



Episode 116 – Mestre Efraim Silva | [whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com](http://whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com)

## **Jeremy Lesniak**

Hey, there. How's it going? This is episode 116 of whistlekick Martial Arts Radio, the only place to find the best stories from the best martial artists, like today's guest, Mestre Efraim Silva. At whistlekick, we make the world's best sparring gear, and here on Martial Arts Radio, we bring you the best martial arts podcast. I'd like to welcome you. I'm Jeremy Lesniak, the founder here at whistlekick. For the next hour or so, I'll also be your host for Martial Arts Radio. Thank you to the returning listeners, and hello and welcome to those of you checking us out for the first time.

If you're new to the show or our great products, please check out our hats. Winter hats, summer hats, different colors and styles, with more being added all the time. You can find them at [whistlekick.com](http://whistlekick.com), right along with our sparring gear, which is the core of what we offer. If you want the show notes, including photos and links to everything we talk about today with Mestre Efraim, you can find those at [whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com](http://whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com). If you're not on the newsletter list, sign up. We send out exclusive content, and it's the only place to find out about upcoming guests to the show. As a thank you for joining, we'll send you our Top 10 Tips for Martial Artists, an exclusive podcast episode. You can sign up for the newsletter at any of our websites.

As with a number of our guests, it was from a news article that we first learned of Mestre Efraim Silva. Native to Brazil, Mestre Efraim has been living in Connecticut for quite a few years now, and has been spreading capoeira throughout New England via his school. It took us some time to find a day to record as he is very much in-demand teaching seminars throughout the United States. It was worth the wait. Mestre Efraim talks of his early challenges in Brazil, his struggles to open a school here in the United States, and the positive changes he's had on his students. It's a powerful episode, and one that may leave you feeling inspired and, at times, overwhelmed. It certainly did for me, so enjoy.

Mestre Efraim?

## **Mestre Efraim Silva**

Hello.

## **Jeremy Lesniak**

Welcome to whistlekick Martial Arts Radio.

## **Mestre Efraim Silva**

Hi. How are you?

## **Jeremy Lesniak**



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I'm great. How are you?

**Mestre Efraim Silva**

Awesome. Awesome, thank you.

**Jeremy Lesniak**

It's good to have you here. You are our first capoeirista ...

**Mestre Efraim Silva**

Oh, wow.

**Jeremy Lesniak**

... on the show. Yeah, yeah. I'm sure we have had some people that have done capoeira on the show, but you are the first Mestre we've had on, so this will be fun. You're going to give us some different answers, and offer a different perspective than others, but why don't you tell us how you got started with capoeira?

**Mestre Efraim Silva**

Okay. I started capoeira in Brazil when I was 13 years old. I come from a family of 13 kids. We have seven boys and six girls. I usually tell this to my students when they ask. Being one of the youngest, and growing up in Brazil, I really had to learn to defend myself, especially against one of my brothers, who was always trying to mess with me.

**Jeremy Lesniak**

Yeah.

**Mestre Efraim Silva**

So, that's one of the reasons that I looked for capoeira, but I started to learn capoeira from one of my brothers who started a little before I did.

Anyway, as I started to practice capoeira, I trained like a maniac. I was thinking that, "Now, when he comes, I'm not going to accept this anymore." This was all about my brother. As soon as I start to get better, my brother would say to me, "Hey, don't think that I'm afraid of you, man. I'm going to kick your behind with your capoeira and all." I said, "Come." He never touched me, and I never had to fight my



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brother, so capoeira actually allowed me to face my brother without fear of being bullied by him, and he never had the courage to actually do anything, so it was a great thing. That was the reason I actually started capoeira, but I fell in love with it, with the music aspect of it. I always loved gymnastics. I always loved to play tough, and capoeira gave me all this opportunity, and the dance part of it is one of the things that I really, really connect, because once I learned not to have to fight anybody, I developed the other side of it which was the music aspect and the dance aspect of capoeira. That was my beginning of all.

**Jeremy Lesniak**

That's great. Here we have a very specific reason that you start martial arts, to learn self defense.

**Mestre Efraim Silva**

Yup.

**Jeremy Lesniak**

The same reason that so many of our guests, so many people out there start. With the skills you learned came confidence, and you didn't really ... It sounds like you didn't have to use it, that he recognized that it wasn't a good idea for him to pick on you anymore.

**Mestre Efraim Silva**

That's exactly what it is. I tell my kids ... I work with kids all the time, and I tell them that learning martial arts is not so you can fight. It's just people that do any type of work where they develop self confidence, it stops people that like to mess with other people from even coming near you. The confidence, the empowering that you acquire by being in control of who you are and your ability to defend yourself, really stops people from messing with you, so that's what happened. I learned, and I never had to use it for any reason, so that was good.

**Jeremy Lesniak**

Perfect. That's the best.

**Mestre Efraim Silva**

That was.

**Jeremy Lesniak**



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One of the things that we've talked about on this show is that in martial arts, we tend to talk a lot about self defense, how to win a fight. Even though so many of us have learned how to do this, we don't talk about the fact that we learn how not to get into a fight in the first place ...

### **Mestre Efraim Silva**

Yup.

### **Jeremy Lesniak**

... by having that confidence in your skills, so I think that's fantastic. I'm going to guess you've got some pretty good stories. Growing up in Brazil, learning capoeira, you're in the United States now, there's a story there. What ... If I was to ask you for your best story around capoeira, what would it be?

### **Mestre Efraim Silva**

Well, like I said, you know, knowing capoeira and loving it so much, in Brazil, I competed, I went through many different stages of my life thinking that I was a tough guy, and I didn't ... I was a champion in the state and the region and international state champion, but I think the best experience for me in terms of martial arts, being a martial artist, was over here in the United States.

I came to America 27 years ago, and the first six months that I was here, I bought a brand new Ford Escort. It was my very car ever. I was in love with my car, and I delivered newspapers in the morning, in the middle of the night actually. Coming back home, I was driving back home after delivering the newspaper, and I was coming nice and slow in Bridgeport, Connecticut. A guy was trying to pass me on the right side. He passed, but there was a car parked. Not to hit the car parked, he hit my car, and he drove away.

Without even thinking, I drove behind him, because he hit my brand new car. I wanted him to do it ... To pay. As I was driving behind him, he stopped in a very bad area in Bridgeport, which there are many. I got out of the car, and there were three guys in the car. It was funny for me, now thinking about, so I didn't even think about fear, or anything, what they were going to do to me. I just wanted my car to be paid. I didn't even speak English enough to explain what I wanted. I just said, "You got to pay, you got to pay, you got to pay."

One of them was the tough guy. A short guy wanted to push me. I said, "Look, man, don't touch me." Another car parked behind. There were five of them, and a girl. They were yelling, and they didn't want to pay, and they want to beat me up. I told the guy, "If you touch me, you're not going to like me, man." He pushed me. There is a capoeira movement. I don't know if you train capoeira, you might know. It's called parafuso, which you kick one leg, and the other leg goes over. It's like a turning, flying kick over the guy's head, their head because they were in front of me. So, I jumped, and I kicked, without



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touching them. Then I stopped my foot on the guy's face. I said, "Who wants to fight?" They all ran from me. All of them. It was like ... It was the funniest ... Thinking about it ... It was like ... I said, "Who wants to fight me?"

Nobody wanted to fight me anymore after that, and the police came. There were cars all over, because the neighbors heard all the conversation and stopped. Then, the police came. I said, "Well, he hit my car on Main Street, and he's here running away." Anyway, to make a long story short, they had to pay for my car, and the guy came to me, one of the guys. He says, "Hey, man. What is it that you do, dudes? You do karate or something?" I said, "No, man, I do capoeira." I went to my car, got my flyers, and I gave it to all of them, and I made it into advertisement. In that same week, they came to my class to take a look at my class. That was awesome for me that happened. I did not have to hit anybody. I had just to show that I could if I wanted to.

**Jeremy Lesniak**

Wow. That's very much a sort of Karate Kid moment, if you've seen that movie.

**Mestre Efraim Silva**

Of course I did.

**Jeremy Lesniak**

You take your enemy, and you turn them into your friend.

**Mestre Efraim Silva**

Yeah, no, but the funniest part of all is, is my ex, now my ex-wife, she was my girlfriend then. She always thought I was a coward because I never wanted to fight anybody. People want say things, okay. Good to have your opinion. That's good. She said, "I can't believe you. You are a martial artist. Kick them!" I said, "I'm not going to kick anybody," but she always wanted to see. Many times, she went with me to deliver newspapers, and that was the only day she didn't. When I told her what happened, she was so mad at me. She said, "I can't believe I didn't see this!" She always wanted to see me fighting. She was crazy, but thank God I never had to fight anybody. That was my good story that it was a happy ending for me, you know?

**Jeremy Lesniak**

Yeah, because nobody really wins in a fight.

**Mestre Efraim Silva**



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No, no, nobody does. This is the beauty of my art form, because it is ... Most martial arts, it's a full contact all the time, so in order for you to really get it, you have to hit or get hit. Capoeira, I teach my students this. Now, this is just my point of view. I think capoeira as a martial art teaches something beyond hitting. It's you being able to control your movement before you hit, because to aim at someone in front of me and punch them and kick them, well, the probability that I'm going to hit them is very big, but being able to stop my foot before I do that is a completely different ball game. It requires a different kind of ability, and that's what I think capoeira teaches you, because it's too easy to hit, but it isn't to stop your foot before you hit someone. You don't have to break someone's nose to say, "Look, man, I can. It's okay. Now, do you want to continue? This is your choice." Those guys didn't want to fight me. They didn't see if I could hit hard or not, but they knew that I could. That's what I think capoeira teaches, and that's what I teach to my students.

**Jeremy Lesniak**

That's great. Other than capoeira, do you have any non-martial arts hobbies that you like? We just like to get to know you a little bit more.

**Mestre Efraim Silva**

Dance, man. I love dancing. I love all kinds of dance. I love Brazilian dance, and every night, I have a friend, now he's actually going to stay with me because he's visiting from Brazil. We sit down, he gets his cavaquinho, which is like a mini guitar to play samba. I get my instrument, we sit, and we play music every night. That's what I love to do.

**Jeremy Lesniak**

Wow. Were you ... Did you love dance and music before you started capoeira?

**Mestre Efraim Silva**

Well, I'm Brazilian. Most Brazilians do love music.

**Jeremy Lesniak**

Okay.

**Mestre Efraim Silva**

We grow up with this, and my life has always been around music. I grew up in the church with my Mom and Daddy and my 12 brothers and sisters, and we had a choir in the church that all of us sang. My sister



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was the conductor of the choir. Every single one of us had a different voice in the choir that we were trying to sing, so my life has been around music.

**Jeremy Lesniak**

That's fantastic.

**Mestre Efraim Silva**

Thank you.

**Jeremy Lesniak**

Obviously, everyone's life has ups and downs. We have good days, we have bad days, sometimes we have good weeks or years, and unfortunately sometimes we have bad weeks and years. Tell us about a time in your life that maybe wasn't so good, and how your martial arts training helped you to overcome that time.

**Mestre Efraim Silva**

Okay, so I think the ... I left my house when I was 13 because I wanted to do well by myself, and capoeira took me all over the world. Moving from my home to another city, it was very difficult for me, but I did it anyway. The only time in my life that I didn't think I was going to do capoeira was when I was in the Air Force in Brazil, but I taught capoeira in the Air Force anyway. The hardest thing that I can think of, even though I lived alone pretty much without my family since I was 17, I think the hardest thing for me was when I decided to ... I left the Air Force, I opened a school. I had a lot of students in another city, in the state of Sao Paulo, Brazil. It was a lot of people, I had a lot of friends. I always had a lot of friends in my life, but it was when I came to the United States. I think if it wasn't for ... First of all, my sister, because she supported me, but if it wasn't for my training with capoeira, the understanding that I got through the art form, through living this art so deeply, I don't think I could have survived very well here, because the hardest moment in my life was when I came to the US.

First of all, I didn't speak the language. I did not know anybody besides my sister and her family, and my biggest thing is that I knew I was going to do capoeira here, no matter what, even though in Brazil I was also a massage therapist. Everybody said to me, "Look, you don't speak the language. Nobody knows what capoeira is. Why don't you just do massage? You'd make more money." I said, "It's not about the money. Now, I didn't come here for that. I am a capoeira teacher, and that's what I'm going to do. I'm going to teach." "But nobody cares." Everybody said that.

I'm going to tell you this, man. I cried many times. I cried, I swore to God that I was going to leave, but I said, "Now, I'm not going to quit in this." Days, I would get up, decided ... Told my sister, "Tomorrow I'm





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going to go back to Brazil. I don't have to be here. I don't need to do these jobs that I'm doing." I was delivering newspaper in the morning, I was cleaning three houses with my sister, and later on I would paint apartments, and four times a week I went to school to learn English, because that was my goal. I said, "If I leave in six months, if I don't take anything from here, I'll take at least the language." I took it seriously, but I never gave up the intention of creating capoeira to be my only source of income.

While I was doing all other kinds of jobs, and many times very depressed, very feeling sorry for myself, many times, I would come out and say, "You know what, man? Take a look at capoeira, man. Take a look at how the Africans survived so much suffering, and many of them triumphed through capoeira." I said, "Now, wait, I'm not going to quit. I'm not going to quit this, and I am going to continue," and I opened a capoeira school five times in different towns trying to get something going. The only ... The sixth time is when it got to work, and that was in New Haven, when someone said, "You know what? There is this space under this church that you might be able to get some class going." That's how I started, and to make a longer story short, even though it was a lot of suffering, when I acquired what I wanted to do, which was teach capoeira, it was the biggest, biggest deal of my life. Then I taught capoeira at five different universities, and for the past 16 years, I've been teaching capoeira at Yale University.

It doesn't really matter today how much crying and sorry I felt, and how much I missed everything that I had left behind. What matters to me today is that I got what I wanted just because I did not quit, and I can thank capoeira for it.

**Jeremy Lesniak**

That's fantastic. What ... I felt like I was along that ride with you, and felt sad with you. What was that experience, what was that moment with the sixth school you opened, the point when you realized it was working ...

**Mestre Efraim Silva**

Well, the ...

**Jeremy Lesniak**

... what did that feel like?

**Mestre Efraim Silva**

Thank you for asking. When I decided to quit, I said to my friend ... That was the friend in Boston. He was in Boston three years before I came, and I said, "No, I'm not going to do this anymore. This thing doesn't work," and he says, "No, man, you can do this. Look. Try one more time." Then, someone ... I was already starting to do a little work here and there with capoeira, teaching kids in the schools, and I was





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trained by the state as a Master Teaching Artist, which allowed me to come into the schools to - this was a few years later - to integrate arts in the curriculum. In Connecticut, it's an amazing training for the students.

But anyway, so the sixth time when I opened the school, first of all, the reason that I could stay it a little longer without having too many people was that the church allowed me to be there for very little money, so I didn't pay a lot of money, and I had a great space. They gave me all this freedom to do anything I wanted. They really, really loved what I did with capoeira. They supported that, and thanks to this church, St. Paul and St. James Church, I was able to start something and continue powerfully, and it worked. When I left the church, I opened my own school. I have a 2000 sq. feet beautiful studio that I am in love with, but I taught capoeira at that church for about 14, 15 years. Yeah.

**Jeremy Lesniak**

Whoa.

**Mestre Efraim Silva**

It was an amazing opportunity for me, and it worked.

**Jeremy Lesniak**

When you think back of all the people that you've trained with, have taught you capoeira or other elements of martial arts, who has been the most important?

**Mestre Efraim Silva**

I can't deny that was my Capoeira Master because even though he was a pain ... I was 13. I'm going to tell you what he did. I didn't have money. I'm coming from ... I live in a very tiny house in a very bad neighborhood in Sao Paulo with 15 people. My mother couldn't pay for anything. First of all, she didn't want me to do it, but my father said, "No, let my boy do it," and so she let me do it. But many times, I didn't have money to pay my Master. He would make a document with the price of the month and give it to me, and he says, "Look, sign." I said, "Master, I can't come to train this month because I don't have how to pay." I would shoe shine, I would sell limes, I would sell all kinds of things so I could get the money to pay for him, but I was at the school every day, every day. I would sweep the floor, I would help him make Xerox of stuff, I always helped him, but I didn't do because of any other reason besides me loving to be there. I loved him. He was a master, and I looked up for him. He was a mean guy to everybody, very tough to everybody. He was a martial artist in a time that if you don't beat up someone, nobody respects you, so that was his approach to capoeira. I had to fight, so I grew up with this.



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But what I wanted to say is that the influence that he had in my life was incredible because all those little things that he did, he made me sign a, it's called promissória. It's a promise that you are going to pay. At the end of the month, I would put all the money together and I would give the money to him to pay for it, and then he says, "No, that's okay," and he would rip it up, throw it in the garbage, and he says, "No, you already helped me. You swept the floor ... You don't have to this month, but so you know. You know have to pay, you got to pay." He threw it out. Many times he did that.

For me, it was nothing then, and many times I got mad because he was very rude to everybody, and at 17, I moved to another town and I disconnected from him for many years. But living my life as a capoeira teacher, I got to experience the same thing that he experienced with me, and I was able many times, and I still am, to give the same opportunity for a lot of people in my life. People come to me, "Well, I want to train capoeira and I don't have the money." I just remember what my Master did for me. I'm sorry. I get ...

**Jeremy Lesniak**

Yeah, that's okay. I think it's amazing that you're taking that example. I think ... I don't know if you can hear it in your words, but it sounds to me like even though your Mestre was difficult, was rough, it sounds like he had a method.

**Mestre Efraim Silva**

He did.

**Jeremy Lesniak**

There was a reason that he did that. Here in the United States, most of us don't live in an area that is very rough, where it is very dangerous. Some of us do, but I would guess that some of that method was to help prepare you to be safe.

**Mestre Efraim Silva**

It did. Yeah, I don't know exact ... Anyway, I'm sorry. I am a crying baby.

**Jeremy Lesniak**

It's perfectly okay.

**Mestre Efraim Silva**



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What it is, is that I remember these things. It's a big deal for me, you know? Meantime, my ex-wife, she was my partner. She helped me a lot with my business at the time. So meantime, she says, "You can't give these people for free. They have money." I says, "Well, if they have money, they are lying. I am not the one to judge. I know one thing. When I did not have how to pay, my Master let me do it. I didn't stop because I didn't have money." I said, "No, if they don't pay someone else will, and it's okay." My entire life, I built my business, and I'm a very successful artist. I tell my two kids being successful means you be happy with the things that you do and how you do it, and having lots of friends in your life, and I am successful because of it. It doesn't matter to me whether someone is cheating and trying to ... Look, I'm not going to judge that because I don't know the reasons, but one thing I know for sure. The lessons that Mestre Trindade gave to me with those simple little gestures, it was a big deal for me, and many times I talk about him and the things that I remember as a kid, I am moved, I am touched, and I'm inspired by who he was for me.

Years later, I was in the United States, I realized how important he was in my life, so I reconnected with my Master. I brought him to the United States many times. He stayed with me many months. I trained with him. I did so many things. We performed together, and my relationship with him just formed, just because as a grown man, as a capoeira teacher, I understand that who he was for me was a role model, someone that I really, really had to thank for, and I did, and I'm thankful that I have him in my life. I haven't seen him in a while because he had stopped capoeira for a long time because he became a priest then, and now he's starting to come back because at his church he is teaching capoeira. But anyway, that was my story. I hope I answered your question and I didn't talk too much.

**Jeremy Lesniak**

You did. You did. No, no. We want you to talk too much. There is no too much on this show. We want to hear about you and we want to hear your stories.

**Mestre Efraim Silva**

Okay.

**Jeremy Lesniak**

And the longer you talk, the better the stories get.

**Mestre Efraim Silva**

Okay.

**Jeremy Lesniak**



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That's what happens with almost everyone on this show, and I love it. Now, you mentioned earlier about competition, that you had participated in competition.

**Mestre Efraim Silva**

Yeah.

**Jeremy Lesniak**

Could you tell us about that?

**Mestre Efraim Silva**

Yeah, so, to tell the truth, I stop to think about it now, I am not proud of it because it was crazy. It was just a man trying to prove that, "Oh, you know, I'm not afraid of anything," and I wasn't. I grew up in a bad neighborhood, and kicking and hitting and fighting was all I knew, so I did that without a problem. But the competition was very rough. It was full contact and had nothing to do, now when I think over about this stuff, that had nothing to do with capoeira really, because it was just two guys getting into the hoda, we call it hoda, which is the circle where capoeira happens, and we would do a cartwheel. That was the only capoeira thing, and the rest was who can hit the other one faster to knock them out. People had broken arms, broken nose, broken everything, for just a medal.

I did this for a long time, for many, many years. I would train for that. I would train to hit, to get hit, so when I hit, there would be no problem. If I got hit, nobody was going to break me. That was the stupidity. I don't know. I'm not proud of it, but that's what I did. Today, I don't do that anymore. Of course, I'm an older guy, but if the competitions nowadays, they changed the whole entire rules. Now they are conscious about if you hit someone and you intentionally takes blood from someone, you are completely disqualified. The Confederation of Capoeira now have different rules, and that is you can take it down, you can take the person down, you can hold down, whatever that is that you can do, but it has to be with control, without just being mean to each other.

Even though it is like this today, I still prefer staying away from competition. I don't think capoeira is all about that. I don't preach that to my students, but I don't stop them from it if they want to do it because, again, it is part of the art form. It is a human tendency to want to compete with each other, with yourself, and I can't deny anybody because I've done that. I do not advertise, I do not go for it, I don't go out there, I don't say, "This is the best thing ever," but if people want to do, it is an aspect of capoeira. Because capoeira englobals all that, I can't deny anybody from anything. People want just dance? Okay, come, I'll teach you dance. Want to kick each others' butts? Come here. Want to do some flips? I can show you, too. Whatever it is in capoeira, I am willing to teach, and however you want to full focus your intention, is only up to you. I tell my students that capoeira was created for freedom, and it is



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that, so if it is freedom art form, I can't really impose too much my beliefs on anyone, so I don't. That's how I look at it.

Also, because I decided, I chose not to take suffering out of my life, so if there is an area that is really bothering me, and especially because capoeira is all I do, I try not to suffer with anything. If people want to, why am I going to fight them and try to prove? So I just allow people to be whatever they want to be, and empower them the best way I can. I don't compete anymore, I don't advertise, I'm not even so proud about it.

**Jeremy Lesniak**

Sure. Sure. If you could train with anyone in any martial art that you have not, and they could be alive or dead, who would you want to train with?

**Mestre Efraim Silva**

Bruce Lee.

**Jeremy Lesniak**

Okay. That was quick. Why pick that?

**Mestre Efraim Silva**

Even though I've never met him, I admire his ability. Not only, but it looks like even though ... What you know about him and about his sayings, he was a very empowered man who was willing to empower other people. I think beyond movement, I think a master is someone who are willing and able to empower other people to become better than they are. I don't know. I don't know him. I didn't know him, but for the little things that we see, it's like ... I take a class, and now I decided to really get certified as a massage therapist here, at 27 years after. I decided to go to school, and I am. My teacher, last Sunday in the class, he wrote a saying, I can't remember. I should have taken a note. I didn't, but he wrote a very empowering saying, and at the end of the saying, he said, "Bruce Lee." I just think that he was a very, very wise man, even though he seemed to be very young for it, but he was a very wise man. If I had an opportunity, I would choose him.

**Jeremy Lesniak**

And here we are, more than 40 years after his death, and he still has such a strong influence on people that, not just in the martial arts, but you were at a massage therapy class and that quote comes up.

**Mestre Efraim Silva**



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Exactly. It has nothing to do with martial arts.

**Jeremy Lesniak**

Yeah. Powerful.

**Mestre Efraim Silva**

Very.

**Jeremy Lesniak**

How about movies? Do you like martial arts movies? Do you have a favorite?

**Mestre Efraim Silva**

I don't. I don't watch TV so much. I don't ... I have a TV in my house, yes, but it's not even connected to cable. The kids watch some stuff. I watch movies once in a while. I like action movies, but no, there is no one specific ... I always liked Steven Seagal.

**Jeremy Lesniak**

Yeah.

**Mestre Efraim Silva**

I always liked his movies, because I think he was a real martial artist. Yeah. If I were to choose a movie, I would prefer his movies. You know?

**Jeremy Lesniak**

Sure, and he has some absolutely incredible movies.

**Mestre Efraim Silva**

Oh, he did.

**Jeremy Lesniak**



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Of course, people pick on him a lot now. In some ways, he's become a little controversial in the martial arts world, but I don't think anyone can deny the appeal of his early movies. Yeah, we've talked about him often on this show.

### **Mestre Efraim Silva**

Yeah, no, I don't know much about him. This is about movies. This is how it is, right? I either like the movie or I don't. I either like it to the point where I tell you to watch, or I don't care for it. It doesn't matter to me. They are the ones making the money. I don't want to suffer about discussing things that I have no power over, so that's just my take on it.

### **Jeremy Lesniak**

Okay. What are your goals for your martial arts school, and for your training? Why do you keep training? Why do you keep teaching?

### **Mestre Efraim Silva**

Well, look, I'm going to tell you why I do what I do. When I opened my sixth school that was under the church, there was a student that was always there. He had dreads, very long dreads. He had piercings everywhere on his face, on his nose, on the eyebrow, everywhere. He looked like a very crazy kind of guy, right, because I wasn't used to those styles of people in my life growing up in Brazil. He was there, and he was very focused, very trained. When I decided to get this space, he helped me paint. He was there. He was another Efraim in my life. I was an Efraim for my Master. He was an Efraim for me.

Anyway, he trained capoeira. He was a very difficult guy to learn. I would leave him doing a movement. By the time I came back, he would be doing something else, completely off balance, he was so uncoordinated. Anyway, years later, he was training capoeira with me. Years later, he said to me, "Master, I want to thank you. You know, I never actually got to thank you." I said, "For what?" He says, "Well, for having capoeira here, for teaching me, because if it wasn't for capoeira, I think I would be lost in drugs." I didn't even know he did drugs. For me, that was how he was.

He says, "Yeah, I would be completely lost in drugs, because that was what I was doing all the time." He met a girl in my class, they got married, they had two kids. They're divorced now, many years later, but he was the first student that was an American student to become a capoeira teacher under me. He is my oldest student, and I'm proud. He was here last night with us, and I'm proud that he said that to me. The reasons that I do what I do, that I like to travel, to do capoeira, teach capoeira, because I never know who I am touching, who is going to be transformed, just because of who I am through capoeira. So, my love for capoeira is not just because I like to kick and show off my movements even though I'm an older guy. It's because I consciously know that it will transform someone's life at some point. If it is just one anywhere I go, well, it's better than none. I will do capoeira until I die.





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**Jeremy Lesniak**

Wow, that's ... That is all powerful, but that last statement, that you will do capoeira until you die, that's ... I think some people make that claim. They say that something they love, they will do until they die, but you can ... There's a little bit of doubt in their voice. I have no doubt ...

**Mestre Efraim Silva**

Neither do I.

**Jeremy Lesniak**

... from what I just heard. No, no, you will. One day, you will be doing capoeira, and the next day, you will fall over and you will ...

**Mestre Efraim Silva**

Yup.

**Jeremy Lesniak**

I think that that is very ... It was powerful.

**Mestre Efraim Silva**

Thank you.

**Jeremy Lesniak**

It's powerful, and you clearly ... Who knows how many lives you've touched, but you have such a concrete example of that one man, that you quite possibly saved his life.

**Mestre Efraim Silva**

Well, based on what he says, capoeira did, and my being in his life. Yeah. I am proud and honored. This I can tell you.

**Jeremy Lesniak**



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Whoa. Now's your chance to tell us a little bit about you, your school, if someone is interested in having you come teach, I know you travel and teach, so if they were interested in contacting you for that, or they were interested in coming to your classes, tell us about that.

### **Mestre Efraim Silva**

Well, yeah, I have a great studio in New Haven, on 1175 State Street. We have class every night from 7, 7:30 to 8:30, and sometimes until 9:00 on Tuesdays and Thursdays, where through this art form, through capoeira, we teach all the aspects of it, like I already mentioned, the music, the dance, and we focus on the music very much, because nobody can dance with bad music. I teach my students very much about all the percussion aspects of capoeira.

The classes are every night, and anybody can register. It's all levels, beginners and advanced. Tuesdays and Thursdays, we have an amazing program for children. They start start at four years old until 12, and I have a great class. They play music. The kids do very well, actually. Sometimes I tell the adults, "You guys should come to my kids class to learn a little bit from the kids, because you guys can't do anything," you know, making fun of them, but it's true. They are doing very, very well, because the kids don't have any fear. You tell them to do something, they go for it. The kids program is Tuesdays and Thursdays at 5:30 until 6:15, and 6:30 til 7:15.

We also have Samba classes, taught by Thelma Ladeira, who's my friend and works with me for the last five, six years. Great girls. The only Brazilians over there is just me and Thelma. Everybody else are not Brazilian, but they all dance Samba very well. If you see my students playing capoeira ... You know, at some point, Brazilians thought capoeira was, "You know, if you're not Brazilian, you don't have the swing," which is big lie. Capoeira is the world. The world owns it now, and the Americans are kicking behind with it. If there was a competition today against Brazil and the United States, I doubt Brazilians would get too much ahead of the game. They're incredible.

Anyway, so this is for anybody at any age. Anybody can train capoeira on their own limits, and yeah, we are always there. We are always available. I travel teaching, but most of the times it's the weekends, and I do have teachers that teach the class when I'm not around, so it's for anybody.

### **Jeremy Lesniak**

Sure, and of course, we'll have a link to your website so people can find out, if anybody's in the Connecticut area or traveling to the Connecticut area, and they'd like to look you up, and maybe come take some classes, they can do that.

### **Mestre Efraim Silva**

Beautiful. Beautiful.



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### **Jeremy Lesniak**

Sure. Well, as we wrap up, one more final question. If you could give some advice to everyone listening, what would you say?

### **Mestre Efraim Silva**

If I could give advice, which I won't, I'm just going to say that an opportunity to get yourself in any type of martial arts, any type of movement, will keep you young forever. People that are not ... Are using excuses to justify why they don't do it, it is nothing but excuse. If anybody at any moment want throughout the day to stand up and do 20 minutes of any exercise, it will enhance their lifestyle, their life quality. They will live a better life, so what I would like to say is stop using the word try as an excuse. People that want to try to do things have absolutely no intention of doing it, because people that want to do it, they do it, they do it, they do it, they fail, they do it, they fail, they do it, until they get it. I am live example of it. I told you, I opened a school six times, so no trying. Get up and do something so you can live a healthy life. That's what I would like to say.

### **Jeremy Lesniak**

Thank you for listening to episode 116 of whistlekick Martial Arts Radio, and thank you to Mestre Efraim. Over at whistlekick Martial Arts Radio, you can find links to the history of capoeira, some videos, photos, and contact information for Mestre Efraim. You can follow us on social media. We're on Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, YouTube, and Instagram, and our username is always whistlekick. If you want to know what's going on behind the scenes of the show, check out our sort-of-secret Facebook group, whistlekick Martial Arts Radio - Behind the Scenes. Yes, we're great at coming up with creative names.

If you know someone that would be a great interview for the show, please fill out the form at [whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com](http://whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com), or if you want to shoot us a message with a suggestion for a Thursday show or some other feedback, there's a place to do that as well. If you like the show, make sure you're subscribing. You know we're always asking for reviews, because they help spread the word of the show and push us up in the rankings. If you like what we're doing, this is the best way to help.

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