stories. I took a lot of inspiration from her words and I think you will, too. Sensei Andrea, welcome to whistlekick Martial Arts Radio.

Andrea Harkins:

Thank you. I am so excited to be here. I'm really thrilled. Thank you for having me.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Well it's an honor to have you and this is gonna be a lot of fun. So let's get going, you know? As you said, you've listened to other shows so you know how we start episode. Tell us how you got started in the martial arts?

Andrea Harkins:

I have a wonderful story about getting started. It basically was not my idea at all which is a little bit different than most people. Most people think I want to learn the martial art, let me go try one. I was newly married about a year and my husband had always had an interest in martial arts. He'd taken a little bit of martial arts when he was younger. And he decided it would be a great thing for us to do it together. So I wasn't so sure about it. I had a little trepidation about going and I had never actually seen martial arts stuff close and personal. I had seen it on TV or on movies or whatever but I've never, never been to a dojo, never been to a class or school or anything like that. So we did go and it was in a community center so it was reasonably priced, it was not too far from home. It had a great instructor



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and assistant instructors and it was a large class, lots of people. And I walked in there and it was here in Florida which is a very warm state, as you know, and I don't think the air-conditioning even work. I don't even think it had air-conditioning in there, you know? This is old school, 26 years ago.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah, old school. Sure.

Andrea Harkins:

And we went in and everybody was waiting before class or starting to stretch and that seemed okay. And we did some stretching with the class and then we sort of sat on the sideline. And he said, just sit and watch for a few minutes. And as we're sitting on the sideline, there were quite a few backed out from the class. They were performing katas and forms and there were some board breaking and people were yelling. And I remember sitting there with this dust kind of swirling around and the sweaty people yelling and breaking boards and I just thought to myself there is no way I'm ever doing this. Absolutely no way. And I still laugh about it because I remember so vividly thinking, no! No, no, no. So, but like anything you have to give things a chance, right? The first time is never the full story so we did continue to go, maybe once or twice a week. More than not, it was once a week, that's all we could sort of fit in to our schedule at that time. And I started to like. I started to really like it. I felt empowered, I started feeling more confident about myself and I found it very interesting. You think that these black belts just break boards or yell or do a nice kata and just because they know how to do it, you forget that they start from day one just like you as a beginner. So I started from day one and started to build on it, realized how they were doing these things, and had great instructors like I said. So I really got into the martial arts because of my husband and then I stuck to it, stuck with it, because of how much I learned to enjoy it and it was such a personal challenge to me. So it's very funny because there were parts of me that I never knew about so I tried the martial arts. And then those first classes, I realized how very focused and intense I was and I remember the instructor pointing me out many times as I was a white belt or a yellow belt to other students who were higher ranks to say look at the focus and intensity in this person. And honestly, I never knew I had that so there were lots of lessons, lots or personal lessons that I learned when I started martial arts. And I stuck with it because it fit me, it ended up being something that was right for me and I loved it from then on out.

Jeremy Lesniak:

So here we are or here you are, you're in this class and you're discovering something that just clicks for you and that you'd never experienced before. Did you play sports growing up or did you have any other passions that maybe were a little different?

Andrea Harkins:



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That was surely the next point I was gonna make. I was never athletic or I didn't think I was. I had some athleticism but I never pursued it. First of all, because I didn't have the confidence to. I never felt that I was really good enough to be on a team or play a sport or pursue something. And I never felt athletic. This is the first time in my life, and I was 26 years old, when I started that I realized I had potential, that I realized I was better than I thought I was - that I had a lost in me that I had never explored before, athletically. In fact, in was around that same time that I started exercising more with weights and jogging and doing other things that were sort of athletic, physical fitness, that I had never really done before. And ever since then, I still combine martial arts with other athletic activities or physical fitness that I enjoy doing. I ran 5ks which I never knew I could even run a mile, you know? But I finally thought to myself, hey if I can break boards or if I can fight with somebody, I can certainly run a mile. And that's what it taught me about athleticism, is I think there's an athlete in everyone. There's something athletic in everyone any way. You just need to find it. But martial arts was a great way to catapult me into a more athletic person and I've been like that ever since. So to this day, I'm 52 years old, I still practice the martial arts. I still work with weights and I still do aerobic exercises. I do it all because it all clicks together for me. Thanks to my beginning in martial arts.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Wow. Yes, the other thing I wanted to go back to was you just painted a pretty solid visual for us of that first time your walked into the school at the, you say it was a community center, and I could imagine you on the sideline there watching everyone before class and doing all these things that probably seem pretty odd in that moment. And I was getting the impression that maybe you felt overwhelmed. Is that accurate?

Andrea Harkins:

Yeah, I actually did. There were women there, too, so a lot of people asked me while it was a mostly men. It was mostly men but there were other women and it was overwhelming because as I said, I had never seen this stuff close before. I had never first seen people sparring or fighting up close. You know boxing had that in TV or people watched fights like that but I've never really seen anybody sparring either. So all of these was new. That really frightened me, the sparring. And it was all very new to me and when I learned the first kata, I always tell people that the first form, pattern, kata, whatever you call it, the first one that you learn is the hardest one because it makes absolutely no sense. Why am I turning my legs this way? Why am I punching with arm and looking that way?

Jeremy Lesniak:

Right.

Andrea Harkins:



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It is simple but it's so difficult. So all of those things, yeah they were overwhelming but as I progress, I learned to just take one class at a time or one step at a time and that's what helped me get through that and not worry about it so much.

Jeremy Lesniak:

That's great. And I can totally see myself there, you know, watching you taking this journey that you know, I've taken in, most of the listeners, of course, have taken so I really thank you for sharing that with us. But I know we're gonna get into the fact that you're a writer as we go later one. So I know you've got stories and that's what we're all about here on Martial Arts Radio - stories. And I'm sure you've got a bunch of them so I'd like you to tell us your best martial arts story.

Andrea Harkins:

Yeah, I do have a bunch; I have a bunch bunch. But I'm gonna tell you one of my favorite and I've told it before. And the reason I tell it over and over is because you can never hear this kind of story too much. It's really a story about believing in yourself and a story about confidence and a story about mindset. When I was testing for my green belt, I was always very nervous about tests, always very nervous. My husband would ask me, why are you so nervous? Why are you so anxious? They would not ask you to test if you weren't ready. I know what you know and I'm not that upset about it. But still, I was always very, very nervous. So for our green belt test, I made sure I knew what I needed to know, that I could execute it and perform and whatever was gonna be asked of me, I had practiced; I felt good about it. Even on the drive there, I was a little nervous that day but I felt good. So the exam or the test, there were again, lots of people testing at the same time. And it was in the community center and they have bleachers so there were people there watching the students. And then there were so many students, some testing for just beginning belts, some were testing for higher belts. So everybody had family or friend there in the stands. And I went through the test, I did everything, I felt really good. Everything they asked me to do, I knew what it was. I didn't forget anything. I don't remember making any big mistakes. I felt really good. And at the end, everybody kind of goes into one area and sits down. And they were getting ready to do that so I felt like I did this, I got to my green belt. And I heard the Sensei call my name up and I thought to myself, why is he calling me? We're done, we're finished, aren't we? We're finished. And he came up and I saw that he had some board and I thought to my stomach, oh I can't even tell you how I felt when I saw him pull out a board. I'd never broken one before - not in class, nowhere. So he hold up this board and it was a one-inch board and he hold out another board and it was another one-inch board, and put the two one-inch boards together. And I'm just looking at him thinking, what is he doing? I don't know how to do it. And he said okay, and he was just talking to me in a low voice and he said, Andrea, you're gonna do a jump front kick and break the board. And I'm sure I whined a little bit and saying I never did this before but there was no time for that and people were watching. So he said, just do the jump front kick and kick the board with the ball of your foot in the middle and just do it. So I am sitting there and I thought to myself okay, do what he says, do what he says. I'm trying to talk to myself, just do what he said. I got myself ready, I jumped up, it was a pretty good jump but the execution wasn't all that great and then my foot just bounced off the board - the



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boards, two. And I remember thinking, oh my goodness. Everybody's looking at me, everybody sees this. What am I gonna do? He said, Andrea just do it again and break the board. So I'm trying to change my mind about how I was thinking again. Okay, he said break the board, you know how to do this kick, just put your foot on the board, and I don't know what was going through my mind. I jumped up the second time, my foot bounces off again. Well now, I'm embarrassed and humiliated, and feeling just awful like I wish I could crawl under a rock. But there's no rock. There's no big rock, there's no boulders in there that I can get behind. So I tell myself, and this is the whole key to the story, I finally told myself I could do it. That was the one thing I hadn't told myself. I had told myself, he wants me to do it, you know how to do this kick, but I never told myself the first time, I can do this. I can do this. I've done other things that were difficult, I know how to do this kick. So I realized on the third try that I hadn't told myself the one thing that I really needed to tell myself. I had not given myself the gift of confidence. I didn't tell myself that I can do it. I had told myself that he wanted me to do it, I know, he tells me I can do it or everybody's looking at me, I should do it. But it wasn't until that third time when I really was under the gun and had no other idea what to do that I allowed myself to believe that I could do it. And I tell people that that was the easiest board break I've ever done in my life. That third try, all I did was change my mindset, all I did was change my negative thought to positive thought, and was able to break through because of that. And today, that's the very thing that I use to practice in my life when I have difficulties or obstacles, it's just that one little reminder that I can do it. And so that's one of my favorite stories because it set the stage for who I am as a martial artist, as a martial arts writer, as a motivator. That was the first time that I allowed myself to believe in myself and that's why it's such an important story not just for me and not just for martial artists. I've used this story when I talk to groups at churches and other women and different people. When I pull out the two boards to show them what it was, they all gasped. They looked at it as non-martial artists and think that's impossible. As martial artists, we know, as long as we use good techniques, that we can do it. But it's a great story for everyone because it just shows the power of the mind.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yes. So you still have those boards.

Andrea Harkins:

I have those boards, yes.

Jeremy Lesniak:

That's great. I mean there's a lot of symbolism in there, of course.

Andrea Harkins:

So much, yeah.



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Jeremy Lesniak:

And I think most martial artists that have been training for more than a few years have had the opportunity to break a board or two, some far more than others. I've trained at schools where it's been a lot higher of a priority whereas others it comes out late at testings such as you experienced there.

Andrea Harkins:

Right.

Jeremy Lesniak:

But I think it's a great symbol because it's such a transitional point - the first time that you break a board to be on the side of never having done it just feels like the most daunting thing in the world, even if it's one board. And of course, I mean, you're an instructor now. I don't know if you break in your curriculum

Andrea Harkins:

Yeah.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Okay, you do. So you get to see just as I do and just as, I'm sure, a lot of the listeners do, other people as they step up for their first opportunity to break a board.

Andrea Harkins:

Yes.

Jeremy Lesniak:

And the range of emotions that comes through be it fear or terror or excitement or some combination of all of them.

Andrea Harkins:

Right.

Jeremy Lesniak:

And then they get through that and then on the other side you'll realize, oh I can do that.



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Andrea Harkins:

Yeah, it's amazing.

Jeremy Lesniak:

It is amazing, absolutely.

Andrea Harkins:

So I love the story and I like to share it with, as I said, martial artists and non-martial artists because everybody can relate to breaking through a barrier. Everybody can relate to having some blockage put up in front of them and having to figure out how to break through it. It really is very symbolic.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah. Absolutely. So a lot of the guests that we have on the show started martial arts at, you know, right out of the wombs practically but you started a little bit later in life so you know what your life was before martial arts. A lot of our guests have to think of this question in a hypothetical sense so I'd like you to compare what your life looked like before martial arts and after and imagine had you never stepped in the community center that day, what do you think your life would be like now?

Andrea Harkins:

Right. You know, I am a writer and I actually wrote a blog about this and I called it Martial Arts Saved Me. Not that they saved me from drugs or you know, something crazy but they really saved me from myself. They really saved me from not having a lot of confidence. There was a point in my life where I would never want to speak in public or be interviewed by somebody. There was a point when I never believed that I had any special purpose or talent or skills and this was all before martial arts. I felt like an average person and I just went through everyday without a lot of goals. In fact, there were a lot of times in my earlier years when I couldn't think of a goal. My husband used to ask me, what are your goals? What do you want to do? And I would say, I don't know. That was the straight answer I would throw out all the time because I didn't have the focus and I didn't have the ambition. And I wasn't sure where to go. So the reason why I say martial arts saved me is because I would have never become the person I am today if not for my journey into martial art. I wasn't confident back then or tenacious or positive. And I know if I had continued being that way today, I'd be struggling with so many life and health issues or wouldn't have the motivation that I have. I just know this because I look around. I see the other women my age who are having difficulties with health issues, who are having difficulties with family issues or whatever it might be, physical fitness. I don't have that because of martial arts. I think that I've been able to push the negative from my life and replace it with things like hope and insight and positivity, and I didn't have that before; I was a negative person. I think everybody is sort of predisposed



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to negativity. It's so easy to go the negative rout. It could be something as simple as it's a rainy day today and seeing that as a negative thing as opposed to a day where maybe you could stay inside and get a lot of work done or a day when you could take a nap or go see a movie or maybe it's just not such a bad thing. Before martial arts, I would have seen it as the bad thing, the negative thing, the dreary day - why is it raining? After the martial arts, I could see it for what it was. And you know, I have so many martial arts friendship, there's so many people I trust and admire now. I am the person I am and I'm so grateful for it. I'm a positive person, I've transformed my life into motivating and inspiring others. It really is my mission and purpose. I am a martial artist but what I've done is taking everything I learned - the physical part but also the mental part - and created the person that I've always wanted to be, created this type of person I still look up to myself; the one that I would point to and think I wish I was like her. Now I am like her. I am her. And all of that attribute to martial arts. They helped me to walk towards being the person that I always wanted to be, to strive and to work had. And all of those amazing things happened to me because of my martial arts practice.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Wow. That's great and that's so powerful. I really hope people hone in on that. I think a lot of us are, you know, because we started really young, we take for granted some of these wonderful benefits that martial arts bring to us. And here, you have a much I would say perspective, a better ability to compare what life is before and after martial arts and thus value martial arts. I appreciate that perspective. Thank you for sharing it.

Andrea Harkins:

Thank you.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Now a lot of what we talked about so far -

Andrea Harkins:

Welcome.

Jeremy Lesniak:

A lot of what we talked has been more high points so let's take it a little bit in the other direction and I'd like you to talk about a low point in your life that your martial arts experience or training helped you overcome.

Andrea Harkins:



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Again, I have several of these, actually. I'm gonna talk about one and later we're gonna talk about some of my writing and I'll share with you some of the - little bit briefly - some of the stories that I'm gonna include in a book.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Sure.

Andrea Harkins:

But one of the low points that I talked about: because being a female martial artist, not that I... You know, gender is not really important in martial arts, there's no gender involved it's just the perspective of the student that might be different - a woman and a man. They're taught the same way but their perspectives are different. One of the things that is obviously different about women and men generally is having children, right? Women have the baby.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Right.

Andrea Harkins:

And so a woman martial artist, female and a male, are gonna have that difference. When I was pregnant with my third child, I have four, at about my 5th month of pregnancy, I went into labor. And I didn't realize that I had some complications and so I went to the hospital. When I went to the hospital, they did an examination and they said you are now admitted. And I was admitted to the hospital and I never had a chance to go home and get my toothbrush or my clothes or anything like that; I was just admitted. And I'll tell you upfront that I was there for six weeks. But the day I was admitted, they took me to the room and they said listened, we're really sorry to tell you this but this pregnancy is basically doomed. Your body is not able to hold this pregnancy. You're in labor and we're gonna try to stop it. And they gave me some medication and it was something that gave me double vision and a severe headache and I was really scared. I was really worried about this. I had some miscarriages previously and so I did sort of believe that this was a doomed situation. And they would come in the day each day, each morning, and say look it's probably gonna happen soon and you're gonna have to deliver this baby who's not going to survive. We just want you to be prepared to know that this is gonna happen. And at first, I believed them. As first I believed everything that they said because they're the professionals; they're the medical professionals and they see life through medical professional eyes. This is what they do. They test, they examine, they come up with reasons and theories and they share them with you. And at first, I accepted it and I was devastated, of course. And one day, I went for an ultrasound because they did ultrasounds frequently just trying to check the status everyday, every half a day, they would do an ultrasound. And I remember the woman who did the ultrasound one day looking at it and she's not supposed to share



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what it shows but she just said you know, I said how does it look? And she said, it doesn't look good. And to me that meant this was the day, this was the day that my body was gonna give up on me. And I was scared and I started crying. I was, you know, crying and crying and the doctor came in and he said why are you crying right now? I said, 28:39 looked at it and she saw this. He said, that's not true. What she said is not accurate. And so I realized right then, it's not accurate what are they saying? There is no accurate when it comes to your body and your own life. What's accurate is what you believe and what you see. And that was the turning point like breaking through that board from my green belt exam, this was the turning point for me to decide that I'm gonna change the way I think about this. I'm gonna change the way I look at this. I'm gonna use my martial art mindset here and decide that first of all, I'm gonna be positive about this. No matter what happens, if this baby is meant to survive, I'll accept it but if there's any chance that I can do anything at all to save this child, I'm gonna do it. I'm gonna give 100%, there's my martial art mindset right there. I'm gonna give 100% and I'm going to do everything I can because I feel this child moving inside of me and I can't believe that this life is going to end like that. So I changed my mind. I changed my mind about everything and I decided I wouldn't ever listen to what they will say again, and that was the martial arts mindset. And then I started using my memories and my martial arts training such as envisioning myself breaking through a board, such as performing katas when I was scared in my head thinking about them, meditating. I wasn't allowed to get up, I had to lay flat for as many days as I could. And I had to change the way my mind works and I used martial art; that's how I got through it. And after six weeks in the hospital, they allowed me to go home. I still haven't delivered the baby that they were so certain was gonna come prematurely and not survive. I went home on bed rest for another four months and I delivered a healthy baby, full-term, almost 15 years ago. So that was one of the lowest points in my life but one of the most amazing times when I was able to change my mindset and work through it. Now I'm not saying it'll work for everybody, I'm not saying that somebody with an illness can wish it away. You can't but you can change your perspective. And like I did, I was willing to accept what was gonna happen and I was also willing to work 100% to do whatever I could than I wouldn't. And that was the story.

Jeremy Lesniak:

And I think that that's the key there, that word "work". Everything I've ever read about cancer patients says that one of the major divisions between those that survive and those that don't is that the stubborn ones, the ones that question every decision, the ones that do their own research, that are essentially doing whatever they can to fight, to gain knowledge, to suggest alternative treatments, the ones that are a pain in the butt to the doctors are the ones that have the higher rates of recovery.

Andrea Harkins:

Yes

Jeremy Lesniak:



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And you took a similar track. You shifted from accepting what the doctors told you to in the way that you could having that warrior, that 32:31 spirit to take it on as a challenge, as a battle.

Andrea Harkins:

Yes, exactly! Exactly.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Without attempting to trivialize anything down to a single word, you won.

Andrea Harkins:

Yes. Yes, I won.

Jeremy Lesniak:

What you wanted happened.

Andrea Harkins:

And I succeed because -

Jeremy Lesniak:

And I think that there's something really glorious in there.

Andrea Harkins:

Yes. That is one of the keys about positivity - it gives you the opportunity to win. It doesn't mean you're going to, it doesn't mean you're gonna overcome every battle and not come out with some kind of scar. But it does mean that you've opened up the opportunity to win if that opportunity to exist because it's there. If there's just a small bit of it out there, you've opened up the opportunity to it. And that's a martial art mindset and that's a warrior spirit.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah. Without a doubt. This is all -

Andrea Harkins:



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And with a warrior spirit that I didn't know I had. That was another turning point in my life that helped me become who I am today; because I didn't know I was that warrior woman.

Jeremy Lesniak:

When did you realize that? Was that after this experience with the pregnancy or was it -

Andrea Harkins:

It was during. Well I think this was one of the biggest moment. It was during it when I changed my mind and I started wondering how I could explore a different way to make it a positive experience, to work diligently in some manner to try and control some of it. And I think it was during that time when I just realized the power of the mind and what it meant to believe in yourself and allow yourself to try. Some people are just afraid to try, that fear of trying. Some people would just let it go and say you know what, fine it's over. Let me just get over this. Let me just stop it now and not do anything about it. Let me just let the worst happen so I can just move on past it, forget about it. But you know, to face it is a different story and when you face things head on, you have a better chance of pushing through.

Jeremy Lesniak:

So I know you've had the chance to train in a few places but I'd like to shift gears to some of your role models, your martial arts inspirations. Who would you say was the most influential in setting you and keeping you on this martial arts path that has clearly brought you such wonderful experiences?

Andrea Harkins:

Well as I talked earlier, it was my husband who dragged me to that first class. I have to give him credit for being instrumental in my martial arts upbringing but not just because he dragged me to that first class. He was there with me when we trained and I think I always felt comfortable knowing he was there and even though we've been training always together within the class itself, sometimes we were in different rooms or whatnot. You know, we were able to practice at home and do things like that together and he always encouraged me to continue. I often won trophies and things in the class tests, believe it or not. The place that I was so fearful to go, I would on occasion get a trophy for being the most focused or whatever winning something, and he would just always back me up. And for years we trained together and then when we received our black belts and you know, we are old school. We got our black belts back in, I'm trying to think, 1994 and then second degree in 1997. We did those together. I was actually pregnant when I tested for my first black belt; I was pregnant at the time. So we've been through a lot of experiences together but beyond that, after that, we taught for our Sensei and then we started a program together at a low-income, high risk community center for youth. And we taught there for few reasons. One, we wanted to get some experience outside of our original dojo, something on our own- a program that we did on our own to learn more about being good instructors. And these kids



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were kids that live in a neighborhood in an area that was violence and crime-ridden. They needed self-defense and they needed role models. And we taught there for seven years for free. It was just something that happened and fell into place for us and he was always instrumental in us in doing these types of things because he loved martial arts as well. So many stories happened when we taught there. There were a brother and a sister whose caretaker, their grandfather, went in for a surgery and he passed away during surgery. And they suddenly had no caretaker anymore and so we actually considered adopting them. That's just how we felt about teaching. It really was a family and we didn't want anybody to be separated, you know brother and sister be separated or put into a foster home or be afraid. Fortunately, their family, some family from other state came forward. But it was just an experience that we did together and he's just always instrumental and pushing me along in my journey. He was the one who started our program that we teach now. He said hey, it's time again to do this. And that was six years ago. So to this day, he still is very instrumental in what we do as martial artists and in our family, and just very grateful that that worked out that way for us. Because it's nice to have a spouse who has a similar mindset and loved martial arts, too. He's definitely a great motivator, supporter. I learned a lot from him. He is the main instructor in our program because I work full-time and I'm not able to plan for it but he plans it. And every time I go to a class to teach with him, I actually learn something because he brings a new content to class. So he definitely get the ward for most instrumental in my upbringing.

Jeremy Lesniak:

And I'm gonna speculate that being able to share this in your marriage has brought you closer.

Andrea Harkins:

Yes, I would say it does. Although when you have to... Let me throw the [40:13](#) in there. When you have two people who are leaders and you have two people who are very strong-willed, there's a lot of give and take that has to happen. For instance, when we are teaching and he is the main instructor, I have to learn to step back. Because I have to show up late because I am driving from another area to get there and I would come in and take over the class. And you know, he had already prepared something so there was starting to be some clashing. And I had to decide that you know what, this is his class. I need to step back. He pulled me, we had a conversation about it. So you know, you have to, when you're both martial artists, you're both instructors, you've been doing this the same amount of time, you have to learn that only one can be the leader. So that's just a little quick lesson in marriage and martial arts.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Of course. And honestly, I had a feeling that you were gonna offer that [41:25](#) out because I've seen it in a few married couples teach and train together that that's usually how it goes down.

Andrea Harkins:



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Right.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Now, you know, there's some great lessons to be learned from everything that we're hearing from you today and all these wonderful experiences but hypothetically, if you could train with somebody that you haven't had the opportunity to before, be that alive or somebody that's passed on, who would that be?

Andrea Harkins:

Well, you know, I have so many. Being in social media and very active in social media, just have so many martial art friends and incredible instructors that are out there that I've never really met personally. So I'd like to chat about a few of them that... they're not famous people. I'm not gonna pick Bruce Lee or somebody really famous even though they were fantastic role models and certainly very, very important. My martial arts has always been personal to me. I mean I'm not a competitor and I'm not out to show how great I am. I just want to work on my martial art and my life and keep them blended together in a positive way. So there are few people who have been instrumental in my martial art thoughts and mindset and I'd like to mention them today because I would like to train with them and I will someday teach with these people. The first one, his name is Yau Sun Tong. And Yao Sun, I met him on Facebook or LinkedIn or one of those years ago. Yao Sun lives in Canada but he's from China and he's a Tai Chi practitioner. And I could use the word Master, I don't know if he would accept that, I'm not sure if he goes by that, but he embodies Tai Chi. He lives and breathes it, really. The first time I ever met somebody like that, I mean I've been having interest in Tai Chi but didn't know a lot about it, when I met him and talked to him frequently, he explained how he practices. How personal Tai Chi is different than other martial arts. Every person is so different in how they interpret it and practice it. And he practices it in Canada in the winter and the snow. He actually has clothes that he wears when it's cold that he wears outside when he does Tai Chi outside in the snow. And he's just peaceful and he eats well and he's just like one of those people that you look at and think I would love to just have a day with this person. And I've come so close on a few occasions to having a day with Yau Sun but it hasn't worked out. I tried to schedule a seminar a year or two ago to get him down here to Florida to put on a seminar and kind of fell through at the last minute. And he was here in Florida to go on a cruise not long ago and I still couldn't get over to see him. So I am going to meet Yau Sun Tong one day and we're gonna practice together, and I'm gonna learn from him. Another, some of my newer friends are just so interesting and dynamic. Ado Dulas is in Austria and Ado is a self-defense expert. He has several schools - and these aren't even plugs for these people, I don't even know them, talking about them, they're just so important to me. And Ado is just so technically good at what he does. He teaches body guards, he teaches Krav Maga, he's got old... But the thing about him, He's so much like me in many ways. He's got a very positive outlook; he's so kind and friendly. And all of his students look up to him like a brother. He's a young man, in his early thirties, I believe, but he's just got a tremendous way of teaching. The people love him. And being a woman, self-defense is so important to me. I know some, I've learned some but I watch some of his videos and I watch some of the things that he does and I'm so impressed. And so for those reasons, I'd like to train with Ado someday. Like to meet him. His positivity and just his



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demeanor, his work ethic is just impeccable. I have a similar one, I'm a hard-worker. So when I see someone else who works so hard to help people, and that's really what he does, that inspires me. And that's why I want to work with Ado. Another friend is Alex McAllen and Alex live in Scotland. And I've met him really not too long ago but he's the most incredible Taekwondo practitioner I personally have ever met and got to talk to. His flexibility is just incredible and he's just so willing to teach others and to teach me. I can ask him any question. And I mean, he's taught out from people all over the world for his strength training and his martial art. And yet, anytime I talk to him, he'll stop and make me a video and send it along to me so I can watch how to do something. He just reaches out to me whenever I need. But his Taekwondo is just so spectacular. I just, you know, I can't explain it any other way but to look at him and think, that is really amazing. He's in my age range and his work ethic is, again, impeccable. So I would love to work with Alex one day. And of course --

Jeremy Lesniak:

Does -- Go ahead.

Andrea Harkins:

Yeah, they're all amazing. I mean the list goes on. I have other people who support me daily. Arthur Collin [48:27](#) up in Pennsylvania. He just sends me encouragement everyday. He reminds me to work on my abs and to do my squat, you know?

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah.

Andrea Harkins:

He's like well how many are you doing because I'm gonna do as many, you know, just to pull motivation and he's a martial artist so, so many. And I guess the list could go on but I'm just happy to be able to mention those few because they're so important in my inspirational development. I look at a martial artist and want to train with them not because of what they do but because of how they do it. And that's what I see when I look at these people. Their willingness to help others, their positivity, their skills and techniques. So they're some of my favorite.

Jeremy Lesniak:

And those sound like great people. I don't know any of those names but listening to you talk about them, I certainly want to train with them myself.

Andrea Harkins:



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Yes. That's why I said there's no famous people on my list, there's just real people.

Jeremy Lesniak:

That's okay. Without offering any disrespect to some of the famous people that have been on the show and some of whom that I've trained with, some of my favorite martial artists that I've trained with have been virtually unknown as well. So nothing with picking people from that greater body of martial artists. Because most of us aren't famous.

Andrea Harkins:

Right, exactly. And I don't personally know any of the famous ones. It's time I get to know some of those, too.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Well keep plugging along and I'm sure some people --

Andrea Harkins:

Oh, yes.

Jeremy Lesniak:

will appear if you want. So you've taken us on quite a journey through this episode but you know, it's clear just from listening to you, even for a few minutes, that you've got a lot of self-motivation. So what's keeping you going? Are you goal-oriented or are there goals, things that you're striving for as you move forward in the martial arts?

Andrea Harkins:

Yes, absolutely. I'm very goal-oriented. I border a little bit on workaholic so I have to watch myself because I take on a lot of project. But my goals are many. My main degree that I have my black belt is Tang Soo Do which was... I mean I would say it was altered a little bit. It was a little more Americanized than some but basically, that's what I did. But I haven't had an instructor in a long time and it's difficult to find somebody who taught exactly what I learned now. So I'm now starting to train in Taekwondo and this person that's teaching me, Grandmaster Michael Hadsell here in Florida. He reached out to me because I complained, I guess, one day on Facebook how I felt like a martial art orphan. It was very difficult for me to find a way to train anymore just based on my time and how busy my life is. And he kind of jumped in there and said, I will train you. I'll train you if you want to learn Taekwondo. I know it's a little different style but it's still Korean. I will train you. So he sort of taken me under his wing and he's



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training me in that. And I've got a lot to learn but it's really nice to be a student again. It's sort of like being a volunteer. If you've ever been a volunteer, you'll notice that some people volunteer all the time. It's sometimes nice if you're the volunteer. It's sometimes nice if you're the volunteer to be able to just go to the event or go the place and not have to be the volunteer for a change. To me, that's sort of how being a student is. It's sort of nice not being the instructor. It's sort of nice to learn and not have to think about the other student or you know, I love doing that but it's just nice to practice myself again and work on my own skills and techniques which is important. So that's one of my goals that I'm working on. Rank is not important to me, only is that important to other people. In order to validate yourself as a martial artist, sometimes you have to improve your rank to be seen for who you are. I mean 26 years in the martial arts, I should be a higher rank some people would think. Well, I just devoted myself to teaching all these years and rank is not that important to me but I know it's important to other people and to promote my own students. So that's why that's one of my goals.

Jeremy Lesniak:

One of the things that I can say just to spider off of that and just validate that just a little bit more, one of the things that happens with this show is that before the interviews actually start, I have a few minutes, just as I did with you, speaking with these guests. And if you look through the guests that we've had, we've had some of the most prominent martial artists of our time come on the show which I'm absolutely away by. But one of the things I will say is that there is almost an inverse relationship between someone's skill and prominence with the importance they place on both rank and title. I won't say who they are but there are guests that I almost had to argue with because they wanted me to refer them by their first name only without any kind of title.

Andrea Harkins:

Right.

Jeremy Lesniak:

And some of those people ended up with Mr. or Ms. or something else. I won't say who it was. I'll let all of you speculate but there's absolutely nothing wrong with 26 years in the martial arts and having any rank on any end of the spectrum because regardless how many stripes are on your belt, whether they're stripes or not doesn't change what you can do.

Andrea Harkins:

That's very true.

Jeremy Lesniak:



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Sorry for stealing the spotlight for a minute but please -

Andrea Harkins:

No, no. Please. So some of my other goals. Okay, we didn't talk about my writing but I am a martial arts writer. I started doing that a couple of years ago. I decided to put my martial arts thought - both inspirational and actual martial arts training stuff - and combine those with my other passion which has always been writing. And writing was one of those things that I didn't have confidence about. Even though I was always a writer, I've always been a writer, didn't have the confidence to ever do anything with it until a couple of years ago when another martial artist told me and he's a blogger. And he said, I looked for you on Google and everything and I couldn't find anything about you. And I said, no why would you find anything about me there? And he said, because you're such a good writer and a martial artist, why aren't you doing something with that? So I started the blog a couple of years ago. And my full intent with the blog was just to reach out and it's called Winning at Life. It's just really about martial arts and how you can apply it to your life. Whether it's a mindset or whether you're a martial artist or not, here's some positive things that you should know about yourself that you don't know. All the things that I've learned about myself over all these years that took me, all these hard lessons that I learned, I'm able to share those with other people and say look, this is how you apply this to your life. So I started the blog and was hopeful that I'd have a reader or two. And it took a little bit of time to get it going but now, you know, in a month's time or a few weeks, there's thousands of people who read the blog. And it just blows me away because I always wondered why does anybody want to read what I'm writing? And I know why. It's because I'm genuine, it's because they see me as a friend, it's because of these experiences that I've been through that they can relate. So that's what it is. It's the real me and people get to see someone else who struggles and someone else who has bad times but that person is able to persevere and pull through and if she can do it, I can do it - that's one of my motto. You know, I try to tell people if I can do it, you can do it. If I'm 52 years old, I'm still doing all these stuff and I'm happy about it, you can do it. So the blog has helped. A little bit before the blog, I had sent in my first query letter to write in a magazine and it was the magazine called MASuccess for the martial arts industry association. This advertisement in there that always said writers wanted or whatever. So I finally got enough nerve to send in a query and they accepted it. They wrote me back and said yes, write the article. So I was thrilled and scared and everything at the same time because I've never been published. I wrote the article about... I believe the first one was about teaching martial arts in a rural community because I live in a rural community. So I wrote that and you know, that really opened a door for me, just thinking about magazines. And since then, my goal now are always about writing, about combining martial arts and writing and inspiring other people. I'm a writer for the World Martial Arts Magazine. I highlight other martial artists in there and I also write a sort of inspirational article myself every month so a monthly column is for that. I write it for Conflict Manager, I write about self-defense there. I write for my local newspaper. So now I'm writing for several magazines and my book. The book is called The Martial Arts Woman. It's gonna be published this year. I've been working on it for probably seven or eight months. It's one of my biggest goal because I've been published in magazines many times now and the book is something amazing. I think it's never really been done this way, don't think there's another book like it. It's called the Martial Arts Woman, it's about women, obviously, but it's not about what kind



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of training they've had or what degree they are or how many schools they own or where they teach or where they practice. It's not really about any of that. What it's about is the [1:00:14](#) and the mindset of the martial arts woman - how she applies martial arts to her life, how she... just like the story I told you about the pregnancy, there's a few stories like that in there. There's stories about being a fighter for those women who are fighters, there's three cancer journeys in there about women who are martial artists and have cancer and how they applied martial arts to that. Each one of them has a different way of doing it. There's just all different stories, different variety --- different martial artists that many people are familiar with: Karen Eden Herdman, Joy Turberville, Restita DeJesus, Michelle Manu... there's a huge list, Dana Hee... There is about 25 women, some who are just what I consider myself, an everyday martial artist, some are everyday martial artists telling their story. So it's really a beautiful book about many stories and insights and give people finally the chance to see what it is the female martial artist thinks about. How she lives, why it's so important to her. It's just like personal stories or stories about how they decided to learn the martial art. They're just really amazing stories and each chapter is stand-alone where you could just read this chapter and learn something about a woman. And I've written the bulk of the book myself so there are topics in there that I've chosen to write about. The pregnancy story that I told you is one of them but there's another that is an interesting story as well. And then I also talked about why women stopped training - my ideas why. I also talked about different things that I've seen myself over the years. What kind of commitment a woman makes with the martial arts or how she's a mother and applied martial arts. So all of those kind of fit in the book. Just because my biggest goal is just finally get those the big thing published this year and get it out there so everybody can read it. And I'll just say it's not a book for men or women or martial artist or not, it's a book for all of those people. It's got an inspirational tone I think anybody can read and enjoy and learn something about. So that's the big goal.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Well, certainly with the stories that you're sharing here today, I'm looking forward to reading it and I'm sure anyone that's gonna listen to the episode will be interested in the book. So of course, please, once it's published, let us know. We'll let everybody know, we'll probably even update the show notes for this episode over on the website, whistlekickmartialartsradio.com. Of course, I haven't said that yet in this episode; we are gonna have link because you sent me links to all these things that you're talking about - your blog and the places that you're writing so people can follow you and learn more about you and what's going on with you and you know, get a sense maybe of your writing style in anticipation of the book which is really exciting.

Andrea Harkins:

Right.

Jeremy Lesniak:



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Yeah, I mean there aren't enough martial arts books out there, I wish there were more, and so I'm glad that you're writing one.

Andrea Harkins:

Yeah. I'm glad, too.

Jeremy Lesniak:

So I don't want to cut you off if there's more on the, you know, that front where you're writing and where people can follow you and learn more about you.

Andrea Harkins:

No, I mean there's not really more. If you could share the links, I invite people to connect with me on Facebook - one of my Facebooks but you do have to request, send a friend request, and I'll generally accept. The other one is for the Martial Arts Woman and you can just like that page if you're interested. And the blog, I'll just go ahead and throw that out now.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Please.

Andrea Harkins:

www.themartialartswoman.com. So as you can see, and I did mention this earlier but, the name of my blog is called the Martial Arts Woman and over time, I started to become known as the martial arts woman and now the book is being called The Martial Arts Woman so you'll see in there.

Jeremy Lesniak:

You're consistent with your branding, that's a good thing.

Andrea Harkins:

There you go. People will remember. They might not remember Andrea Harkins but they will remember The Martial Arts Woman.

Jeremy Lesniak:



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That's right. Wonderful. So I really appreciate you being here today and I'm wondering if you have any parting words of wisdom for all of us.

Andrea Harkins:

My parting words of wisdom are apply a martial arts mindset to your life each and everyday. And if you don't know what that is, just start with positivity; just start with learning self-confidence, believing in yourself because I believe in you. That's all there is to it, really. If you need someone to believe in you, I believe in you and I know that you can do whatever that you want to do. Be empowered and go forward in your life. Take risks and reach out, and do all of the things. Don't let fear stop you from your purpose or from your mission.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Thank you for listening to episode 55 or whistlekick Martial Arts Radio and thank you to Sensei Andrea for your time and your stories. Head on over to whistlekickmartialartsradio.com for the show notes, links to everything we talked about today including links to all Sensei Andrea's writings, photos, and her website. If you like the show, please subscribe or download one of the apps so you never miss out on a new episode. And if we could trouble you to leave us a review wherever you download your podcast, we'd appreciate it. We've been getting some great five ratings but the reviews have been a bit light lately. Remember, if we read your review on the air, just contact us and we'll get you a free pack of whistlekick stuff. If you want to be a guest on the show or you know someone that would be a interview, please fill out the form on the website. And don't forget to subscribe to our newsletter so you can stay up on everything we do. Please follow us on social media. We're on Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest and Instagram all with the username whistlekick. And remember the products we make here at whistlekick like our great hats, those whole bunch more over at whistlekick.com. So until next time. Train hard, smile, and have a great day.