



Episode 328 – Sifu Scott Graner | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com



Jeremy Lesniak:

Welcome, welcome, welcome. This is whistlekick Martial Arts Radio episode 328 and today, I'm joined by Sifu Scott Graner. My name's Jeremy Lesniak, I'm your host for the show. I'm the founder here at whistlekick and I started this company cause I love traditional martial arts and I wanted to bring stuff, content, video, audio, products, to the other traditional martial artists. And honestly, everything we make is stuff that I wanted to see, stuff I wanted to use, I wanted to hear. That's kind of the root of this show. If you want to check out our episodes, you can find them at whistlekickmartialartsradio.com. We've got a ton of good stuff over there with show notes transcripts, video, photo, links, just a lot of great stuff to help give you more context for our guest or if you're listening to a topic episode which we do on Thursdays - usually a profile of a style or person that maybe has passed away - you can find all kinds of great context, you know. We bring a lot of good stuff in there just to help you understand because the martial arts is deep. There's a lot going on there because we're talking about people and people are deep.

Let's talk about today's person, today's guest, Sifu Scott Graner. I've known Sifu Graner, I honestly don't know how long I've known him. He doesn't live too far away. He runs a martial arts school. This is Vermont and let's face it, martial arts is already a pretty tight-knit community. Martial arts in Vermont, everybody knows everybody 'cause even outside of martial arts everybody knows everybody. But I've always liked this man. I don't know him that well. I've been fortunate enough to get to know him a little bit better over the past few years; to train with him. And recently, he welcomed me into his home so we



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could sit down and chat and that's the conversation that you're about to hear. We talked about a lot of different stuff from his origins in the arts to honestly, my favorite subject, what makes him tick. So let's hang back and you can listen to my conversation with Sifu Scott Graner.

Sifu Graner, welcome to whistlekick Martial Arts Radio.

Scott Graner:

Thank you so much. It's an honor being here.

Jeremy Lesniak:

This is cool. We started talking about this, what, couple of years ago?

Scott Graner:

Yeah.

Jeremy Lesniak:

[02:46](#) it just hasn't happened which is funny 'cause you live 45 minutes away...

Scott Graner:

I know.

Jeremy Lesniak:

... from my house. Like you're not far away at all and I don't know. I think that's always the way. I have friends that... I moved to Vermont after college and they stuck around. They, you know, like I'm thinking one in particular. He went to St. Mikes and I think in the two years I was here, he's one of my bestfriends from high school, I think we saw each other twice. And he moved back to Maine and now I see him like 4-5 times a year? Makes no sense.

Scott Graner:

Yeah. I know what you mean. I know what you mean. Sometimes the closer you are, the less you see people. I don't know how that -

Jeremy Lesniak:



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It's almost like you take it for granted like oh, they're just over there, you know? I can see them tomorrow.

Scott Graner:

Then it gets to the next day then the next day.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Doesn't make any sense.

Scott Graner:

Yeah.

Jeremy Lesniak:

But we're here now.

Scott Graner:

Yeah.

Jeremy Lesniak:

I'm excited and you know, I've got to be honest. I know a little bit about your lineage. I don't know a lot about how you got started or anything. I think you moved here from somewhere else, I think I heard that somewhere along the way so let's just roll back and talk about how you got started in martial arts.

Scott Graner:

Yeah. So I started when I was 5 and I remember that my bestfriend at the time started at a Karate school - technically it was a Kempo school but you know, all the signs back in that time, everything said Karate 'cause Karate Kid.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Right.

Scott Graner:



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And so we got to... I was 5 and we're at this movie store. So right [04:26](#) is in like a plaza so there's like next is VHS, old rental movie store. And there's this Karate place next door and my bestfriend just started there. He just turned five. And I was like, that was the cut-off. You had to be five in order to start. And so for my birthday, that was kind of, oh yeah, I'm gonna start Karate. My dad saw the introductory prices like 20 bucks for the month and he was like oh this is gonna be so simple, he's not gonna want to do this at all. And that was the beginning of a journey and he thought it was gonna be 20 easy dollars that turned into almost 28 years of turning.

Jeremy Lesniak:

A lot more, yeah.

Scott Graner:

So that was my beginning. And yeah, my friends stuck with it for a couple of years and I just kept going, just kept training; fell in love with it and became my passion, really.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Why did you want to do it? So you know, you have kids.

Scott Graner:

Yeah.

Jeremy Lesniak:

And I've spent enough time with young kids. At five, you don't really know what you want.

Scott Graner:

I was thinking it was one of those like oh this is like the movies and Ninja Turtle was just big at the time, too. So it was like oh I get to, you know... And they had like swords in the window and all that kind. So there was just the whole line.

Jeremy Lesniak:

I'm gonna be Leonardo.

Scott Graner:



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Yeah, I'm gonna be Leonardo; I love Leonardo, yeah. [05:43](#) so cool 'cause my son's like way into Ninja Turtles right now.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Nice.

Scott Graner:

So it's kind of like a full circle which is neat.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Ninja Turtles are great.

Scott Graner:

Yeah. And I think there's just the whole idea that my friend was doing it, I needed to do it, too. And it was what I was seeing in like the movies and all that kind of stuff. And I think they had that idea of play, almost. My dad was a music teacher and he taught in high school so I was always watching his performances and shows, and basically grew up around that kind of stuff. So there's almost this like sense of like ceremony and I don't want to say show but like no, you put on the gear and in your training, and you're all doing this ritual that goes back in time and that appealed to me, I think. I think that's kind of where [06:32](#) Though the seed was planted.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Makes sense.

Scott Graner:

Yeah.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Makes sense. I you know, I can certainly see the correlation in that, the presentation of it certainly between music and martial arts. And you know, we've had a number of people on who have confessed to having some musical ability or enjoyment of being in front of a crowd in that way, as well.

Scott Graner:



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Yeah.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Are you musical yourself?

Scott Graner:

Yeah. It was one of the kind of choices I had. It was do I pursue music more or do I pursue the martial arts more? And pursuing the martial arts was kind of my dream and that kind of took over. I did music throughout high school, everybody thought I was just gonna go into some kind of music-related field.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Interesting.

Scott Graner:

But instead, you know, this is kind of where my heart was. I enjoyed music, I wasn't a great musician. Everything was... I could read music, I was the number two vocalist in the state of Connecticut for [07:38](#) and like couple of years and that was really cool. I was decent; I'll just say I was decent at it but a lot of it was through ear. A lot of it was through hearing and I didn't practice it. I didn't... It just came naturally. Whereas martial arts, I practiced. It wasn't something I was gifted with; I wasn't gifted physically with it. I worked at it. And that's -

Jeremy Lesniak:

That's the opposite of what you would think would happen.

Scott Graner:

Yeah.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Most people that are really good at something, that's the thing that they're gonna go after not the thing that they don't have a gift for.

Scott Graner:

Oh, yeah. For the most part -



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Jeremy Lesniak:

Were you aware of that?

Scott Graner:

Yeah, I was completely aware. Like when I go to like these all-state music festivals we do this kind of almost like a training. You'd be there from the morning till night time practicing, practicing, practicing, working as a group singing, doing everything. I also played musical instruments as well but that didn't excite me. What excited me in the music realm is more of the creativity, you know? How the music is created and developing your own music, that excited me. So I was in a rock band in high school, that kind of stuff. And that excited me more and performing it was exciting but sitting there and really kind of diving into a practice of it, that made it dry for me. And I didn't like the feeling of music being dry. And because I loved creating music, I don't like the idea of killing that passion with killing the practice, so to speak.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Sure.

Scott Graner:

I didn't want it to become my job, if that makes sense.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah. Yeah, absolutely.

Scott Graner:

Whereas martial arts was you know, from that early age of five, I was practicing and dedicating a lot of time to it. And my instructors would often call me a dojo rat. I'd be there all the time.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah, it's definitely a term you would kick around on the show. People know that phrase.

Scott Graner:

It's one of those things where I think the work ethic was already in place so continuing that and wanting to pursue that as work was just natural. It was how I developed it.



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Jeremy Lesniak:

How does the resistance to the structure of music, how does the push back on that get flipped into, let's face it traditional martial arts is about as rigid a pursuit as you get.

Scott Graner:

Yeah. I was lucky also that for the most part, my martial arts school, yeah they had the tradition behind it, they had some of the ceremony behind it, but it wasn't like complete militaristic. There's a little bit more free flow and conversation between the instructors and the students. So that was nice that I was in that kind of martial arts environment; and it allowed for a little bit creativity. And I see a strong parallel between the music and the martial arts as far as the idea of feeling. I find that if you work on your martial arts, you're just doing movements; you're just doing kicks and punches, and maybe somebody's telling you something or telling you how to do it, that's one thing. And that's okay; that's great. But then you want to be able to feel it. You want to be able to express the underlying idea or intent behind what you're doing. And so, you know, feeling and expression in music and feeling and expression in your techniques, your forms, your katas, whatever it is that you're doing, I can see that correlation.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Absolutely.

Scott Graner:

Yeah.

Jeremy Lesniak:

I can see that as well. Is that something... This is subjective, personally I'm really interested in so I'm curious with your thoughts, is that expression, is that something that you can foster? Because of course, you have a school, you have students, you have quite a few students and a lot of kids - kids that are, I think more people would agree, a little more moldable if you can reach them in the right way than adults. Is that ability to express? Is that something that you can kind of pull the string on them or is it like your musical ability? Is it just innate and you accept it for what it is?

Scott Graner:

No, I think you can pull the strings on it. You know, it's kind of like when an instructor says something over and over and over again, and that's... you know, the student might not get it at that point. But then all of a sudden, a year later, two years later, five years later, when that light bulb goes off and it clicks,



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and you're like why didn't I think of that before? And it's like, it's been said how many times before that. That's totally the way I feel about that expression in your art form. It's not gonna be overnight. All white belts are never gonna be able to do a kata with the expression of somebody who's been there and has more experience. It's... That's through the training; that's through the practice, through the development of the person. But I think also seeing it if... I've had instructors before that you've never seen them do their kata, you've never seen them do their techniques. You've never seen them spar. And they just exist in kind of you know, they'll lead in front of the class. And you know, that's okay. You can get a lot out of that but there's an inspiration that happens when you see your instructor do something at a certain level which is kind of neat.

Jeremy Lesniak:

And is there any other hobby, pursuit, academic whatever, where we accept that? We just gladly accept this person, says they know what they're doing and never demonstrates their ability, but we say okay and we... we're gonna do what they tell us.

Scott Graner:

Maybe in politics but that's about it. But we're not getting in there.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Oh. Oh, we're not going there. Man, we can totally have like a sideline show because we flirt with that subject. Because there is a political element in martial arts, isn't there? The idea that... Well just watch all the people that break way from other people and people getting hurt and offended and... I was sharing an anecdote with you prior to us recording about something that's not quite political but you're a martial artist that should know better on something getting really hurt and offended and walking away.

Scott Graner:

Yeah. It's one of those things where a lot of times we put our ego way too far in front of us and... I think really the heart of martial arts is, I mean if you have a big ego and you're getting punched all the time while you're sparring, you're going to have a problem when you're sparring. Because hey, that tends to escalate and turn into bad sparring practice and a lot of times those people will get ticked off. Either just don't train at that level, you see him leave, you see him not do it. But you have to keep your ego in check a little bit.

Jeremy Lesniak:

How do you do that?



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Scott Graner:

How do I do that?

Jeremy Lesniak:

And let me preface why I asked that question. You've been training virtually your whole life. You run a successful school. You know, we're sitting at your home, it's a beautiful home. You clearly achieved some success in that way. You know, I've watched some of your students, they're skilled. They're skilled as a teacher. And you've accomplished these things at a younger age than most. Your rank versus your age would seem out of place to a lot of people but I've also, I've worked with you and I've seen your students and I know that it is not, you know... And I know your Kempo instructor and I know that he doesn't just like throw belts around, you know, when you throw money around, right? So I see that. So I think you're a good person to speak in this subject. Because you very well could have ego problems. Which is we've had enough conversation that if you do, you do a great job at hiding it. Which I think in and of itself would show that you don't have an ego problem, right? Even if you did have some, oh I'm working on this, I'm not going to express it - that's almost the same thing.

Scott Graner:

You know, I look at the martial arts training, at least the way that I've... We didn't get into anything about like who I feel my teachers are; I've had a lot of teachers. When I first started, I start at five, I think my school went through like several, 3 or 4 teachers, within the first year.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Wow.

Scott Graner:

It was one of those things where I had a great - probably teacher that's there for about a year, maybe two years - and he was great. Then also went through this turmoil in the school 'cause he left to go do something else. And we ended up with like 5, 4 or 5, teachers in one very short amount of time.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Sounds like politics - political.

Scott Graner:



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Yeah. There was politics. And finally, when the dust settled, basically the person who took control of the school at that point was the person, his name was Master [17:53](#) and he kind of took the helm of the school at that point. And that was when all of a sudden things changed for me as far as I was really into the martial arts. I did well in the school but things changed tremendously for me as a martial artist when he took kind of a hold in school. And he had a lot more, even though we were doing Kempo, he had a lot of Tai Chi background as well. So when he came into the school, I was already maybe, I think it's either like in our school goes green and then brown, so I was either a green belt or a brown belt at that time. So I was already getting closer to black belt and within that year, I did some competing from purple belt to that point. I never have won anything at any tournament up to that point. And then, with his training, with his tutelage, we were able to really refine my skill. After the, I think it's the first tournament that I went to with him as my instructor, I got like 1st place in the tournament. And he saw the potential that I had.

Jeremy Lesniak:

And he knew how to reach you.

Scott Graner:

And he knew how to reach me and he fostered that. And again, it came back to also when I was saying that being able to demonstrate something. I learned really well by seeing how it's supposed to look and I was getting inspired by those that do a really awesome job at expressing themselves and expressing the art as it's supposed to be done. That it inspires me. So when I see that, that's how I want to be and it's kind of if I copy that. It's a good way to get there initially. And then, of course later on, you have to kinda develop yourself and your own style within it but it allows you to see where it could go. And he fostered a lot of ideas because of his Tai Chi background. Breathing, we incorporated Chi Gong into class, I mean this is as a kid. I'm doing Chi Gong poses and breathing exercises and meditative exercises and I think if it wasn't for that component that was in my training, or maybe just martial arts training in general, I would have been a totally different person. I know my initial reaction to getting upset, heated under the collar is normally not a good reaction. I know my dad always jokes that the Graner side of the family tends to be quite explosive with things like that. And you know, he has some interesting stories about being a kid and you know, his parents with very explosive personalities but it's one of those things where when I feel that, I have some training to go back on. If I'm feeling heated under the collar, I can kinda manage that a little bit and use some of the techniques that I've learned along the way. I think I wouldn't be as even keel without my training.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Now that's a subject that, you know, I gotta say you're gonna be episode 300 and whatever and I don't know that we've covered the subject of children and... I know a lot of folks struggle with using this term but I've yet to come up with a better one, you know, softer arts or internal arts. And certainly here's an



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example, you're saying that only was it okay but you think it was pretty important as you grew as a person as a martial artist.

Scott Graner:

I think it was, yeah.

Jeremy Lesniak:

I've done a small amount of Tai Chi, of Chi Gong, mostly at seminars so it's, you know, presented in a very condensed form. You know, single outcome, you know, maybe you're going over a short form for 45 minutes, you know; not a lot of stuff. Was it presented kind of in that same way that adults would learn? Or was it different?

Scott Graner:

And that's part of the... I've always had this issue with some of my own practices that when I learn things, I learn it in an adult atmosphere. At that point, I was... I was on the cusp of when that big martial arts bubble of kids was happening. So behind me, was this giant bubble of kids and everything became very kid-friendly, old style, you know, and that became the push. Ahead of me were - this was like when I was 8,9, 10 - ahead of me were these teenagers that were 16, 17, 18 and then some adults. And they all grew up basically Karate Kid, pre-Karate Kid - much more traditional, much harder training. I was square in the middle of that. So instead of me being bumped down, I was in the bumped up and was working with these older, much more mature teenagers and adults. And so I was experiencing kind of that level of what the class was even though I was much younger. To get my black belt at the time, I had to work at an adult level as expected. Even though I got my black belt fairly young and I know most people are gonna be listening to this and going ooh, you know

Jeremy Lesniak:

We're all doing the math, you know.

Scott Graner:

Like an 11-year old black belt, that's kinda young. Yes, but I was required to do things with adults and in an adult level. I still remember his name and it wasn't like we were friends, he was just a great training partner; he was a senior in high school. And as I was a brown belt and I was getting closer and getting ready for my black belt, so he was like a good foot and a half taller than me, bigger dude at the time. And he wouldn't make the techniques easy for me to do. If I was to do a sweep or a takedown, he would put some resistance behind it so that I would have to really actually apply on it. And that was kind of like the lesson was - I'm not gonna let you just take me down. It's I'm going to actually make you have to do



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this at a level that you should be to be able to do a black belt. It was... There was an expectation that I had to be able to do what everybody else was doing at an adult level. And I'm thankful for that because I think that's what a black belt should be. I don't think there should be a... you know, this is what the adults are doing and this is what the kids are doing but they still equal the same belt.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Right.

Scott Graner:

If that makes sense.

Jeremy Lesniak:

It does. It does and certainly the notion of adult versus junior black belts is a hotly debated topic and probably one of the hottest - definitely top three - in my experience when you get martial artists together.

Scott Graner:

Yeah.

Jeremy Lesniak:

But I think that you kinda hit the nail on the head there. The idea that if you are gonna have a junior black belt, it is seen as different. I mean I've met you know, 13 year olds with 8 stripes on their belt but everybody knows, this is a junior black belt. I mean, 8th degree junior black belt which is still subordinate to a 1st degree adult black belt. And the moment that I am of whatever that age standard is, I will retest under the new standards. And you know, some people might say why bother, why have that. I would counter that the majority of those people have never run a school and the economics of those decision have never come into play.

Scott Graner:

I totally understand that. And this is... You know, as a school owner I always have to kind of weigh and balance things between... Every school has its own philosophy and its own way of doing things. Whether it's from being a strict, very structured militaristic style to kind of meeting in your backyard, you know. There's such a wide range of what martial arts school could be and you have to find what fits you and what's right for you. For us, I kind of hold to what I grew up with. And so all of our students that are going for black belt, whether they are... We haven't had anybody that's not a you know, young teen, but



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anybody who's a young teen or that's kind of the youngest we've had, has to do still what the adults do. And I've actually had the opposite. When people ask like will they have to be like 16 or they have to be 18 to get the black belt? I've had a 13, 14 year old who can outperform my 30 and 40 year olds.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Sure.

Scott Graner:

No doubt. And that blows my mind sometimes but it also is one of those things like I don't think age is the determining factor. It's really the skill of the person. I also have a 14 year-olds who can bench-press 200 pounds. I mean... Yeah. He's a beast. So it's one of those things like I don't think that the age is the deciding factor. You'll know when somebody's a black belt. You know.

Jeremy Lesniak:

I agree. I agree and that was something that, you know... I think one of the reasons that we get along that I've always enjoyed in our conversations as infrequent as they've been is that I think our upbringings were fairly similar. I remember my original instructors, you know, we would have conversations about rank. And they always said, you know, we will promote slowly. We'll always promote slowly. No one will ever question your rank because we hold a very high standard. But our testing as you got further along, with the exception of black belt, became less structured. For example, you know, this was a traditional Karate school and third degree is a brown belt. There was no test to move from third to second, second to first. It was a designation. And we would ask about that, same thing for black belt - you would test for your [28:42](#) on but then second on up was a designation. How can we do that? Because you know. And you might not always understand that when you're early on in martial arts but I mean you attend events and tournaments and you look around and you can tell, that person was promoted fast, that person is due for promotion now, you know. Right? Like you can see. 'Cause it's not just in their technique; it's in their conduct. It's the way they operate in the world. I've had people guess that I'm a martial artist just because of the way I conduct myself with them. Especially if they are also a martial artist.

Scott Graner:

Oh, yeah. And I've had it also where, you know, I can sometimes tell which parents have had martial arts experience previous to their kids signing up or something with us just by our interactions.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah.



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Scott Graner:

It's something you carry with you - how you conduct yourself, how you carry that and approach your life sometimes, a lot of times, would translate well, I think, to the majority of people who have studied martial arts. But yeah, I mean I've gone through... well I don't think we've discussed this. I was in a Kempo school with Master VanSchelt for many years. All the way through high school, I was there, but he left after like 4 or 5 years.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Okay. So you had to transition instructors again.

Scott Graner:

Again. Which uh...

Jeremy Lesniak:

It's hard.

Scott Graner:

That is so hard. It's so hard.

Jeremy Lesniak:

And especially on a kid. It sounds like you really looked up to him, you know.

Scott Graner:

Oh, yeah.

Jeremy Lesniak:

You know, a third parent in a sense.

Scott Graner:

Yeah, exactly. And we connected several times after that but he went on to really just continue pursuing the internal arts and making that his primary objective, and shared that both in the medical field and in public field, as well. But we were building a house in Vermont and this is when I was in sixth grade so I



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don't remember what age that is up top my head but it's like twelve or something like that. So we're building a house in Vermont and you know, what would I do without doing martial arts for 2 or 3 months while we were up in Vermont for the whole summer? My parents were both teachers so they had the summers off. We went up to Vermont and we're gonna be building this place. We decided that we needed to do something about my martial arts training. So it just happened that there's going to be a seminar with my current instructor who is Master VanSchelt at the time and this sparring seminar at the same time, he was doing forms and kata, and then another seminar was on sparring [31:45](#) And so just by happenstance it was that I met Master LaPan at the seminar. And he was on the same style, same system as us and it was okay, he's, what, 40 minutes away from where we're building at the time. And we're gonna now travel multiple times a week in two class all summer long with Master LaPan. And that, you know, Freddie LaPan became my mentor who I now, you know, I see him weekly to this day.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Cool.

Scott Graner:

And it's interesting that, you know, I don't often go out and like oh I need to go training with this person then I need to go train with this person then I need to train with this person; it kind of just happens naturally. And oh, this opportunity presents itself so I go that way if I choose to.

Jeremy Lesniak:

When the student is ready.

Scott Graner:

Yeah, exactly.

Jeremy Lesniak:

It does seem to line up.

Scott Graner:

It really does and I've just been so lucky to have some great instructors in the process. And then at the same time, when Master VanSchelt ended up leaving our school, so that was kind of another transition moment. What do I do? And at the exact same time, Master Hu Jianqiang moved to Connecticut where I was, about half an hour away. And it was in the papers that this Chinese Wushu Master was moving to, you know, just moved to the area and he was in Kung Fu magazine, huge page articles about him.



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Jeremy Lesniak:

That's still kind of the earlier days of Wushu in the U.S.

Scott Graner:

Yeah, it was like... This is like, I think, 1999 by the time this happened.

Jeremy Lesniak:

And especially in the East Coast.

Scott Graner:

So I was already a black belt in Kempo at that point and competing, doing like the [33:39](#) stuff and the [33:42](#) term, it's a [33:43](#) and stuff like that. Things started getting... I know that John Stork was on and I trained... You know, John and I were buddies, we trained together at Master LaPan's studio. And we just worked together so great. [34:04](#) was another one who was on the extreme team and we all competed together. It was a good time; good bonding, you know. I look back at those moments and it's great when you have such a great team. You can bond together and it becomes more than just training in martial arts. It's kind of that's your friend core, you know.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Which as a teenager, as a higher rank teenager, I mean there's nothing more I think that you can do to keep teams in martial arts than building that core, building that nucleus.

Scott Graner:

Exactly, yeah.

Jeremy Lesniak:

To pull them back in as they start to drift out because your friends are there.

Scott Graner:

And I think that's the cool part, you know. Because I start so early. I get the early perspective. I understand being a kid that's 5, 6, 7 in the martial arts. I've been there but I also understand the frustrations and draws that sometimes, you know, making often not do the martial arts. I understand that. But then I also went to whole teenage thing and between that group of the extreme team with



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under Freddie LaPan and... Then I started Wushu and I eventually got onto their team, their competition team. And that crew, that group, was really kind of close knit - great family of people. And that allowed me to do so many different opportunities through them which is fantastic. But yeah, I met Master Hu and it's like just when you think you know something, 'cause I was competing with bo staff; bo staff is my thing. And just when you think you know something, go try something just slightly different, right? Go try something slightly different and see how much you know of that. 'Cause it completely changes your understand, you know. I look at the martial arts... Master VanSchelt used to talk about tree. You have your trunk of your tree, that's your main style. And I consider myself a Kempo martial artist - that's what I do. Everything else is branches off of that. Now you might have small little twigs but you might have, you know, thicker branches that are there. And those branches are what else you do and they give you insight to your Kempo or to your martial art, your core. So I look at like my studying of Wushu, my studying of Tai Chi as a lens to look at my Kempo through. It changes how I look at it, if that makes sense.

Jeremy Lesniak:

It does. I particularly like that analogy. I've never heard that analogy before but as I'm kind of playing it out if I imagine a tree and you know, you think about any tree. Any tree that's been around for a while and you get these little branches that come off in these tiny places and they don't need to be there. The tree won't die without them. But even if it's a tiny amount, that tree is healthier because of the nutrition, the light, that's coming in through those leaves.

Scott Graner:

Yeah, yeah. This is... It's one of those things where I'm totally okay with people learning different martial arts but you need your base. If you don't have a base, you have no reference point, you know. If I do a year of Taekwondo and then a year of Kempo, a year of Kung Fu, a year of Kickboxing, yeah it's cool; you're gonna learn a lot. But you don't necessarily have a base yet to view it through.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah. You'd be better off in most cases doing three years of one and a year of another because that three years is gonna give you enough that you can start to gain some perspective and start to understand - here's what I like, here's what I don't like and then switch gear. And I'm sure you're able to switch gears between Wushu and Kempo because you have enough time working each. I can switch gears from, you know, from Shotokan to kickboxing to Taekwondo to Kempo to whatever because I've had the time. I've had a lot of time in on these other things and I can also put them all together.

Scott Graner:

Yeah.



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Jeremy Lesniak:

I can, you know, smash them together to Jeremy Fu and teach you what seems to work well for me that I pulled from all of those. But if you came to me and said teach me [39:09](#) I could push all that aside.

Scott Graner:

Yeah and I think that's great. I love being able to see the different styles, understand the differences. One of the things that I, and this is just my own belief and my own thought -

Jeremy Lesniak:

This whole episode is your beliefs and your thoughts.

Scott Graner:

That's right. Anybody can take this anyway they want to take it. I love Bruce Lee's quote which is about... it's like a finger pointing at the moon or pointing a way to the moon. If you stare at the finger, you'll miss all that's heavenly glory. I even have that on my website. I like that so much I put that on my website and I know that that's not really just a Bruce Lee quote. I mean that goes back to, you know, Chan or Zen Buddhism and you can just keep pushing that backwards and you know, for those that are in the Chinese martial arts with, you know, if we can go back to the Shaolin Temple, that's basically the histories and origins of Chan and Chan which eventually, you know, became Zen Buddhism. And that whole idea of are we missing the point? You know. Are we so focused on the finger, this style, and doing it this specific way and then this finger over here that's also pointing to the moon is something else, another style, and we just have all these fingers pointing at the moon but we're so focused on the finger we're missing the whole point all together. And so when I'm looking at the martial arts, I really look at what's similar? What is the true quotes - I'm using quotes here - the true essence that lies underneath it. And that's kind of what interests me at this point.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah.

Scott Graner:

It's trying to find what's the moon rather than the finger.

Jeremy Lesniak:



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I find it the more time people spend in the martial arts, the more likely they are to come to that kind of mindset, you know. Here you are, I'm doing the math, close to 30 years, right?

Scott Graner:

Yeah, yeah.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Close to 30 years in and because you've trained in different styles with a bunch of different people, you're starting to see hey, this Kempo and this Wushu, I mean you can make arguments that Kempo is more of a Chinese art than a Japanese art. I mean there's a whole discussion we can have on that.

Scott Graner:

We can go and tackle.

Jeremy Lesniak:

But I think anybody would agree that they're pretty different.

Scott Graner:

Yeah

Jeremy Lesniak:

But yet there's still enough overlap that you start to look and go wait a second, there's a lot of similarities here. And then you start to learn other things, you know, maybe you go learn Kyokushin, you know, brutal, hard, Japanese styles and say wait a second, there's some similarities in there, too. And the best analogy I've heard on the subject, and I've heard multiple people share this with me, the idea that martial arts is a mountain. And you start at the bottom and we can be on the opposite sides of the mountain and really far away but the further we get, the closer we get.

Scott Graner:

Yeah, yeah. Totally. I mean you look at, and this comes back to like the inspiration part, you look at great martial artists that are, you know, getting closer to the top of the mountain as you would say. They have so many more similarities than they do differences. I feel -

Jeremy Lesniak:



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I agree.

Scott Graner:

- yes, our strategies may be slightly different or there are styles that emphasize one thing more than other, yes of course there are. Because we're all different. How I approach music might be totally different than how you like approach music. That's okay. But there's... for music, does it give you a certain feeling? Does it give you a response? For martial arts, is it giving you the certain response that you're looking for? And we can only move in so many ways as human beings, you know?

Jeremy Lesniak:

And only so many of those makes sense in under the lens of combat.

Scott Graner:

Exactly. So we're all gonna get to that same spot but the worst part is if you only are in your one viewpoint the entire time and you stop at the base of the mountain or halfway up the mountain. Then you won't get there. So that's the whole thing of like continuing the journey; it's a tall journey. We just have to keep continuing it.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Awesome. Yeah, totally. If you could train with someone you haven't, anybody and anywhere in the world, any style, anywhere in time, you know, let's say we invent a time machine and you can go back, who would you want to train with?

Scott Graner:

There's so many great martial artists that I... I mean just in general, I love pulling ideas and hearing how somebody explains. Like I'm saying earlier about the bulb alsen going off, that "aha" moment, that thing that you might be doing and your instructor's been saying all the time and you hear it slightly from somebody else just a little bit differently, all suddenly goes click and you're able to now perform it. And you go oh, wow that makes sense now. I understand it. And it's just because it's said slightly differently or maybe it was presented slightly differently and that's great. That's gonna enhance your martial arts. As you said, Jeremy Fu. It's gonna answer you. So I love training. So training with anybody would be great but as far as historically, Sun Lutang who is the founder of Sun Style Tai Chi. So often times we talk about, you know, five major, again there's hundreds of styles of Tai Chi, but five major branches of Tai Chi and Sun Style is one of those five.

Jeremy Lesniak:



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Why him?

Scott Graner:

What about him?

Jeremy Lesniak:

Why him?

Scott Graner:

Why him? Because not only was he just somebody who is good at his one style. He was also somebody who was really good in a bunch of styles before he even studies Tai Chi. So he was a Xing Yi and Ba Gua well before he was a Tai Chi master. He developed Sun Style Tai Chi, I think and don't quote me on this as far as exact times but from what I understand is, in his late 50s by the time he started really working on Tai Chi. And he's kind of one of the first people to pull the idea of internal martial arts, of Xing Yi, Ba Gua in Tai Chi have these similarities to them. And I think it would be interesting to understand his perspective. The idea that his, from I've heard he found that his Tai Chi was his crowning achievement because it kind of combines elements of his other martial arts into the Tai Chi, and kind of where he came from, how he came about that. What are the thought process? That's what I'd like to understand a little bit more. 'Cause you know, I studied some styles of Tai Chi but I'd want to understand how he got there and the ideas. Because this is like early 1900s.

Jeremy Lesniak:

So not that long ago.

Scott Graner:

Not that long ago. And a lot of times in China, this is considered the Golden Age of martial arts for a movie perspective, have you ever seen, is it Fearless?

Jeremy Lesniak:

With Jet Li?

Scott Graner:

With Jet Li?



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Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah.

Scott Graner:

Right. Where there's like, you know, bunch of different styles of Kung Fu and they're all like competing on the like a stage, right? And they can be knocked off and all that kind of stuff. That's the era. And you had these influences, outside influences, from the West, from Japan, they were starting to change culture a little bit and so they wanted to kind of hold onto their culture and their ideas. He was instrumental in also starting some of the sports academies, some of the martial arts academies where he was pulling masters from various styles to gather into one location.

Jeremy Lesniak:

And I would assume around that time, that wasn't common maybe even unheard of.

Scott Graner:

Yeah. And he was also one of the first to do a lot of writing and publishing of his stuff which again, controversial at the time.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah.

Scott Graner:

You know, kind of almost like, you know...

Jeremy Lesniak:

How dare you share these -

Scott Graner:

How dare you share these?

Jeremy Lesniak:

- anyone who can read.



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Scott Graner:

Yeah. I mean that was like the internet of today. So that, I would like to see his thought process 'cause he also was... you know, the philosophies, the Chinese philosophies of Taoism, of the [48:47](#) and all that kind of stuff. It really are all tied very tightly. And being just a fly on the wall even on his discussions with other martial arts masters must have been fun to listen to.

Jeremy Lesniak:

I find it fascinating how plenty of people start in let's call them hard styles or external styles and they transition into internal or softer. And I've never met, and I'm sure there are, but I've never met anyone who did the opposite. I've never met anyone who did 15 years of Tai Chi and said you know what, I'm gonna go learn Taekwondo.

Scott Graner:

Well, I think that's just because we're all getting older. And we're not all gonna be doing a jump spin hook kick.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Sure.

Scott Graner:

Turning kick to the side of the head when we're 70 years old. Man, I wish I could be doing it. Jump spin kick when I'm 70 years old, I hope so. That would be fun.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Maybe you will.

Scott Graner:

Maybe I will. But yeah, I would say it allows you to practice and continue your practice even though you might not be in the fastest shape of your life or the fittest shape of your life. But it allows you to get your benefits from your martial arts training. And I personally just, you know, Tai Chi Chuan is Grand Ultimate Fist, that's what it's referred to. And the whole thing is that it's centered around principles. It's not like oh I'm learning how to do just one specific punch or one specific move. It's how your whole body is working together and it has to stay within the principles of Yin and Yang. So it's kind of you know, every single move in a Tai Chi form has those components. When you work with your partner and you're doing



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push hands, it has those components to it. It never loses it. And if you lose it, you're not doing Tai Chi anymore.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Makes sense.

Scott Graner:

So you know, I like things that also work on principles so that whole idea of having principle or concept-driven martial arts really is what I'm into at this point. Every part of my life I've had different things I'm into and that's what I love about the martial arts. If you're not feeling it one day or you're getting bored for some reason, it means you're not looking hard enough, you're not digging deep enough. If you look harder or deeper or even simply just I'm gonna change and work on weapons, that can form your other training, right? And it just gives you again, a different lens or a different perspective to see it through. So getting bored with my training, I tend not to. I tend to just kinda shift a little bit and then that inspires me again to train harder, to train again more and it reflects when it influences my core.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Makes sense.

Scott Graner:

Yeah. But besides Sun Lutang there's some contemporary people that, you know, I like for certain things. I don't do too much of the Japanese sword arts. You know, I've done a little bit. I have a katana form that I play with once in a while that I've learned but Sensei Kuroda of Japan just... Again, when you see intent and you can see how a person moves with grace and fluidity and flow, that's inspiring. And that's not even like any style that I'm closely related to but I see it there.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah.

Scott Graner:

That would be a fun, fun conversation. As far as, you know... I'd like my martial art to also be practical. I know you said you did competitions, right? Did you get to a point in like let's call it a late 90s, early 2000s, when all of a sudden people would go from let's say they're doing like a common routine and they'd do their finishing strike then they'd walk over to the corner like literally walk to the corner, set it up, do a front hand spring into backflip or a back flash kick and then land, basically reposition



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themselves in the middle of the ring again, start doing a common form, reposition to the corner, do another gymnastic set.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah. Yeah. I've just got enough years on you that I stepped out just before that happened and I've seen it. And it is really an interesting thing. It is a very big dichotomy between the ability to say this form has, in entirety, based around practical application. And this form, maybe has some practical application, but is also heavily modified and without excuse for presentation.

Scott Graner:

And I'm okay with the whole presentation thing. It's almost like if you divide your personality, right? If you start having a conversation and then all of a sudden your personality changes completely halfway through and it changes again, it's kind of disruptive, right? When you have a form and you're doing the martial arts component but then also you break to do just some tricks, then you go back to the form then you break to do tricks that kind of lost me at that point. That's when I started doing more of the Wushu tournaments and at that point, the Wushu tournaments still had Kung Fu. They still had the actual technique, you know, are still there. Was there a butterfly kick or a butterfly twist kick once in a while pope in? Yeah but it's still martial arts driven.

Jeremy Lesniak:

And it was within a sequence of other -

Scott Graner:

other thing

Jeremy Lesniak:

- martial arts movements.

Scott Graner:

And I know 'cause I also got back into the NASKA stuff for a couple of years while I was in college. By that point, things had changed. And then it started being where you incorporated your trick into your form and everything became tight sequences combined all together. That makes sense, right? Cause that has flow, that has purpose behind it even if you're throwing some crazy trick. It hurts the same time. And then at that exact same moment, the Wushu tournament started doing the exact same thing.



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Jeremy Lesniak:

Interesting.

Scott Graner:

Yeah. So in like 2008-ish, you'd see it where all of a sudden they'd stop their form, reset themselves somewhere else in the corner and do very much like what was happening 10 years earlier in the NASKA tournaments.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Weird.

Scott Graner:

It was very strange. And it all became very points driven like you'd see in a gymnastics competition - for floor exercise or for ice skating competitions where if you do a certain trick, you get a certain amount of points, extra. If you mess the trick up a little bit, you get deduction, there's certain required tricks you have to do within your form. And that was all basically trying to get ready for what was hoping that it was gonna be in the 2008 Olympics. But that's when I kind of left the competition and of the Wushu training. Because it just became can you pull off the trick? That was the heavy part compared to... and that's why I like Master Hu even though it was Wushu, it was a very traditional intent behind what he was doing.

Jeremy Lesniak:

It was rooted in [56:57](#)

Scott Graner:

It was rooted, it was Kung Fu. 'Cause he was like, you know, he was in the group of that came over to present Wushu and martial arts to [57:07](#)

Jeremy Lesniak:

Oh, okay.

Scott Graner:



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Yeah, he was in the first group, you know, that presented martial arts to the world, basically, along with... He was in Shaolin Temple movie with Jet Li

Jeremy Lesniak:

Nice

Scott Graner:

And also in several other movies with Jet Li and Sammo Hung and all that kind of stuff. So that was also another added benefit. We got to meet some of these. I've never met Jet Li but I got to meet Sammo Hung

Jeremy Lesniak:

Nice

Scott Graner:

Master^{57:41} very famous for two-handed straight sword. Long beard, he's in some of the old Kung Fu movies and he always had this long either dark black or white beard in the movies and then as he got older, his beautiful white beard when you think of this Taoist on a mountain. That's it, though. But it was kinda neat cause we got to... Gordon Liu another one from like 36 Chambers of Shaolin. So we got to meet and also do some of their training 'cause these guys were martial artists, as well. They weren't actors first, martial artist second. They were martial artists first, actors second, you know? So that kind of, that time of period; didn't have all the CGI.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Sure. Sure.

Scott Graner:

But yeah, it was one of those things I've got some excellent experiences through working with Master Hu and got to go to China several times and train with Zhejiang Wushu Team and you know. I found out a lot about myself.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Like what?



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Scott Graner:

Like I was good at competing, I've done well for myself. I'm not somebody who brags or boasts, that's not me. Talking about myself tends to be harder for me, not my forte normally.

Jeremy Lesniak:

But you objectively performed well, and received awards, I mean, we can leave it at that.

Scott Graner:

Yeah. So I like training. What was hard for me is I learned kind of the limitation that my body would be allowed to take. While we were there, training before the tournament which is about a month of training before the tournament, it was up early. You had training sessions one at 8 o'clock till basically noon, break for lunch. Afternoon training slot for an hour or two, break for dinner and then an evening more learning experience so it was a little bit of a workout but it's still working out, you know, and training. Doing that day in, day out, seven days a week.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Wow. That's a lot.

Scott Graner:

Yeah. I learned about what my body was willing to take. I started not benefiting my body anymore, it started breaking it down rather than having some like rest days built into it.

Jeremy Lesniak:

How old are you at this time?

Scott Graner:

This would be like college and late high school.

Jeremy Lesniak:

So even still early but anybody who might be listening that hasn't dug in may not know that a lot of Chinese athletics start at like age 3.

Scott Graner:



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Oh, yeah. I mean -

Jeremy Lesniak:

You are taken from your parents, your parents are compensated. And you are on this track and that is what you do. So you didn't have that 15 or so years experience building up your body to be able to handle that level of training.

Scott Graner:

Yeah. It was tough training. It was fun training; it was just, I learned that my body does better with - and this is what we have to figure out for yourself, you know - everybody has a schedule or a routine that is better for you. Mine is not everyday, you know, that level of intensity. And we're like stretching at that level, like force stretching. Like you get down in that front split as low as you can multiple times over the day that you know, your muscle doesn't recover. So I went to college for sports and exercise science, basically. That was one of the studies we were working on was, let's say if you're gonna do a performance-based activity, something really... where you have to perform ballistic movements, if you stretch like static stretching before that for an extended amount of time, you're actually gonna reduce your ability to contract and be able to be on your best performance. And so I think some of those over training moments led to not being able to benefit and progress the skills as much as I wanted to in that amount of time. Or as sometimes I have to move breaks in there, really allows my training to feel like I'm gaining to having gains off of it.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Your body grows and adapts in the healing process not in the breaking down process.

Scott Graner:

Exactly. Yeah, yeah. So I learned a lot about myself through that training but it was just an amazing time to be able to train in China at high level, be able to be part of the culture which is just fantastic.

Jeremy Lesniak:

When you look out over the next however long, I won't put a timeframe on it but just the future, your future with the martial arts, what has you excited?

Scott Graner:

What has me excited? I'm excited to keep learning and growing just in anything. And re-examining my martial art and what I'm looking from it, and looking to get from it. I would love to do some additional



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training and going around and just experiencing, you know, other people. Right now, I don't know if you we're on tape or when we're recording this if we caught it but I have a two year-old and a five year-old so a little hard to get away from the house as much as I'd want to get some seminars and all that kind of stuff. But I'd love to be able to get back into that again a little bit more. And then my primary focus is looking at my teaching and try to give my students the best that I can do for them. Whether re-examining how I teach it or what I'm teaching, how I can present it a little bit better, I can dig a little bit deeper for them and do it in maybe a slightly different way. I like playing with things like that. But I really... My goal is my students at this point and trying to help them become the best not just martial artists that they can be but also the best human beings they can be. And that drives me everyday. And then I have a lot of little goals of you know, being able to get some material on videos so that they can a little bit more assisted knowledge - not learning from video but so they can reference it.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Supplement.

Scott Graner:

Yeah, to supplement what they're doing. And we do a performance by yearly show which is something, again, from you know, growing up in a performance... you know, my dad being a music teacher and theater director. That kind of... I like martial arts in that scene more so than in competition. Even though I did a whole bunch of competition, I like that idea of showing and demonstrating the martial arts and for our students having a place where they can present something and be supported. Everybody there is going to love it no matter what happens So they're gonna have that support no matter what but they're still training to do their best. It's the same training as competition but no matter what, you're not gonna have, oh I failed.

Jeremy Lesniak:

It's the best of both.

Scott Graner:

It's the best of both. You know, some people and me, I'm one of those people, not doing well in the competition makes you want to drive harder. Other people, it breaks them. And that can be tough but it's just a different way of presenting it. And that's one of the things we do in our school which I find fun.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Cool.



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Scott Graner:

Yeah. And just connecting with other martial artists. That's where I'm at.

Jeremy Lesniak:

I can certainly empathize that desire. I mean let's turn it into a job. It's fun. I get to call this work, right?

Scott Graner:

That's right.

Jeremy Lesniak:

That's pretty awesome. If people want to look you up online, find your school, social media, you know, anything like that, where should we send them?

Scott Graner:

mountmansfieldmartialarts.com is our website. You can pretty much contact us anyway through that. Our phone number's on there, email's on there. That would probably be the easiest.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Cool. And of course, if people are listening and driving in the car or something, we'll link that. If people are new to the show, it's whistlekickmartialartsradio.com, that might be easier to find. Although mountmansfieldmartialarts.com is also pretty darn easy to remember.

Scott Graner:

It's really pretty easy. Well if you're looking for [1:07:04](#) it's pretty easy to remember.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah, no hyphens or anything like that. Awesome. Thanks for doing this and just one last thing as we head out the door with it, parting advice for the people listening.

Scott Graner:

Alright. I always talk to my students when they're getting ready for black belt. I like to see that they become thinking martial artists; that they're not just puppets. So if you can think about what you're



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doing, why you're doing it, how you're doing it, how you can improve it, what concepts, what ways you're doing something can enhance your practice, that's gonna enhance your training. And it will be more than just practicing kicks and punches. And hopefully, if you're applying that to your martial arts, it's also applying to your life in general. And allowing you to become a better person because - I think you've said it before - most martial artists are good people.

Jeremy Lesniak:

I like to think so.

Scott Graner:

I hope so. Thank you very much, Jeremy. This has been great.

Jeremy Lesniak:

One of the coolest things about this show is that I get to go to people that I know or maybe want to know better and say hey, will you sit down and talk with me? Well it makes for good content but it also means I get to know more about who they are which enhance my friendships with them, which makes me more excited to train with them or just really interact with them in any way - whether be it martial arts or not. And this was one of those examples where I got to know a friend of mine even better. So Sifu Graner, thank you so much for your openness, for your time coming on the show. Hope to see you soon.

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