



Episode 64 – Hanshi Richard Bernard | [whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com](http://whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com)

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

What's up everybody? It's episode 64 of whistlekick Martial Arts Radio, the only place to hear the best stories from the best martial artists like today's guest, Hanshi Richard Bernard. I'm Jeremy Lesniak, the founder here at whistlekick, but most listeners know me better as the show's host. whistlekick, if you don't know, makes the world's best sparring gear as well as great apparel and accessories, all for practitioners and fans of the traditional martial arts. I'd like to welcome all of our new listeners and thank you returning fans. If you're not familiar with our products, you should check out everything we make like our polyester t-shirts. They're great under your uniform to soak up the sweat and they're even a bit lighter weight than the polyester you might be used to from some other companies; available in a bunch of different colors and sizes. You can take a look at our polyester shirts and all the rest of the stuff we make over at [whistlekick.com](http://whistlekick.com). If you want to check out some of our other podcast episodes or see the show notes, those are over at [whistlekickmartialartsradio.com](http://whistlekickmartialartsradio.com). And while you're over there, go ahead and sign up for the newsletter. We offer special content to subscribers and it's the only place to find out about upcoming guests for the show. We've added a new feature to the show notes - a quiz. Head on over, take the quiz, see how you stack up to others on the leaderboard and please, give us your feedback. We're always looking for ways to help you enjoy the show more and who knows, if the quizzes take off, we may even start offering prizes; we'll see. But, here we are for episode 64 and we're joined by Hanshi Richard Bernard. If you've heard Hanshi Ron Martin's episode, you've heard Hanshi Bernard's name before, and now it's time for us to really find out what makes him tick. We've spent time talking about things and in different ways than I would have expected. I knew Hanshi a bit before we started the episode but I learned a tremendous amount during our time. I'm honored to call him a friend and I think you'll see why as you listen. So here we go, Hanshi Bernard, welcome to whistlekick Martial Arts Radio

**Richard Bernard:**

Thank you very much for having me, Jeremy.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Oh it's a pleasure to have you. So anyone that follows whistlekick closely will recognize your name as frequent victor to our push-up contest that we ran over the last 18 months. Of course that's really how I got to know you, was through that. But here, we're gonna have the opportunity - I'm gonna have the opportunity - to get to know you a lot better and I'm looking forward to that. So why don't we start the way we always start - how did you get started in the martial arts?

**Richard Bernard:**



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Well it was back in the... I'm an only child and growing up I was severely introverted - severely. I missed out on a lot of opportunities, and I had heard that this martial arts stuff was good to develop confidence and I didn't have any, and I want to be viewed as the tough guy of sorts for all the wrong reasons. So I ventured into a school when I was in the late teens. And very spotting conditions and after they taught me a couple of techniques, I was asked to break a 2x4 that was suspended over two metal folding chairs. And I just came shot a break in my hand that night and that was the end of that school. But I had this ambition to proceed so I ventured into another school, and after teaching me a few techniques, I didn't have the best training implements. They had, actually, slide paper strips hanging from the ceiling and I was supposed to punch the strip, not touch it of course, and you know, I just throw my Shinken Zuke, my basic strike shot and that would show control. Then of course, I touched it and I had all this goo all over my hand and that was the end of that school. I left humiliated and I kind of put it out of my mind for a little bit, and then I saw an ad in the local paper. It said Karate Lessons call Richie. So I called Richie and the phone rang for quite a while, a part of me did not want him to pick it up cause I didn't have the confidence; I didn't know what to say, I didn't know what to ask. So he finally picked me up and totally unprofessionally, said yeah. I said yeah, is this Richie? You teach Karate? And he said yeah, what do you need? And my first question was how long will it take me to make black belt? And he said, are you in some sort of rush? So anyway, I recruited a friend and we started training in this Richie basement, Goju Ryu Karate and it was over in beacon Karate projects [05:17](#), kind of a tough section but we were hanging in there. The class is you know, there's just a few of us in class and it was old school condition - you throw up, you get back on the floor and train. And I was hanging in, probably because of my friend helping me as a crutch but then Richie lived at this location and he started coming home a little late for class. It was obvious, he maybe had a beer or two, and classes got more rigorous and sort of brutal and I was still hanging in there. And then Richie stopped coming home and I said that's it, strike three; I'm out. I gave it my best shot, it's not meant to be, and that was it. Well my friend that I had recruited had a friend that happened to be taking Goju Ryu Karate at the Lawrence YMCA with this gentleman named Ron Martin. And knowing what I know now, I would have known that okay I studied Goju and right across town is another Goju School, there must have been some sort of fracture between these two individuals but I didn't put two and two together back then so I said, I'm done. I appreciate your interest but I just... I'm done. So my friend said well, you know, let's go down to Lawrence's way and shoot some pool. I said, that's fine. So we go into the [06:42](#) and I go to the right to head towards the pool tables and he said we can't go that way tonight. I said, why not? He said well the scuba divers have all their gear laid out and regulators and that was kind of a common thing down there. So I said, all right. So we walked through the bowels of the basement and when we come out into the wrestling room and there's a Karate class in progress. So basically I was set up to get to that location that night. He lied to me to get me there.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Yeah.



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**Richard Bernard:**

And his friend came over and welcomed us. I said alright. I was kind of mad and he said, let me take you into the locker room and introduce you to my teacher, Mr. Martin. So we go into the locker room and Mr. Martin is standing in front of locker number 5, putting on his protective cup and I'm introduced as someone who has trained across town with this Richie character and that I took Goju Karate. And like I said, I was not aware of the fact that these two instructors had a major falling out so Mr. Martin's first words' to me were, that doesn't mean bleep, bleep, bleep around here, dude. I said, okay. So he says, you know, do you have a gi? I said, yes. He said, well put it on. I said, well I didn't bring it with me. He said, well why didn't you bring it with you? I said, I didn't know I was going to a dojo. He said, where the hell do you think you were going? This is going down so fast. So he grabbed you know, back then there were gis hanging around everywhere, [08:21](#) and he said, put this one on and come on out on dojo. I couldn't wait to get out of this place and so he assigned me this instructor, his name was Rick Savastano. Rick was a very nurturing, compassionate, everything I needed at that point. So he took me through the technique that I had and he went over and, you know, chat with Mr. Martin. Mr. Martin came back and said alright, this is the deal. He said, you want to train with us, we'll start you out at [08:54](#) level, and I moved right away; that was my rank. You know, it was a little green stripe on a white belt and I never heard another word he said. I was hooked right then and there, boom. I'm in. And that was the beginning, at Lawrence YMCA under Ron Martin.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

So you know, I've got a pretty good picture and of course, you know, anyone that's listened to the show for a little bit knows that I had the chance to talk to Hanshi Martin not too long ago. And he's a pretty big personality so I can imagine myself in the room as you at that time but you know, I can only imagine what it was like for you, you know, completely getting snowballed into where you were going. And you know, here you've had a few different strikes with the martial arts people not treating you very well. What was it at that moment, in front of him, that you didn't just say no, thank you, and walk away?

**Richard Bernard:**

Well, you know, up in front of the dojo, it was pretty clear what was required. There was a big sign that said, show up, shut up and line up. I kind of knew where I stood. And it was that - the assignment of that other instructor, Mr. Savastano, he was my crutch, and the fact that I was being recognized for my first rank, night one, for you know duty already served at that other basement dojo, [10:23](#) just something that... and he didn't, you know, he treated everyone kind of a spot and conditioned. A white belt was almost oh no, now we gotta slow the whole class down, teach this white belt. It was just not the most but all schools were like that back then. So it was kind of a take



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it or leave it thing. There weren't schools in every corner like there are today. I don't know, that was just something, there was [10:52](#) destiny, something kept me there and I never looked back from that point.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

That's great. So this was around the time, maybe a little bit before - I'm doing math and I'm not gonna put you on the spot - but was this before or kind of in the middle of Hanshi Martin's successes on the competitive circuit?

**Richard Bernard:**

This was way before.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Okay.

**Richard Bernard:**

I was there when Mr. Martin was discovered by Mr. Merriman, and that's what transformed the dojo into, well Mr. Martin particularly, into a mega superpower, mega. It was Mr. Merriman that maybe saw a diamond in the rough. So I started with Mr. Martin, you know, just a little bit prior to Mr. Merriman coming on the scene and I saw that transformation of the dojo from good into, you know, just off the charts good. So Mr. Merriman was also very integral part of my upbringing in the influence he had with my teacher and the transformation of the dojo; just something to behold, I was on the front lines - saw it all.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

You were there through all the big moments, I'm sure.

**Richard Bernard:**

I was there through all the big moments, yeah. We were doing one particular form of Goju and then when Mr. Merriman came on board, we transitioned over. You know, goes back so many years, I forget it was Okinawa and now we went to Japanese so vice versa. But there was some changes to be made and I just... I had faith on my teacher and I trusted him, I just went for the ride. And the rest is history, so to speak.



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**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Yeah, great history, great history. And from that history, we've had some fun stories that not only have come from Mr. Martin but some of the other people that those stories had trickled out to onto the show. But you know, you've listened to the show and fans of the show know that we're all about the stories. So I know you've got a ton, I've heard you tell some from time to time. But if you would indulge me and tell us your best martial arts story...

**Richard Bernard:**

It's indirectly martial arts related. I've got a lot of [13:24](#) stories. I was a floor manager or a bouncer, whatever you'd want to call it, basically at Hell's Angles Biker Bar but this story has to do with the other end of the spectrum. I went... part of my past life included I was a police officer in the town of Bedford, New Hampshire, and I basically was working part-time but I was putting in so many hours part-time, they asked me if I would like to come on full-time and you know, get the benefits of that. At the time, I was 42 years old so it meant I'd have to go to the police academy for, at the time it was a 10-week academy. So 42 years old, everyone else up there is gonna be 20-25 for the most part, so we up another 42-year old from Bedford and former Marine which I have the highest respect for. I asked them, I said, you know, are you getting ready for this academy? He said, I went to Parris Island. He said, I'll be able to do it, no problem. I said yeah, but that was like 20 years ago. So he went up and he washed out the first day. And so now I'm going up to the next academy and it's in alphabetical order so last name, Bernard, I'm near the front of the line. We don't have any uniforms or on any or anything at this point so they basically said, you know, who are you and where are you from? I said I'm, you know, Richard Bernard from Bedford, New Hampshire. Bedford, New Hampshire, what are they recruiting from the senior citizen home out there? I saw the Lieutenant and the Sergeants, they were taking a pool on what time that first day I would wash out. They were passing dollars amongst each other and when I saw that, I said okay, that's just what I need, throw a little gas on my fire. So the Lieutenant said, what do you think about that, Bernard? I said, I don't think you should take that bet, sir. So Academy proceeded and I was number one ranking every week. It ended up, I come out of that number one ranking but the 6th week was my shining time. We're in class and other departments was sending some regulars there to attend these particular classes, so are the police chiefs, there were state police, there were fishing game, there were deputy sheriffs, and then it was just this classroom of probably 46 remaining recruits. And the Lieutenant, he was a black belt in Taekwondo and he was kind of encouraging us to continue our physical training after we graduate, like in his case he took martial arts. And then he said, does anyone else take martial arts? So no one wants to answer, you know. So he says, on a code violation means if you do not answer truthfully, they will bounce you and I already saw a couple of [16:31](#) So three of us put up our hands and guy in the... I was up in the back row because of the alphabetical. First guy said I'm a green belt in Kempo. He said well alright, keep it up, keep training. And then another guy... What are you? I'm a brown belt in Taekwondo. Oh, okay. And he



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looks up and, the lighting is a little bit dim up at the back of the room, so he kinda squints and he said hey, grandpa what are you? At the time, I said I'm a Godan in Karate-do. He says what? He says, speak English. I said I'm a 5th degree black belt in Japanese Karate. At that point, he stopped teaching, he turned and he bowed to me. Ahh, I get emotional when I talk about this. He apologized for not knowing. He said, I should have known, I apologize sir. And from that point out, I cruised through that academy cause I made... You know, it was obvious to him who had training and he missed it. He said, I should have known. You know, 42 years old, finishing the first of the pack, what makes this guy kick? And that was my day in the sun, right there.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Yeah, there's something that any of us that have trained for a long time, you know, you can pick it out, you can see in the personality, there's something in the way we approach things - that perseverance or whatever you want to call it so... So were you saying that you cruised through because he realized that he wasn't going to break you or...

**Richard Bernard:**

Right, at that point he knew... Well you know, they're looking for the weak links, should there be any, cause they don't want to put these guys out on the street and endanger themselves as well as, you know, their fellow officers and the general public. So by finishing first every week... I finished first academically, at the end of the Academy I got an award and kind of Bedford gave me an award and... but they started out, they did a lot of running and a lot of push-ups - I actually set the record up there for push-ups, and the running... you know, I start at the back of the pack but then they were moving me up to the front with couple of recruits that just got out of the Marine - they're in phenomenal shape - so we kind of [18:58](#) front of the pack on the run. So I'd already proven myself and I knew that, you know, I had what it took to be an officer and so they kind of zeroed in on a few of the others that were questionable yet. So basically I had nothing left to prove at that point, I just continued to do what I had been doing, and well... I finished first academically, and that was my goal and I went in. I just didn't want to get through the academy, you know. On weekends, when I came home, a lot of the guys were going, you know, maybe partied a little bit, and I studied all weekend. All weekend-long, I studied for the test that was gonna be coming on Monday morning and I maintained my number one ranking for all 10 weeks. I'm not sure that was ever done before up to that point. I just don't know but... I was on a mission. Karate has taught me, you know, set your goals, set the bar high, and give it your best shot. And that I did.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**



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Yeah. So how would you compare the academy to maybe a black belt test? You know, cause probably more people listening to this right now that had been through some kind of strenuous black belt testing that have been through the police academy.

**Richard Bernard:**

Yeah. The academy, they had... you know, you'd get up whatever time a day - relatively early - and you do your physical training. You know, use a lot of calisthenics and running, a lot of running, and it was demanding and they kept raising the bar but anyone who, you know, train pretty regularly in martial arts, none of those morning sessions were anywhere near a full-blown Karate class. So I can't say I walked in a park by any means but I had done a lot more strenuous things up to that point of my life than those morning sessions. You just have to be careful not to get injured, you know, pushing yourself too hard because if you get injured, you might get recycled which no one wanted that. You know, whatever week you were at would kind of... you'd have to start from the beginning. So a little bit more cognizant of... I felt a little muscle ache or what-have-you, I try to tend to it immediately. But other than that, martial arts training is... that was that academy at that time. There's a lot of different police academies. My stepson who is a Mass. State Trooper with the gang unit, he went to Massachusetts State Police Academy and that was a whole different breed of [21:58](#) than the academy I went to. They had... It was 26 weeks of power military training from day one to minute last. So I'm not sure I would have... if I could have endured that one at the age of 42 but just... kept putting one foot in front of the other and hoping Friday would get there as soon as possible so I could go home recoup, rest and get back Monday morning to do it all again.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Yeah, one foot in front of the other - I think that's the way a lot of us have learned to handle a lot of difficult things. I mean it's... actually that's one of my personal mantras on a difficult day. Just take it one hour at a time and if that's too much, it's a minute. Take a minute at a time, whatever you've gotta do to keep making that forward progress. Now you mentioned that when you were younger you were really kind of closed off from the world - only child - which is something I can certainly relate to.

**Richard Bernard:**

Go ahead, excuse me [22:56](#)

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Well a lot of the guests we've had on the show that have been in that boat, it was their parents driving them to take martial arts but this was something that you were seeking out yourself



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**Richard Bernard:**

Right, right.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

So that's a little bit different than what we're used to. What, you know... did you wanted to have more confidence? You wanted to be a little bit more open to the world?

**Richard Bernard:**

Back in the early days, you know, they weren't that many around. If you heard so and so was a black belt it was almost like a god. Just probably for the wrong reasons, I wanted people to look at me with that type of respect cause I was so introverted. I had no, you know, my self-respect that hadn't developed, the self-awareness, I knew I was introverted and no confidence. And I'm going to an all-boys high school so that kinda shutted my social skills a little more. I don't know, it's just something driving me that when someone mentioned that guy over there, a black belt, something happened in my head and I had to say, wow. You know, it was just like a god-like figure for whatever reason back then. There was a scarcity back then, you know; there weren't that many around.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Sure

**Richard Bernard:**

It was just something, I say wow. If I, you know, if people looked at me in that way, that would surely bolster my confidence. I didn't know how to connect all the dots. It's just something that drove me. It's hard to explain... and then you know, that further fueled by a little way down the road, I have to get going. The movie Billy Jack came out and then the series Kung Fu every week, and I just really... that just really pushed me forward at that point. I'd already started but that gave me afterburners.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Yeah. Billy Jack, I mean there's a classic to there. I think you're only the second guest to mention that movie on the show which is kind of funny to me cause it goes back so far, farther even then, if I'm doing the math right, if I'm remembering correctly, that was before Bruce Lee's big American movies.





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**Richard Bernard:**

I believe so. Billy Jack came out 1971-ish, and Kung Fu 1972-ish, somewhere around there.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Something like that, yeah.

**Richard Bernard:**

And I can remember when it came out, we don't have so many people in the dojo. And after that movie came out, I was in Mr. Martin's dojo and a lot of commotion outside. You know, we're on a main street, a lot of traffic, but there was more traffic. And I look out into the parking lot and all these cars were pulling in, prospective students that had seen that movie. That was the explosion of martial arts in this country from what I can remember.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Yeah.

**Richard Bernard:**

It was overnight. It was overnight. And then when Kung Fu came out, it was a weekly more fuel on a fire, you know? It's everyone waiting for the flashbacks to the temple. There's just an amazing time.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Yeah. So let's go back and let's imagine that, you know, you as this late teenage years introverted child didn't end up fighting Mr. Martin. You know, that you had those couple attempts at martial arts training and didn't work out and you didn't end up going, you know. Maybe you went and played pool that night and that was it. You know, here's our transition. What do you think your life would have looked like without your Karate training?

**Richard Bernard:**

When I first thought about that question, I would say well I would, you know, have remained full-time police officer but martial arts is what opened the door for me to get into police work so I'd have to go back to another generation of my early employment. I was an insurance adjuster, auto-appraiser, fire insurance adjuster. It's you know, a very good job and a good pay. I drove a brand new Corvette every year so I'd probably still... I probably would have retired from that at this point



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but basically I would just... to me, it was kind of a mundane existence. I was bored to death doing it although I was good at it, I was just bored to death so it'd be like a nine-to-five job, come home, kick back, watch TV. It just wouldn't have the excitement that my life has had for sure. That's probably the rot I would have remained in for the duration of the employment, anyway.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Sort of a... I'm gonna put some words out there, maybe a little less than fulfilling than what you might have transitioned into?

**Richard Bernard:**

Yeah, you've been in one burnt-out building, you're betting it all. And sure, I've been helping people but back then, you know, you had to hand write all about all of the claims - nothing like today on computers. So it's very strenuous as far as... It was boring. You know, I have to sift through all the rubble and because I was a martial artist, I had miraculously... I had some beautiful seacoast towns that were my territory - you know, like Gloucester and Rockport down in this area and it's just gorgeous. So that in itself made it a... you know, it was interesting. But then I was given a Lawrence Lowell and Havel which... the beautiful cities but they've got some serious problems - you know, heroin and... I picked up those territories because my boss was actually out on a claim and he got mugged he got hit across the front of the face with a baseball bat, knocked out all of his teeth, and because I was a martial artist, I found myself after the... I thought I was getting a promotion, you know, I'm moving up into the bigger league, I'm getting the cities now, had nothing to do with that. They envisioned someone that might be able to protect himself if that were to reoccur again. So it just old real quick at that point. Yeah, I remember I drove a brand new Corvette so I'm going to a very, very depressed portion of the town, packing the wheels there and going into a burnt-out building. Disaster was lurking, no doubt about it.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Yeah. It's good that you got out.

**Richard Bernard:**

It started getting old real quick.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

I can only imagine.



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**Richard Bernard:**

I always had the desire to teach martial arts full time professionally, I just didn't know how to get there. You know, I was teaching... when I was an insurance adjuster, I was teaching part-time evenings where I had that desire. And my boss called me one day said you know, we're a little bit slow. He said, so what I want you to do is see your claims in the morning, kinda wine and dine the insurance agents in the afternoon to try to pull some claims out of them, and then write up the acclaims at night. I said I can't do that, I teach Karate at night. He said, well I guess you have to make a decision. I don't know where the words came from, I said well I guess you just made it for me. I'll give you my two weeks' notice and that's the end of it. I only had about 30 students. After I left there, you know, at the time I was married and I gotta go home and tell my wife that I just quit my job. But prior to that, I had sat down with my accountant and I said, you know, I'm not gonna do this full-time professionally. If I have to live in a tent on a beach, how many students do I need? And it was like I need like 20 more to live I mean a bare-bones existence at that time. So I gave my notice at the job, I went home and two weeks later, I'm done that job and in the next few weeks, I do no such thing as advertising or anything back then, 20 students appeared at the door.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Wow. Faith?

**Richard Bernard:**

Divine intervention.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Yeah.

**Richard Bernard:**

That was the beginning of my full-time professional career.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Wow. So what was that... I mean I can only imagine what it was like knowing that you know, you've back yourself into a corner.

**Richard Bernard:**



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Right.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

You know, in realizing hey this is not gonna work, something is gonna have to shift. But then, you know, in the span of a couple weeks, nearly doubling the enrollment at your dojo.

**Richard Bernard:**

Right

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

I mean, what was that feeling like?

**Richard Bernard:**

Well, I knew it had to be divine intervention because I didn't do anything to make it happen. And you know, the word didn't get out on a community that this guy needed 20 students real fast or he gonna be folding up his tent. I just... I never questioned it, I just said... Well, I questioned in a sense that this is where I wanted to go, it was meant to be, and this is just another telltale sign that this is what I've been cutout to do in life. And never looked back, never looked back. [32:44](#)

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Yeah

**Richard Bernard:**

That new Corvette was gone along with a few others little material things but yeah. I had to shift gears a little bit, back pedal a little bit.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Sure. So maybe this was it but, you know, of course one of the questions we always like to talk about is how the martial arts has helped you overcome something of a challenge?

**Richard Bernard:**



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Well ironically, martial arts put me in deepest recesses of my life. I started The House of The Samurai, my school, in the basement of my home and over the course of, I think I had 12 different locations, you know, we went to a VFW hall, we went to a community center, we're in a church basement, our little, you know, part-time ventures. Then we started hitting small store fronts and then I moved the school to Londonderry, New Hampshire where it's currently located. And you know, it's like the Taj Mahal dojos down here, you know, the hardwood floors, ceiling too floor mirrors - it's gorgeous, stunningly gorgeous. So I was able to build it from zero up to... I got up to just to under 400 students and I promoted 510 people to black belt over the years and many have gone on for much higher ranks. So but then I'm thinking futuristically. I can't carry this ball forever and I have an obligation to continue the rule of the system so I need to look for a successor of some sort. So I had one of my long-term students - a young lady that basically was running the school for me. So I sat down with her and I said okay, now let's think futuristically here. Maybe three years from now, I'll pass the torch and you know, I'd still be on-hand but... yeah, kinda your school at that point. So we agreed and it wasn't too long thereafter, she came to me and she said well, I've decided I'm gonna open up the next town over which is, you know, part of my territory. And I'm gonna take these 30 or 40, 50, 60 students with me and I'm gonna take the 10-11, 12 black belts with me and good luck to you. So that started a little downward cycle there. You know, she broke my heart. Well, I'm still thinking I gotta, you know, I have an obligation to pass on the rule of the system. So another, a young couple, they basically started with me 8, 9, 10 years old. And they met at the dojo, they ended up getting married, I was... attended their wedding; they're my children. And he's going off into the military. He said, I really to have my own school. I said alright, when you get back in five years, if you still have this aspiration, this ambition, I'll make it happen. So five years went by, they came back, and ended up... you know, just getting out of the military, didn't have much of anything, no money set aside to buy a school so I made it happen. I held paper, I just... made it possible for them to get into their own school. And I was willing to do it on a bow and a handshake, and a lot of legal advice and accounting of... I can't do that, I'm... what difference does it make? I said it's either gonna work or it isn't. So anyway, we did the deal and that deal went so sour so fast, and this the [36:34](#) this is what put me down. They basically had made some alignments when they were in the military with other martial artists overseas, and they basically booted me to the curb to go with someone else, threw me out of my own school, technically, but it wasn't mine at that point. And they didn't follow my advice as they should have and basically they ran the school out of business. But before they did that, they took what small remaining money there was, and went right down the street and open up under a different name. They're still there, and I'm sure they're struggling and not that I wish that upon them but they're like, these are the closest people in my life and they just put the knife deep in my back. So they just... they stopped showing up here. Students were still showing up but there's no lights on. They didn't even let their students that they were moving down that road. So you know, that reflected very badly upon me. I'm over it now but... that tore my heart out; tore my heart out. And as a result of that type of, you know, the business side of things, every penny I had been able to put aside for retirement as a result of when I was a police officer and insurance adjuster, I had to pay off the debt they had accumulated and



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just... I lost everything. I lost everything. And then it's resulted, shortly thereafter, I lost an 18-year old dog or 15-year old daughter - you know I love animals - I lost my mom, I lost my dad, I lost the commercial building that the school was in as result of all these. I was as deep down as you could possible get. So martial arts put me there but then I just looked in the mirror one day, I said hey, I teach people how to overcome these type of obstacle so it's about time I start to do, you know, walk the walks cause I've been talking the talk long enough. So I just... I woke up one day and just said, that's enough. Now the school was closed at that point cause I had migrated to another... one of my other students and I went down to a school in Salem, New Hampshire, National Karate Institute and Kyoshi38:53 me over 30 years. So I was down there and the Japanese have a saying, in every bit of bad there is some good you just gotta find it. So I'm down there and doing my thing, when I first walked into the school, I don't know what it is, something's wrong about it. I don't know what it is. So I just kept doing my thing, I kind of took over and taught most of the classes, and whatever feeling I got passed and he would come to say you know, he says, I was about two weeks shot of going out of business when you came, and now the school is thriving. So that's the good that came out of the bad. And so it did have a purpose, and it came full cycle.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Wow. That's some powerful stuff. Now, I'm sure a lot of the listeners out there teach and some of them even have their own schools, so somewhere in here, you know what the secret sauce is because you've been able to, you know, you've seen the difference between you being in a school and you not being in a school.

**Richard Bernard:**

Right.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

What did you bring in in that two weeks that turned everything around?

**Richard Bernard:**

Well, I have a probably, well definitely as result of martial arts but then my police background, I have a very acute sense of detail. You know, I try to show that when I do kata. I just have a very acute sense of the smaller, little details which, and I have another saying, everything counts. So you take care of those really itty-bitty details, they add up, and turn into big details in your favor. There's just a lot of things that, you know, just gotta be looking for at times but they're there. The facial expressions of the students, do they leave sweating and smiling or are they just leaving cause they're glad to get out of here. And I just... I shifted gears, I upped the level of training. There was



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definitely a lot more sweating going on and maybe the owner of that school just didn't have much bench strength. They never really developed instructors, he's teaching most of the classes himself and trying to spin a lot of different plates, all rank classes. You got a lot of beginner with a 5th Dan or higher. They gotta keep everyone moving and learning, and it can be challenging. It can be challenging. So I just put some systems in place that I had in place here at The House of The Samurai that had proven themselves. House of Samurais has been around now 42 years. So I've seen a lot of changes over those years and I just... I treated it like my own school, he gave me free rein to do what I thought was necessary. So a lot had to do with, you know, what's happening out on the dojo floor but there was a lot of the administrative things, too. A lot of people kind of fell through the cracks - you know, not testing when they should have been testing, things like that. Students won't tell you about it a lot of times, they'll just leave.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Sure, sure. So if we had to boil that off to a nugget of wisdom, you would say pay attention to the details

**Richard Bernard:**

Yes, pay attention to the tiniest of details. Stay on top of all of those things that you might think don't matter but put your, you know, put yourselves on the position of the students. Try to remember what it's like to be a white belt. You know, there's a high degree of dropout in a lot of school in that first six months and just try to put yourself in their gi, remember what it was to be there and what can you do to help them transition into the community on a long-term basis, black belts and beyond. Yeah, details - details, details.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Great. So other than Mr. Martin, who would you say has been the most influential on your martial arts career?

**Richard Bernard:**

Well, I met a gentleman, happened to be a Goju stylist so he... Mr. Martin had to take a sabbatical because he, you know, he got married, had a daughter, had to get like a full-time job to pay for his increasing commitments so I was without a teacher for a number of years on the Goju side. And that led me to start studying Shorin Ryu but it also led me to join a few organizations that could help me on my journey. So I joined one organization, National Karate Jiu Jitsu Union out of Valdosta, Georgia. And the chief instructor for that, it was the mixture of all different styles, but the chief instructor of that organization, it was a [44:19](#) a Goju stylist out of Nutley, New Jersey. So we



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had that little Goju connection and he came up to visit me here once. And he had purchased a business system; there was no such thing today, you got you know, Maya 44:36 all these professional organizations, so there was none of that back then. And he purchased a business system, I believe he bought it from I'm gonna say Frank 44:46 from Virginia Beach, 44:49 He said oh I got this business system, this is what my school is doing with it. Would you be interested in purchasing it for me? And I was bumbling along, I still want to be... I was full-time professional but I was living a meagre existence, I said well how does it work? He said, well we'll implement this system and if you know, say we predict you would do say a thousand dollars a month and all of a sudden you're doing two thousand a month, he said, I get half of the overage, you keep the other half. And it goes up to x-amount of dollars. And before he finished speaking another thing, okay, let's do it. I just was kind of desperate and it immediately turned the school around and headed it upriver immediately. It just had to do with good business, you gotta tie common place for the most part in today's martial arts world were unheard of back then. A lot to do with, you know, pricing, asking for commitment from the student, you know, in a form of a contract - these types of things. We delved into ranking systems and just a lot of stuff that tied into the... it was business matter but it had an integral impact on the success of the school and the training. I'm very close to my parents and when they heard that I bought this system, I'm just 46:26 New Jersey, kind of a fast-paced environment, you know. To be honest, they didn't trust this gentleman and just for the fact, he was concrete as we were, so to speak. And I say, I got nothing to lose. I'm not doing anything at this point, the school is just bumbling along. I got nothing to lose, it's only based on performance. So if it doesn't perform, I lose nothing. Overnight it performed, and that was the turning point for the dojo. It went from a... I doubled my enrollment within six months. And that was it, right there. So he came into my life just as result of joining that NKJU and then... he actually filled in some blanks in my Goju training along the way so it was a good... it worked out well.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Okay. So let's talk about competition.

**Richard Bernard:**

That's where you actually come in, to be honest.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Yeah, hey that's... Competition is where I met you and -

**Richard Bernard:**

Yes





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**Jeremy Lesniak:**

How we begin our friendship.

**Richard Bernard:**

You're an integral part in me competing. You don't know that but

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

I don't know that.

**Richard Bernard:**

But I did... You know, I really hadn't competed much over the years and I called it... I constantly referred to it as you get a monkey on your back, and everyone's afraid of losing so I'm trying to teach people how to overcome this. And all of the time, I've got a family or silverback gorillas on my back and I say you gotta feed the monkey a peanut. If you don't feed it a peanut, it feeds off you in the form of it erodes your confidence. You gotta test yourself under different conditions and the prevalent in the dojo. So I had done a little competition. My biggest win was I went out school championship, this is where Mr. Martin was captain of the very first United States Karate Team then some of my dojo-mates were on that team and had, you know, returned after competing events, 30 different countries, returned successfully. And my big day of competition was our school tournament when I beat all of them - it wasn't by much but I ended... So that was about the height of my competition. And then years and years and years and years go by, I went to a tournament, I saw you, we had that little push-up contest and there was a lot of people over your booth at the time and I stood clear but I was thinking about it. So then when it was a little quiet, I went over and I gave it a shot, and there was no one around the booth when I went down. And a minute later when I got up, there was a small crowd there cause I had put up like 72 in a minute that day.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Yeah.

**Richard Bernard:**

And the time the buzz went through the gym a little bit as, you know, look at the old dude. The old dude, 67 years old, look at how many he gets. And I could almost taste of that. It just sat there a little bit. I'm talking to Mr. Martin, I say I'm trying to get the students to compete it [49:37](#) He said, why don't you lead in the front? Why don't you do it? Sensei, it's been like decades. He said what's there



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to lose? I said, well you know, over the years I've gone up a lot in rank and it's a lot easier if you just sit on the sidelines and have everyone think you're pretty good and then to get out there and prove. You know, it's gotta be a pretty transparent at this point. So I said well, you know, if I lead by the front, I'll get others to follow and hey, suck it up and just do it. So the next tournament, I entered and I happened to win my division and I happen to win the grand championship and that was it. I committed to doing every tournament on [50:27](#) last year and I did that along with two or three other, a couple of little local tournaments around here and I'm doing the same this year. So there's direct result, the one I got a little taste of competition in your push-up contest, and two Mr. Martin encouraging me to get the monkey off your back. And I'm addicted at this point.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

That's great, that's great.

**Richard Bernard:**

You meet some great people and intense rivalry but it's real healthy, and we help each other. It's been very rewarding.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

What would you say your favorite part of competition is?

**Richard Bernard:**

Well I still get pre-competition jitters the day or two before. I don't like that part but just the camaraderie, you know, you're competing with people of all different styles. Before we go up, we pat each other on the back and wish the best of luck and after you've done your form or what have you... Well it almost doesn't matter what the score it. It's just, you're getting up there, you're representing your teacher, your dojo, your system, the arts, and you're just doing your part to have others see you what training will lead to, not so much on the physical but the spirit that's underlying and the competitiveness yet it's a healthy competition, and it really doesn't matter how it turns out. You put your best foot forward and that's it. This is a lot of variables totally out of your control. Sometimes the referee like what they see, sometimes they don't.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

That is true.

**Richard Bernard:**



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Nature of the [52:13](#) and you know, the worst thing... I just tell the students, I said no matter what happens, you grin and bear it. You don't go complaining about the referees cause I guarantee if you do this for a period of time, there's gonna be some trophies you take that you really didn't deserve, for whatever reason. And until you're willing to give those back, don't worry about the ones that you didn't get that you did deserve. It's irrelevant. Just go in with no expectations, give it your best shot, and that's it. Leave it at that.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Yeah. Well said. Now I know over the years you've had the chance to train with some amazing people, you've mentioned some of those names now. But if you had the opportunity to train with someone that you haven't, who would that be?

**Richard Bernard:**

Well I definitely would have loved to be in Chojun Miyagi, the founder of Goju Ryu Karate those backyard dojo, not so much wearing those loincloth looking [53:20](#) I would definitely... it's an amazing system, it's a very organized, very systematic, there's a reason that material is stacked upon each other in a very logical way. I would just like to have been see how he devised this unique system. What went in to his thought processes to come up with the end result? I read a lot about it but I would, you know, I just like to have been there on the front line for one class, just to get a feel for the origins of the art.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Sure. Sure. And excellent choice, somebody I too would love to have studied with. Now how about movies? Are you at all a movie guy?

**Richard Bernard:**

I am a movie guy. I've seen a lot of martial art movies. It's hard to pick a favorite one but there's a couple that come to mind pretty quickly with... They're about Muay Thai and Tony Jaa, he's in The Protector and Ong-Bak movies.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Yeah

**Richard Bernard:**



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The technique is absolutely stunningly beautiful but there's good story to both of those movies. I also like Only the Strong with Mark Dacascos.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

One of my favorites.

**Richard Bernard:**

In that movie, he does Brazilian capoeira. Originally he was a Wun Hop Kuen Do that his dad, Al Dacascos, and his mom, [55:01](#) Dacascos, I believe their name. They were definitely first generation martial artists and that they were... Mr. Martin competed against with Al Dacascos. A little back, one generation earlier than mine.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Yeah. Yeah, actually I think he mentioned that when he was on the show. I'm not sure but that rings a bell. Cool. So how about actors, would there anybody outside of Tony Jaa and Mark Dacascos or would those be your picks?

**Richard Bernard:**

I always had a... the early days particularly, in the earlier movies, Jean-Claude Van Damme. Just kind of grown fond of him over the years, watched probably all of his movies. Bloodsport definitely would be the one that comes to mind. I just... he's had some serious training, obviously, and got some serious skills and I just took a liking for this movies along with a lot of others.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

When I was growing up... go ahead

**Richard Bernard:**

Go ahead, excuse me.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

When I was growing up in the '80s in the martial arts, of course, wherever you look, it was Van Damme in a movie. I mean it's a constant and he did so much. You know, not that I would say he was on the level of Bruce Lee in any way but he was kind of the '80s equivalent of Bruce Lee. I mean



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he was just there in so many movies for good and for bad, and maybe in hindsight more for bad than for good in this quality of movies but they were fun. I have fun memories of Bloodsport and so many others. I think I saw something as I was putting together show notes for an episode a couple of months ago that there was another kickboxer movie coming out this year that he was starring in so he hasn't stopped. So how about books? You mentioned that you've done some reading on Miyagi but what else are you reading?

**Richard Bernard:**

I'm not much of a reader and that goes back to that all-boy high school I went to. Every summer we had to read seven books and one year they threw a little fish to us, they let us read Jonathan Livingston Seagull, a little itty-bitty book that you could read in one sitting. But for the most part, it was like the last of the Mohicans, David Copperfield huge books, thousands of pages. I got kinda out of the reading as a result and basically the first day back each year when you return to school after summer, they give you a book test and you couldn't have cheated by reading a little crib notes. You had to have read that full book in order to pass that test. If you didn't pass that test, you're done, you're gone. So it was kind of force-fed. But I read a book recently. It's actually written by a Uechi stylist, that's a competitor. He has a Uechi school, couple of towns over, his name is Buzz Durkin. He runs the school consistently, 354, 400 students. Tuition's about \$225 a month. He's got the highest retention rate, I think in the world. No one quits his school - no one. So he wrote a book. You can sit down and read it in one sitting, it's called The Martial Arts School Owner's Guide to Teaching, Business and Life. I've read it twice so far and I'm gonna read it again, and I bought a copy for the seven schools within Shidokan. I bought a copy for each of the owners and I said, there's something to be learned by reading this simple book this gentleman has. He teaches Uechi Karate, traditional school. There's only 8 katas in the whole system. They don't do any extra, no upgrade, there's no black belt clubs or anything like this. There's just traditional Karate training, as simple as simple can get and no one quits that school. And he got the best retention so... I read it twice like I said and the fact I share with some of the people on the circuit recently, talking about the business piece of martial arts and then I say hey, I just read a book; you gotta get it. So this last tournament, a couple of them said hey we read that book and we passed it on to some of our students. I never read anything more than once but I've been [59:53](#) What do you do to develop relationships with the students, to hold onto them and the next generation, the next generation, you know. What do you do? You gotta be more than just the training. He relates that in his book, a gold nugget of information. I always knew he had the retention. I just didn't quite know how he achieved it. And he was very forthcoming in the book, this is how I did, and great, great information.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

We had that book mentioned on the show a couple of times and of course I'll link to it in the show notes. For anyone that maybe has been familiar with the way we do things, we have a website,



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[whistlekickmartialartsradio.com](http://whistlekickmartialartsradio.com) and we have links to all the things that we talk about over there. So if anyone wants to make it easy, they can pop over there and just click the link from there. So we've talked about, you know, the reasons that you compete but obviously there are other things that are keeping you going. You know, are there goals, things that you're looking out to accomplish over the next few years?

**Richard Bernard:**

Yeah. My organization, Shidokan USA, right now there are seven schools. I'm looking to recruit more schools into that organization. Basically it's a... we've got a Taekwondo school, we've got Shorin Ryu school, we have Goju schools, so style is almost irrelevant. Basically what I do is a lot to do on the business side. It's included with the relationship as to things I learned over the years, how can I... for the schools of full-time professional schools and they got to be that way as result of instituting certain things that I had already instituted. And I accredit curriculums, I license schools, I instruct the licensure certification, rank certification, and business development is basically what Shidokan does. What I did, I've been a member of quite a few organizations over the years when Mr. Martin was on his sabbatical. I had joined a number of different organizations and so when it came to the creation of Shidokan, which I created with my Shorin Ryu instructor [1:02:33](#) from Laconia, New Hampshire. I wrote down okay, I've been a member of all these organizations, what are the bad points? What do I not want? Where do we not want to go and what were the good points? So we kinda listed both of those, and the bad points were like as long as my leg and the good points were too few. So we developed an organization that invested interest in school not so much on the financial end but if the school's more successful, the organization becomes more successful. And some of the organizations that I'm part of just... they were making crazy demands, you know. If you... I was a Goju stylist but then I joined a Shorin Ryu organization cause I started studying Shorin Ryu as well and it's my full-time profession, and one of their requirements was okay we're gonna come in and everyone puts on a white belt, start fresh. You want me to go to a couple of hundred parents and tell them that their children who have been with me, you know, 6, 8, 10 years are no longer a 6th degree junior black belt and they're gonna go back to white belt. Is that what you're saying? Yeah, that's it. I said there's not gonna be a school. We could be member of your organization but there's not gonna be a school here shortly, that just doesn't make sense. So certain things like that. You know, just demands that were absolutely insane on the business side. And none of these people were making their living doing professional martial as far as in the trenches of the dojo. So that's how Shidokan came to be and right now, we've got seven member schools, always looking to recruit new schools. Basically, if someone doesn't have a teacher, if they have no future access to rank, if they're interested in teaching licensure, basically we will license you through The International Organization of all Japan Karate-do Federation. I received an international licensure through them so that kind of opened up the door for me to now be able to issue the same credentials through Shidokan, and for someone else, for whatever reason, if you don't have a teacher. Now if you had a teacher and well I didn't get promoted so I left, Shidokan is



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not interested in you. That's an invalid reason. I've been there myself... No, no. Your teacher's your karate, martial arts dad. You just don't walk out on your dad. You sit down at the table, hash out your differences, and you need to trust your teacher. Unless they're giving you some absolutely, concrete reason not to, and those are few and far between from one I've seen out there. Yeah, someone... Their teacher passed on or their teacher retired or they moved and have no further connection, they'd be a fine candidate for Shidokan.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

And the website for that is [shidokanusa.com](http://shidokanusa.com), if I remember correctly.

**Richard Bernard:**

That's correct.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Alright, great. And of course, like everything else, we're gonna link that.

**Richard Bernard:**

Best way to reach me would be via the email, [hanshi@shidokanusa.com](mailto:hanshi@shidokanusa.com).

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Okay. And we'll

**Richard Bernard:**

Yeah, when I get involved in the school, like I said, if they have school, I make suggestions, I make recommendations, I give reasons why I would do certain things, and I leave it their decision. There's no mandate. It's up to them. And you know, I'd be a little bit more convincing when it's affecting peace and I'll tell them, from what I know, you can't get there from here if you don't do this. And I'd give him all the facts and figures to back it up and that's up to them, up to them. Make recommendations and when they see the House of the Samurai, you know, that's kind of the end result of all these things I talk about. I say okay this is what I created, I started in the basement of my home and there you have the Taj Mahal dojo and... Yeah, like I said, the school actually closed and Kyoshi Dimacali who you know, they've been coming down here annually. He just walked in my school one day and his now wife, Rebecca, they walked in and they said we heard you have a tournament. Would you mind Rebecca competed? I said are you traditional? It's a traditional



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tournament, by invitation only. Yeah, yeah. So she competed and I said wow, she's pretty good. So he said, well he had been living in Fairbanks, Alaska. And they came back every year to visit Rebecca's parents who lived in Nashua, New Hampshire. So they kinda shaped their annual visit to coincide with my tournament. So he said, can I compete next year? I said absolutely. When I saw him compete, I said oh my god. Have you seen him?

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Yeah, he's exceptional.

**Richard Bernard:**

So he kept coming back year after year and he's won my tournament I think 11 years in a row now. So I think it was 4, 5 years ago, he came back. He said well let's go over the dojo. My tournament was in May and they kinda walked out in April. I said well, the dojo was there but there's one there. As far as students that is technically out of business at least for the moment. And I said I've migrated to a school in Salem and I'm, you know, I've been able to turn that school around. I'm kinda happy there, I said. But, I said now, from the moment I met you, you said you always wanted your own school. I said you're in Fairbanks, Alaska and you also talk about returning to this area to be close to the, you know, in-laws. I said I'll tell you what, if you're all willing to migrate back here, you and your wife and your son, I said I'll reopen that school, I'll get it going with you and I'll give it to you. And that's exactly what happened. So five years ago, he came back, we started with zero students. And now you're starting to see some of his students on a circuit and obviously, they're very skilled. And that, they came down to now the vested interest, they're a member in Shidokan so I have a vested interest on that aspect. But it's his school and I gave it to him. I just saw something in him. People open up some doors for me, he shut doors on me but I just saw something in him that... He's the real deal and kind of pay it forward a little bit, and that's where the House of the Samurai is. It's come back into its glorious existence as Mr. Kyoshi Dimacali and his wife, Rebecca.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Great. And Kyoshi's a great person. I've had really enjoyed the conversations that I've had with him and hope to spend some more time with him in the future, for sure. And I really appreciate everything that you've given us here, today. And thank you for your time. And I'm hoping maybe you have some parting advice, not that you haven't given us all a ton already in the last hour or so. But any words of wisdom you want to leave on?

**Richard Bernard:**





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I give out medals at my tournament and on the back of the medal are the virtues of the samurai - integrity, respect, courage, honor, compassion, honesty, and loyalty. And I would encourage all those involved in the martial arts, particularly those teaching the martial arts, you can't kind of pick and choose. You need to have all of those seven virtues to teach this art appropriately. It's one thing to talk the talk but you need to walk the walk and you need to have the... you gotta be a shining example in those areas. I've just seen so many over the years get some of them, almost all of them, but they're missing we'll say, loyalty. Well, that's a big piece. Or they're missing respect. You need it all. You need it all and I would highly encourage if you don't have that skill set, develop it, and move forward and try to put forth the most professional image that... We save lives; they're not about punching and kicking and blocking. Yes it is but we develop character, we save lives - we literally save some lives. We need to treat it appropriately, the very important integral part of society. That's what I would encourage.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Thank you for listening to episode 64 of whistlekick Martial Arts Radio, and thank you to Hanshi Bernard for your time. Head on over to [whistlekickmartialartsradio.com](http://whistlekickmartialartsradio.com) with links to Hanshi's organization, a few photos, and that quiz I mentioned during the intro. 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 get your podcast, we'd appreciate it. Remember, if we read yours on the air, just email us and we'll get you a free pack of whistlekick stuff. If you know someone that would be a great interview for the show, please fill up the form at [whistlekickmartialartsradio.com](http://whistlekickmartialartsradio.com) or if you just want to shoot us a message with a suggestion for a Thursday show or some other feedback, there's a place to do that on the website, too. You can follow us on social media. We're on Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest and Instagram, pretty much everywhere you can think of. And our username is always whistlekick. Remember the products you can find at [whistlekick.com](http://whistlekick.com) like our line of polyester no sweat t-shirts. They're one of our bestselling clothing items and definitely worth the look. So until next time. Train hard, smile, and have a great day.