



Episode 86 – Miss Jessica Henderson | [whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com](http://whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com)

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Hello everybody! It's episode 86 of whistlekick Martial Arts Radio - the only place to hear the best stories from the best martial artists like today's guest, Ms. Jessica Henderson. My name is Jeremy Lesniak, and I founded whistlekick but I'm also your host here for Martial Arts Radio. I'm proud to say that whistlekick makes the world's best sparring gear as well as really great apparel and accessories all for practitioners and fans of traditional martial arts. Thank you to the returning listeners and hello and welcome to those of you listening for the first time. If you're not familiar with our products, you should take a look at what we make. Our zip up hooded sweatshirts are super comfortable and they have our popular vintage style logo on the back. Check them out at our website, [whistlekick.com](http://whistlekick.com). If you want to see the show notes, those are on another website - [whistlekickmartialartsradio.com](http://whistlekickmartialartsradio.com). While you're over there on either website, get on the newsletter list. We offer special content to subscribers and it's the only place to find out about upcoming guest for the show. We only email a few times a month. We'll never sell your information, and sometimes we mail out a pretty generous coupon. Today's episode is with Ms. Jessica Henderson - a taekwondo practitioner from my neck of the woods in Vermont. I've known Ms. Henderson for most of her martial arts journey, but that doesn't mean I knew everything about path. When we sat down last week, she was full of surprises. And she hit me with story, after story connecting the dots and is very unusual and somehow still typical martial arts beginning. So enjoy. Ms. Henderson, welcome to whistlekick Martial Arts Radio.

**Jessica Henderson:**

Thank you for having me. I'm excited to be here.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

So, long time listeners will know from the audio quality difference that this isn't a Skype interview or a phone interview that we are sitting across tables from each other.

**Jessica Henderson:**

Yes. In my house.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

In your house, right. I'm trying to remember; I think the last time we did one of these was at this very same table with somebody that you live with. But this isn't about him. This is about you.

**Jessica Henderson:**

He might come up in the interview.



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**Jeremy Lesniak:**

We might talk about him a little bit. I will make reference in the show notes to which episode that was and I'm not saying it now because I think it might be fun for some of the listeners to try and guess so we'll just kind of let that hang out. Of course anyone who knows you already know who we're talking about. But be that as it may, we'll just carry on so, we'll start where we always start. Obviously if you're on the show, you're a martial artist. How did that happen?

**Jessica Henderson:**

Peer pressure actually. I was 16, and most 16-year-old and a high school kid really knows that peer pressure just kind of lives in high school. I've always really liked martial arts and I was always fascinated by martial arts but I was pressured into going. I became close with 2 people - my friend Liza and my friend Justice who went to high school with me. We had classes together and they would disappear on Tuesdays and Thursdays to go teach elusive martial arts programs that I didn't really know much about and they said hey why don't you come down and like check it out. I did and I went to watch Liza's 3rd testing and that was really cool to watch and see. I got to see all these black belts and anything like that. It was my junior year of high school, I remember it's right after February break, I went and I did a trial week, and wearing pj pants and a t-shirt and I did push ups in my first class. Push ups, the whole class. That's all we did. It was me, a white belt, and a bunch of black belts in the class, that's it. That was my first experience with martial arts - push ups. I came back for more.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

You don't know what it says.

**Jessica Henderson:**

I don't know what it says. But yeah, I came back for more. That's how I got started in doing martial arts - 16.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

A lot of people at that age might be interested in martial arts, but there's going to be a lot of peer pressure other way to because when you are a teenager, going into martial arts classes not the cool thing. It's never going to happen. I was doing martial arts, I was a black belt at that age and I still felt pressure against going to class even though at the time of us competing, I was training, so I know what that counter energy is. What was it about these friendships? or about the class? or you? or whatever you had going on in your life that's so overwhelmed that opposite influence that you not only decided to try it but stayed with it at 16.

**Jessica Henderson:**



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Well, I mean my friend Liza is just choose just to act this magnetic personality right she just choose boy stress and bubbly and I think that was part of it too her and I had a long-standing friendship and I think she just sort of like enticing me come come try martial arts come try martial arts. I was like martial arts was never into organized sports ever. My friend try to send me up for soccer and I'll be the kid that was like standing up in the corner of the field like eating my finger nails something like I was "oh there's a foul" like I just don't care then care for organized sports and never cared to even like cheer on sports or go to sports events. I didn't have any sorts of activity level and I didn't like to work out on my own either so the idea that I had friends going into the martial arts too they were cool friends like if you think about the social stereotype that are in high school, I was kind of the shy one I didn't really have too many friends. I had friends supposed lot of friends but not really friends. Not really great friends Liza was a great friend and Liza and Justice were popular. They were the cool kids at school so to do anything with them was I guess in the social hierarchy of high school? Pretty cool, pretty awesome to do that so they push me into it and I was never teased about doing martial arts ever. I was never thought to be like kicky and nerdy so that's ever it, it's just never I never got that peer pressure coming from the other side and in my head had something to do if I was an older teenager? I know some of our younger teens like in our school get a little bit of that "it's nerdy, it's kicky, it's weird" they get that but I think as an older teenager I didn't quite get that.

### **Jeremy Lesniak:**

So you have that first week, you know in your pajama pants doing some push-ups and a comeback. So, it was a trial week so what has your mind said after that first week?

### **Jessica Henderson:**

I needed to do it I needed to comeback it was something... I don't even know I just loved it and I think I had to do it the fact that I've always really enjoyed this idea of martial arts of being able to fight, to defend myself to be strong and all that serves stereotype that comes with martial arts, the positive stereotype. I was enjoyed that and when I was writing stories or anything like that as a child I was always trying to make a character that was a martial artist. I loved it and I went back and my stepfather, he sat me down the couch and he goes "I'm going to pay for the whole year upfront, you cannot quit. You are committed to this for a whole year" and I was like "yeah yeah I'll do it, I'll do it for a year I promise". You promise you do for a whole year I'm going to pay for the whole year upfront not doing in either electronics stuff. I'm paying for the whole year you cannot quit. "I won't quit I won't quit" and I did it and I was there for the whole year and more.

### **Jeremy Lesniak:**

Where do you think those early stereotypes about martial arts came from? Was it movies? Or stories from you friends? Or?

### **Jessica Henderson:**



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Might have been movies, might have been from the movies.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Do you remember some early martial arts movies you might have seen?

**Jessica Henderson:**

It wasn't lot to watch any like this scary movies or fight movies or anything like that. Honestly, I'm going to do a super nerdy for a minute and I think I had to do with my early love of anime and Japanese cartoons because there's a lot of that really rich culture and martial arts is in that culture with the samurai and that whole feudal era and some of the anime cartoons that I watch had to do with that or they were martial artists. Martial art has evolved and I think that it might have had to do something with a little bit of that Asian invasion cultural, obsession that like a started out with pretty young. Pokémon's things like that.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

No, no. Anime is not my thing. I've watch some of it, it doesn't click for me but I know we've got plenty of our listeners that are into it so for their benefit were some little earliest anime's you've been Pokémon's do you remember any of the other?

**Jessica Henderson:**

Well, Pokémon was the game that I played and I watched some of the show. I make my best friend Zia proud here for a minute. She introduced me to this anime called Inuyasha and it took place in the feudal era and they've all fought with swords and they all had martial arts backgrounds

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

I've actually heard of that one. I've may've even seen some of it I can't say.

**Jessica Henderson:**

Nope she introduced me to that one and you know she was really super into anime and kicky things like that she still is, don't let her let you. She's still is I mean I'm still in to but I think that sort of early exposure to that rich culture, Asian culture, helped build that up.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Cool. You know it's a really different kind of origin story than we usually have, people usually start at teen years or long before teen years five, six, nine, or they're starting as adult. The vast majority of



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people we've had on the show started before ten years old and maybe even before eight. So here you know we got a really different perspective from you and so interested in that and it'll be interesting to see how that place out as we talk some more. So of course this whole show has given my stories. I know you've heard some of it episodes you know we get people to tell some pretty good stories, and I'm sure you've got a bunch of them you know whether or not it's going in the details about what your arms were like after a whole class of push-ups cause of course I know your instructor like when you say a whole class of push-ups I can legitimately believe that this was not we did a hundred push-ups spread throughout class I can genuinely see that you know five six seven hundred push-ups throughout a class. But I'm sure you got a plenty of other stories too so take a minute and tell us your best one.

### **Jessica Henderson:**

I had a couple, I got some short ones and I got some long one's and I got some funny one's.

### **Jeremy Lesniak:**

Do it up. Start talking and if you get to a point where you need to catch up all I'll do it.

### **Jessica Henderson:**

Alright. Well let's start the beginning since it's the best place to start. I'm trying to think that the time I think it was after I had started martial arts and I was attending a tournament I was a fully wipe out. I was wipe out for my first tournament let me think about that it was definitely I was attending this tournament my friend Liza she was my guide my mentor throughout my color belt years and she was with me and we were in Johnson State College and a long time ago they had a second story where you could look down into the gym. We were standing up there and she was pointing out some guy to me and she's like "you see that guy down there"? I was like "yeah yeah" she's like "he is the grand champ of the grand champs. Nobody has ever last to him in sparring and he is the best" and she's just going on and on and on about this guy and at this point his only a couple years older than I am and he's just were watching him fight watching on do the grand champ sparring matches and he's so fast and he's so good at it and I was just in awe and she was of course not helping. She's not helping she's like going "he's the best! he kicks so much butt" all that stuff really hyping this man up in my head. So and I had no concepts I was wiped out I had no concepts of what sparring was I was just like floored by how fast they were going and they were clashing clean back and points for (13:508 clashing come back and somehow it was all making sense everybody and it was so cool to me. So fast forward couple of weeks later probably this men walks in my studio his instructor is a student of my instructor so our schools are what you called sisters school and he's going down to pay a little homage to my instructor and he brought a couple of black belts with them and they were taking the team class which is the class that I took because that would be had to have a separate class for teenagers so he could just cry their noses into the ground and beat us up which is great we loved it. So if they're taking the team class and we're all wind up it was me, white belt, presidents, black belts because as we had just said most kid start young, become black belts at teenagers, not me. Not me I'm breaking them all. So we're all lined up to run warm ups (14:52) says to



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me says to the class alright front row, spin around face the background. There is this man facing me, grand champ of grand champs and (15:03) says were going to do some sparring today I mean I just about lost my mind because he is standing in front of me, he is the best sparer in our league. He's one grand champ for years and years and years and years and I'm just like that's it. My fleeting short martial arts career is over I mean this is it. This is the end of this and I mean all he did was just kind of look my belt, look to me, look to my belt, look to me went "Hi" and smiled and that was it like I obviously didn't get down to the ground.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

He didn't murder you?

**Jessica Henderson:**

He did not murder me because I'm here on the show.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Right right. Now on the other side of that exchange I mean cause clearly you went into that with one mind set you had an expectation on what was going to happen in clearly that is not what happened. What did letting go of that (15:54) do I mean didn't open things up for you? Or did you just say he must be a really nice guy or you know what was how did that close up for you?

**Jessica Henderson:**

I'm not really sure. I don't remember the exchange, we used to play a lot of what I would called reindeer games where you can reshuffle all cross the lines and you spar with anybody. So I mean obviously he didn't hurt me or this exchange is pretty normal because I don't remember it but as far as that individual goes I just can have open up the doors for just complete fan girl awe because I was just so he was so cool that I was so not because he was a black belt and I was a white belt and that's how that went. But I never ever had a problem sparring with the black belts because all my friends as I said it was me in the team class as the white belt all my friends are black belts so I'm never had any like visions of grander or anything like that it was just we all fight each other we all play together we all kick the same paddles we all work on the same things and you know they were (17:06) you know patterns are cut off once whatever they work on those and I work on mine and that was it but we all were expected to do the same things.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

In a hindsight, do you think that helped you progress?

**Jessica Henderson:**



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Yes, I think it kind of shape me to be like a more advanced, teaching martial arts cannot comes that going to need to know basis like if we gave all the white belts all the information, they're just going to overwhelmed and be like I'm done now like I can't do this, right? They've just going to warned everybody would. But as a white belt and with the black belts it was it kind of felt a little sink or swim. I had to go in and I had to do it and of course you know what my turning kick spinning hook kick may look like a little different than say my third degree friends but I was still expected to do that combination it was not different cheated down to my ability so I had to rise to the level of expectation and so I think it kind of just helped me stay ahead of myself and advance that I never had any visions of any different expectations of what a black belt was supposed to be than what a color belt was supposed to be? As we all set to work, we're all sets to work out and that's all we did we all work out stops.

### **Jeremy Lesniak:**

Like there's a lot of value in class structure that way. But I was coming up to the ranks it was not common to break out classes at least to schools that I participated in and we'd have you know one class which was everybody in then we have a second class advanced class which was (18:50) enough you know so basically were just shutting off the white and yellow belts and this karate school but I always like having the advance ranks some front of me to look at to say you know. Here's an example on what's going on one of the themes that has come up on the show it's kind of interesting to think of it in the context you bring up is that a lot of people get to the certain level and then they stop doing what they can do in front of others and it takes with that example. They can be really inspiring to someone who is just starting out.

### **Jessica Henderson:**

A lot of the class structure now is they separate and that mean they have to (19:32) At any given point we probably have a hundred students in a day training and they can't possibly bring a hundred students in one room and train especially with this phase that we have. But we separated out by age when I was coming up through the ranks so we had you know kid's classes now we had the teen class and then we had the adult classes. And adults do come and take the teen class but it was never really separated by rank it was always just separated by age. So we were always throwing in all the teens together and I had I wasn't I wouldn't be the only wipe out for long we had some others come along. My friend Ms. Sheena who has been on the show she came up right after me. You know yellow belts and white belts and the sea of black belts teenagers so it was always just by age when it's coming out.

### **Jeremy Lesniak:**

Now I'm curious because of course your day job is as a conventional teacher so I'm wondering is there value in breaking up classes more so like age rather than by rank? Do you think in terms of just a psychology?

### **Jessica Henderson:**



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I think they both have their benefits. I think the philosophy behind breaking up by rank is that you can work all the same things. You work out on the same patterns so you can work in all the same kicks and expectation is pretty level but as I just said when I was in a teen class the expectation for me and rest of the black belts is exactly the same so their stats so separating it by rank. It's always a level playing field. Separating it by age I think you start getting it a little different as far interests go. And how you motivate is different than how you motivate an eight-year-old versus a six teen year old versus a thirty-year-old is very different. And as a teacher that's what I do in school right you separate by age kindergarten, first grade, second grade. And I remember teaching back in a day with a grand master (21:50) and were separated by age. We had the drag ins and what we did with the drag ins that three and five years old. First is what we did with the children that were eight to twelve years old was different versus what we did with the teenagers. Were all working on similar things but the drag ins three and five years old they only had a twenty five minutes class we would have a little morning meetings sort of a circle time beforehand and they got to share what was on their mind and get school out of their head and they were run and just run all the time that was never stopped moving and they would hit things and because they got just so much energy. And then that you can't do that with an adult. You can't just run them you could, you can. With teenagers you can run them. Young adults like in their twenty's you can run them. Older adults they're not coming at martial arts to be run around on obstacle courses and yelled at and have circle time on the beginning. That's not for them. So there's a benefit for doing it by a rank and there is benefit by doing it by age. I've seen both and I like both and I dislike both. It doesn't really matter to me but I guess it's just at the point whenever the school owner. However, it fits into their schedule.

### **Jeremy Lesniak:**

It sounds like it's a question of do you prioritized that contempt the curricular that you're teaching versus prioritizing this style of how you teach that curriculum so?

### **Jessica Henderson:**

It's tricky because you know you separate by age you're going to get a wide variety of a rank and if you separate by a rank you're going to get a wide variety of age. So it's just how do you want to differentiate and how much challenge do you want. I guess.

### **Jeremy Lesniak:**

And what kind of challenge.

### **Jessica Henderson:**

Yeah, and what kind of challenge.

### **Jeremy Lesniak:**





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So that was a great tangent. And we know I mean I was looking at the clock and that was a link (23:50) to it and I'm totally given that listeners know you know I'll tandem such where all the good stuff is as to me that's why the questions we asked here are the same and rather simple. Let's pull back.

**Jessica Henderson:**

Okay.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Now let's go back to high school let's pretend you're sixteen and your friends don't pressure you in the taking class but they pressure you in the morning pottery or basket weaving or something that is not martial arts. What do you think your life would look like now?

**Jessica Henderson:**

I can't say with certainty that I most likely would not be a teacher today.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Really?

**Jessica Henderson:**

Really. My love of teaching and how that came about was through martial arts because I was a yellow belt and grand master 24:40 threw me a red uniform and he looked and he said you're in my leadership team and I was like okay and what that meant was that I taught classes and that's all grand master 24:51 that was we he had himself and he had whole bunch of teenagers teaching and that's what we did when I was going in thinking about career so I wanted to do is college like majors that I want to took pick out my best friend (25:12) looked to me and she goes "why don't you just teach? you teach martial arts like do you don't you love that?" So I went to start teaching all because I think between her point to get out her suggestion and the background that I had in teaching how I love to deal with the little kids and everything. I think was a catalyst for wanting to be a teacher now and I think that when the days that I had feel like teaching is so hard like when I go to my day job and I'm like "ugh it's so hard I have to kind a back track and remember why I started and do that so and it's always you do this because you loved teaching you loved teaching martial arts and loved working with the kids. So remember that, bring back.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**



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Now of course this certainly isn't a judgement but an observation, most schools aren't going to have someone at yellow belt, teenage yellow belt teaching anything and of course you know with that age that rank you're not teaching the black belts had had you think you're teaching I would assume younger, and obviously lower rank students had to do certain things. How do you feel that early emphasis on teaching affected your martial arts education?

### **Jessica Henderson:**

You know you're an expert in something when you can teach it and I'd very quickly became an expert at yellow belt like I became an expert at everything yellow belt lower. That's I suggest to anybody who's coming up to the ranks like if you think that you're struggling was something, try to teach it to somebody else because then you will get a very solid feel for how much you know about that subject. And I suggest to all my color belts as their coming up in their learning you know become an expert at the rank that you're in. Become an expert of green belt. Become an expert of red belt. Become an expert of white belt. I mean I wasn't really teaching I wasn't doing much teaching I was doing warming up and stuff for grand master because he came out and he still did all his own. His own teaching and I would warm up classes but that helped with just my ability to handle myself and handle myself like with confidence and independence and command attention rather than demand it. There were times when I was warming up the kid black belts and they had to yes mam at me even though I was a yellow belt green belt they had to because I was leadership team member but I wasn't teaching them anything I was only warming them up and it just kind of disassociated age and authority and made it so that you know just because I was older or they were more advanced in rank like we were all just learning and I was in authorities standing up there even though I was a lower rank which can go always in the other way too.

### **Jeremy Lesniak:**

And of course, I mean that kind of ties in with the a rather new somewhat recurring team that were having on the show about the difference in skill to do and skills to teach and that a lot of times, most of the time in martial arts we want them together. We assume that when someone has achieved the certain rank, that they can do things with some proficiency that they can teach it. And that's not only is that not true, it's almost always not true. It's rare but it something that we don't tend to think about that it's just I think martial arts is probably the place where we make that mistake the most, and I've been the more I think about the more I'm realizing that as martial artists we need to be taught how to teach.

### **Jessica Henderson:**

Yes.

### **Jeremy Lesniak:**



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And you get that I mean you went to school for the skill set to be able to educate, to present information to children and make them understand things. I see you get that I mean there's so much more of it involve than just like "do this".

**Jessica Henderson:**

Absolutely and we try to teach at young too. We try to get some of our young advanced ranks, we had some very young black belts we try to get them to go out there and try out this whole teaching thing because it helps. Teaching somebody doesn't hurt anybody like so what if you teach them the wrong thing there's going to be somebody I will fix it later not a big deal like don't get hang up on it will fix it later, no big deal. What is important there is that interaction between you know you are the teacher trying to convey something in such a way that somebody else can understand. You are not just passively learning or I guess actively learning. But you're not just seating there doing the art of learning you were actually doing the art of teaching and a science of teaching and being able to do that and I think teaching somebody else I think it makes you better in what you do.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

I agree.

**Jessica Henderson:**

Because you understand it. If you understand it enough to teach it you understand enough to do it. There it is.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

So I think about a time in your life where maybe things weren't rosy? They weren't great you know. You were dealing with something, whatever it was and tell us how your martial arts experience or your martial arts training helped you move past that time?

**Jessica Henderson:**

I quit martial arts for three and a half years. I quit, done.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Like just you didn't just kind of fade away like you're...

**Jessica Henderson:**



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No I faded I faded out but at certain point I was just was kind of done. And then the vicious cycle of which you don't feel like coming back you try to come back but then you realized that you're really out of shape you don't know patterns, you don't come back again. I fought in that circle for a long time I fought in that circle for 3 1/2 years. That coupled with graduating from college, trying to get a new job, moving around, a lot trying to find my place at you know twenty-two years old trying to find my place in the world. That was the low point I had no stability. I had no consistency. No constant, nothing to get my energy out nothing to feel like no activity to make my body strong. To make me feel confident. So my low point was when I didn't have any martial arts. And I had nothing I was sort of floating in this abyss of nothingness. No jobs and no money and apartments and bad boyfriends and all that stuff just you know just nothingness of my early twenty's. And it's with the slow fade that I left martial arts is with the slow fade that I came back. And to be perfectly honest with you and with the listeners on the show here that period where I didn't have any martial arts is kind of blank like there's not much in there. There's just a whole bunch of nothing, It's just that (32:24) in my head of days and weeks and jobs and apartments and advanced and it's nothing. It's just all jumbled in there. Martial arts helps keep that consistency a little bit but I faded out and I faded back in and then it kind of came back to me and my friends reaching out "hey what are you doing? You know we miss you we've been seen you in a while and going into a couple of testing and a couple of events". And it was in 2013 I want to say that I came back and went to a tournament like visited people, I visited you, I visited all my martial arts fans and they just opened their arms and welcome to me back in and it was just as.. it was a very powerful feeling it was very emotional for me to just feel so like wanted in a time where I wasn't feeling and a feeling like I belong somewhere where I didn't feel like I belonged anywhere so shuffling from jobs and from houses and from places and things like that. And I finally came back when grand master (33:28) at the end of his tournament he grabbed my shoulders and he goes this is going to suck but she just got to do it, we'll see you on Tuesday and I came back and that was the end of it. I haven't looked back. So my low point was when I was missing martial arts. I was missing that consistency.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Could you recognize that?

**Jessica Henderson:**

I did not at that time because martial arts at that time I kept telling myself I was a luxury I couldn't afford. I was I felt like I was stuck between a rock in a hard place. I was away from my home and instructor. He was far away, was an hour and a half and I was in a visiting school and I was trying to pay tuition for both places but when there's no money martial arts gets expensive. Uniforms and gear and tournaments and events and things like that and I just felt like it wasn't a luxury that I couldn't afford. And at the time I just was like "whatever, whatever" I don't need it, I don't need it. And having comeback after that long hiatus, I had you call a hiatus because I don't have no intentions of coming back, I had quit. But having comeback, I recognize that is like that I was missing martial arts I was missing the community and I was missing the consistency and the routine that it offered me.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**



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One of the things I've always said to people when they got new spot and a kind of like you're in it. It's easy to say no, right? It's a lot easier to say no to things than to say yes. Saying yes to things is hard because there's just so much to do. It's so much easier to not do anything, right? Martial arts is always there for you. And that's the thing I think a lot of people don't realize is that yeah there's the community aspect, there's class aspect, there's all of that. But what you've learned never leaves your head like it's always there and so maybe you couldn't afford classes at that time or you told yourself you couldn't afford classes. But I'm going to guess you needed that rank because could have gone in the backyard, in the living room or something and train I mean there's always something I mean there are people out there that struggle financially that find their ways to train I know some of them, I worked with some of them. But I think when something comes into your life and then it kind of leaves for a little bit it helps you understand the value.

### **Jessica Henderson:**

Absolutely I totally agree of that. I quit on the cusp of black belt which is why lot of people quit they don't want the test for black belts, scary for them.

### **Jeremy Lesniak:**

Sure? Is that why?

### **Jessica Henderson:**

No, that's not why I quit. I quit because I found that I was (36:24) how many time and I don't have any money and I was tired, those sort of things that, whatever. But I think that if I had stayed with it, I don't think that I would be quit the same black belt today or then as I am today. I think that it would be a little different. I think I can respect and appreciate the rank a little bit more now that I'm a little bit older. And I'm a little bit wiser I guess.

### **Jeremy Lesniak:**

I don't think you have to laugh through that.

### **Jessica Henderson:**

I have a little bit more life experience I think that three and a half years can have afforded me that opportunity to have that perspective like "alright well, life with martial arts here, life without martial arts here, life with martial arts again, alright? well". We've done this couple times now let's, this is better, it's better to be here.

### **Jeremy Lesniak:**



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A lot of people seem to go through that time. They may not actually step away from martial arts but sometimes it's just going through emotions and feeling uninspired. And then something kind of kicks you in to that you know past that.

**Jessica Henderson:**

Yep. I was well inspired for sure.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Yah, I mean, you were there.

**Jessica Henderson:**

I was there

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

If you were really inspired you would've been there, you would have found a way.

**Jessica Henderson:**

Yes of course. I would have found a way. When there's a will there's a way. And there was no will at that point. I was just, I'm inspired.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Think for a minute now. There been a bunch of people that you had influence a positive impact on your martial arts career. You know you're (37:59) instructor. Friends that pressured you in the starting classes. The grand champ, of grand champs that you thought was gonna murder you.

**Jessica Henderson:**

Who is (38:11) in my house?

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Who is in the next room right now. Who was on the other side of this table the last time that I was in this house. But if we take all them out for a second, and I forced you to pick somebody who's the most influential in your martial arts upbringing, who would it be?

**Jessica Henderson:**



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Well, I don't have to give a special shout out to my families who did push pressure me into martial arts because not only did she pressure me into martial arts, she actually taught me everything that I needed to know between white belt and like blue belt. Everything grand master (38:48) who's my instructor, but every time I'm promoted to a new rank, Liza the one teaching me my pattern. She taught me how to teach the kids she was my partner in crime when we taught the kids and when we ever had to go to events we were always driving together. We were always talking about her martial arts and her competitive days and everything about her martial arts she passed on to me and I carried the torch sometimes when she was busy doing other sports and other commitments in school, I carry the torch of teaching for her like that's she taught me how to do it. So, I do have to give a special shout out to her because without her, I think my color belt days will be a little different.

### **Jeremy Lesniak:**

And of course, she's been on the show.

### **Jessica Henderson:**

Yes, she has.

### **Jeremy Lesniak:**

Episode 7 if memories serves me in full. Will link in the show notes but one of the top rated episode. Just put in that out there. I mean whether or not there's a correlation was to say but the numbers don't lie.

### **Jessica Henderson:**

I think as far as influence I'm trying to think there's somebody outside of martial arts like mean master (40:00) who took me in, right? as a college kid when I came, I left grand master (40:05) school because I was going to college and I went last year (40:09) school. He took me in and he passed on everything and he and I have developed of a fairly I'd say a pretty close relationship is far as just you know, beyond just like an instructor and student you know if I need some different kind of advice sometimes I'll just choose to shoot a message and he kind of been guides me a little bit more but I think my step father he sat me down in the couch, I'm signing you up for a year, I'm paying for an advance. I think that he deserves some credit there because if he had not told me "girl you were doing this for the whole year and you are not quitting, do not quit, do not make me waste my money". Was a spur to keep me going you know teenage interest you know I could have one bad day but my guess "huh done" I'm out of here man I'm out of here I can't do this anymore. But knowing in the back my mind that I was to disappoint him if I just gave it up, I think kind of helped me continue on that path

### **Jeremy Lesniak:**

Why do you think he did that?



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**Jessica Henderson:**

Pay for upfront

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Yeah. Yeah.

**Jessica Henderson:**

Well my step father's a business man. Through and through, he's a business man. So economically speaking it made sense for him. He just paid for it upfront. Because he didn't want to have to do any of it. Grand master (41:43) was doing an electronic EFT kind of service at that point and my step father wanted nothing to do with it. He wanted to be, he just want pay for it and he would have loved to pay like a cheque every month but economically speaking for him in a business sense, it made sense for him to pay for the whole year just like one cheque.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

That couldn't have been the only reason.

**Jessica Henderson:**

I think in his head, he knows things man, he knows things that...

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

About you?

**Jessica Henderson:**

About me that like I don't even know myself you know his just he's a dad like he knows. And I think that he just kind of knew that if he didn't give me that push that said "you need to stay with this". That I would have in my (42:28) teenage girl kind of ways that I might have just quit and left it and I think that he knew that I needed that, to be pushed forward.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

So, let's talk about competition.





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**Jessica Henderson:**

Oh competition. Competition.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

You've done some competition?

**Jessica Henderson:**

I have done some competition, I haven't done competition lately, but I've done some competition.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Tell us about that. Tell us about your competition.

**Jessica Henderson:**

I cried my way through my first tournament.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Really?

**Jessica Henderson:**

I did.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

That the one you mentioned as white belt or you were..

**Jessica Henderson:**

Yes, that was the first one. I cried my way through that I was nervous, so nervous to go out there I was "wasn't it adult division"? Right? So, sixteen and over is an adult division and to go out there and do my pattern just seems overwhelming and I.. and it was and my stepfather come.. he'd come to watch and I remember looking in the stance "I didn't see him" he at like done to the bathroom or something I didn't see him and I thought he was going to missed it because my.. like my division was being like up and there were calling out the other girls like I didn't see my stepfather, I didn't see it there didn't see that and I was just devastated that he was going to missed it that he'd come to watch and he was going to missed it and I was nervous and all these emotions I just sob my way. But I made it through. I don't know



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what I placed I can't tell you what I placed but I made it through and I continue to compete all the way through my color belt is always.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Did you like it?

**Jessica Henderson:**

I think so. I think I liked it. I like for really want anything?

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Okay before that.

**Jessica Henderson:**

So well before that I was never good at sports or anything like that I had no trophies or anything from my childhood I was like... like I said I was that kid on the corner of the soccer field going like "Oh look there's the ball" I didn't even care for any of those participation things or anything like that but even when I was competing I was always second place or a third place. I never really want anything until that belt and I won grands twice as a red belt and that was really good that was really good to feel like that to win that. As a red belt it's seemed very strange to me as are my friends are black belts and they always won grands and things like that so to win it as red belt seemed very like "wow! this is really cool!" And actually to be prank that was the last time I competed.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Really? When was that?

**Jessica Henderson:**

I went out on a high note. 2008 or 2009 and a..

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

So little while ago.

**Jessica Henderson:**

It was a little while ago now as a black belt that I have some nerves about ever competing again as far as like what the black belt division looks like and you know the ladies' division is getting bigger and bigger



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and there's some really great ladies out there and I'll be honest like that idea of not winning of standing in front of the judges and having to look at my pattern and go "nah". It's fight like I get like nerves and I'm like "No" cause if I'm going out there I want to win and I tried really hard that I worked on my pattern a lot and I get feedback from my other black belt friends and they tell me that you know my pattern is really good and everything like that that I have a hard time getting out on my own way to get in front of the fight judges and go. Use my pattern. So maybe I'll compete in the future if I got to get out of my own head first. Over it.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

It's a good goal.

**Jessica Henderson:**

Yes.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

It's a good... something good to work for. There might be some listening that are thinking and maybe I'm one of them because it's something you're really intimidated to do. Maybe that's, that's where the growth is.

**Jessica Henderson:**

Maybe, I've said that too that to compete would be a little bit outside my box. So, it would probably be really good for me, to get back out there and get into it and do it all over again caused I used to do it as a color belt I was a heavy competitor I competed at all the events and I travel for some tournaments as far as Connecticut and Hampshire for tournaments. And you know I did okay, I did alright. Sometimes I was the only one in my division that won gold caused I was the only one in the division which you know as a teenage color belt like that sometimes like would (47:04) when I would go down and travel there. I think they did it with like you're sixteen to eighteen or...

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Usually fifteen to seventeen.

**Jessica Henderson:**

I was right in back and there was just me sometimes. So that was hard too but maybe I'll compete again.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**



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I think you should.

**Jessica Henderson:**

We'll see, we'll see...

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Tell me I'll be there.

**Jessica Henderson:**

We'll see.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

I'd like to be next time. So if you could train to somebody that you haven't anybody, anybody living or dead, who would you want to train him?

**Jessica Henderson:**

Oh! Hands on Ronda Rousey.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Really?

**Jessica Henderson:**

Yes.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Okay.

**Jessica Henderson:**

Not because she's an MMA fighter, but because she's amazing. She's amazing on what she does. She does have a judo background?

**Jeremy Lesniak:**



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Yup.

**Jessica Henderson:**

And I have seen her flip dudes right over her hip and like break them. And you know maybe not really break them but hurt them and they are like "whoa!" you know and I'll probably talk about that a little later but self-defense is kind of personally why I started martial arts. That idea of being able to fight defend myself but it's a personal goal of my own to work on my self-defense and I think that she would be the lady to go to if I needed to work on some holds and some grabs and some grappling. She's awesome at it.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

What is it about Ronda that really calls you? Cause of course there are other people that might be less well known but there are you know there's some prominent female grapplers I mean Kyra Gracie is very well regarded in the jiu-jitsu world. I'm guessing it's more than just her skill in judo.

**Jessica Henderson:**

The fact that she's a woman is helpful, I think.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Okay.

**Jessica Henderson:**

I mean I don't follow UFC very very much I kind of just look at like the big names and things like that but she's a female fighter she did very good she's very well. She did very well in UFC. And I think that as a female fighter she's around the same height, weight as I am and I think that just watching her do all that stuff as a female fighter as somebody who's about my size. I feel like I can relate to that a little bit like that would be so cool to learn to "Yeah! Let's work out with Ronda Rousey" like that be really cool I mean that would be awesome.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Okay, great answer and I think the first time we've had her as that answer. So that's funny I'm enjoying the difference, different answers that people give to that question. Martial arts movies, do you have a favorite? Couple favorites?

**Jessica Henderson:**



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Yes and no.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Zero favorites?

**Jessica Henderson:**

Sort of like I watch the martial arts movie but it's more because there are people in my house who forced me to watch martial arts movies.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Did perhaps to previous guess on the show so overwhelmed you with martial arts films that you feel a little resistance watching them ever again?

**Jessica Henderson:**

Sort of. I'm going to be a (50:16), I fell asleep during Best of the Best like I want to watch it but I don't want to watch it. I fell asleep during it. Martial arts movies are some other mark absolutely hilarious like some other might really be rated and they're funny they're fine to watch.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Like what?

**Jessica Henderson:**

I got crazy names I don't even remember. Like the ones you watch on the (50:37) network the ones I come on kung fu Tuesdays or something.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

The one's really named has nothing to do with anything that goes on there's no plot and it's just the sequence of fight scenes.

**Jessica Henderson:**

Yeah like the woman in dragging kimono in my closet. I don't know something like this.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**



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There's probably a martial arts movie called that out there somewhere because there are so many of them.

**Jessica Henderson:**

Probably and I enjoy watching them because I love to look at them and go. That won't work. Dude you can't do that. You cannot do that, that's not going to work. And it's funny to watch them but I can't say I really have like a favorite sort of thing.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

We put out actually the most popular at least of the time of recording this social media post that we've ever done was you know you're a martial artists if and it was ten things and one of them was you've ever been (51:34) in a movie theater for say... that wouldn't work while watching martial arts movie.

**Jessica Henderson:**

Yes, yes.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Right? and that if I mean that post will pop up periodically on our different social media for people that are listening but like hundreds of re-shares and shares of re-shares it was insane. It's the first thing we've ever done that truly went viral so it was a lot of fun there. When you said that reminded me of that. How about actors? There anybody you like? Despite hating their movies.

**Jessica Henderson:**

It's not that I hate their movies. That's not it. It's not that I hate their movies. It's just that I was not the kid that grew up with martial arts movies and going "I want to do that". That was not me like I watch them like that where playing martial arts came from was watching like Inuyasha and things like that. Say I have a favorite actor and you like to be really cliché and say like Jackie Chan or Jet Lee or people like that but...

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

But, not really.



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**Jessica Henderson:**

It's not. That's isn't genuine and I don't want to do that so...

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

That's fair, that's fair. Books? How we will get to something here I mean this is the last of the three content questions?

**Jessica Henderson:**

I do wanna read and it's been recommended a few times of the show (52:53)?

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

You have to.

**Jessica Henderson:**

Yes, I've been told that I have to and the copy that was in my house has moved out of my house so...

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

I bought that copy.

**Jessica Henderson:**

That copy was given to somebody because it moved out of my house. Into his own house so that's like great and fine and I haven't, he's a book lover and I totally did not get a chance to read that before he left my house so I have to buy a copy and read that but a lot of things that I read about martial arts come from the internet.

**Jessica Henderson:**

Yes, all of it. Wikipedia is so true make sure you cite it on all your research papers. For serious if I ever want to look at something that's outside of my martial arts if I want to look at karate ranks or if I want to look at kung Fu ranks or I want to look at something you know judo, Jiu jitsu anything like that. First I consult Wikipedia to get a base line. I always like to get a base line and I start googling and I just that's, that's where a lot of my martial arts reading would come from. From that like not too long ago, couple of weeks ago I did like spend two hours on the internet looking up the history of taekwondo and ITF taekwondo and WTF taekwondo and ATF and ATA taekwondo and try to figure out where I came from like figuring out the (54:10) and the families and the (54:12) and you know where did the blue wave





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come from and why, I was trying to figure it all out. I can't say I came to anything conclusive but I did spend about two hours martial arts reading. So the internet is usually where I get that but I do want to read.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Okay well it's, it's a great book and it will completely for anyone out there that has read it. If you've train in taekwondo, at least for me it kind of upended my perspective on what taekwondo was you know I won't give anything away.

**Jessica Henderson:**

I heard that some other political background of it is little bit like "Wooaah". I did not expect that.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

It's so much more than "wow" it's insane.

**Jessica Henderson:**

Yah.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

If the guy who wrote this didn't have the most insane collection of footnotes, citing interviews and letters and all these things that he spent years collecting, I would think he was complete farce.

**Jessica Henderson:**

Like he just made it up.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

It's sounds like a ridiculous martial arts movie it really does. Someone could do a documentary version of that book and if they didn't know that what it was they would watch it and say this is ridiculous. It's never going to happen.

**Jessica Henderson:**

Like the (55:29) and the mermaids or something like a foe documentary, what they called those?

**Jeremy Lesniak:**



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Mock-umentary?

**Jessica Henderson:**

A mock-umentary yes! I teach English.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

I don't think we want to string the words foe and documentary together in that way. I think the junction point sounds like a couple of other words together really appropriate for the show so we'll move on. And anyone that gets that kudos to you. if you don't, that's fine. How about goals?

**Jessica Henderson:**

You got to have goals in martial arts. It what keeps you going.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

What are yours?

**Jessica Henderson:**

First promote, that's hopefully on the horizon.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Why?

**Jessica Henderson:**

Why? Cause I hopefully on the horizon.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

No. Why do you want to promote?

**Jessica Henderson:**

To be totally honest I want to learn any patterns man. I love learning patterns like that is along with self-defense that is I love learning something new and it's not something that I get to do very often as an adult I don't get to learn new things like "yeah sure going on there reading stuff" that's one thing but to actually it's somebody teach you something and physically learn it? I love that, I love learning new



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patterns so that's partially why I want to promote and just to learn more just to keep going you know. Another goal, I want to start someday a woman's self-defense program. I really do it something that I find that I'm pretty passionate about. Pretty like the whole dis-junction between male and female and cultural norms and things like that very I won't get on like a feminist here on the show, try to avoid that. But that (57:29) I want drives me to want to do with my self-defense program and get every women to feel strong and capable and confident and I that's because martial arts and self-defense helps me feel that way even though sometimes self-defense makes me feel like "Ohh Squamish" like the idea of like you know palming someone's nose and to their brain make me feel like "waaah it's so gross" were breaking somebody's bones under my hands like that's, it's freaks me out but the actual real idea of it is alarming, but it makes me feel very capable and I want every I want every woman from age twelve, thirteen I mean kids too but kids don't quite they're not quite as an insecure as teen, young teenagers. I want every woman from twelve to thirteen all the way up to feel that capable and strong so eventually I think I like to get there. To teach something like that.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

It's a good call.

**Jessica Henderson:**

Yeah.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

You should do that.

**Jessica Henderson:**

I've had some feedback from some of my lady friends who they'd say "Yeah I would do that if you try the program, I would do that". And you know I think that I'd like to.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Nice.

**Jessica Henderson:**

Yah.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**



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Keep us apprised of course if it'd happens you know we'll go back, we'll edit your shows like we do for all the rest of our guests as they have new cool stuff coming up. We put it on there because you know we want people to know what's going on. We want to share these things.

**Jessica Henderson:**

Alright.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

So now sort of your commercial time you know you have something going on you want to share or promote or I know you do but, pretend that I didn't say that

**Jessica Henderson:**

Pretend that you didn't you know that well. For the listener's sake, I haven't recently decided to (59:26) and start a blog and yeah everybody starts a blog I know that. Everybody starts a blog. Just hear my hair for a hot second. Writing is something I've done for decades at this point. It feels like I have started writing when I was very very young. I never share with anybody because I never wanted to burden anybody with my writing. And now the idea of starting a blog and sharing is very, it's great. It's a little bit like I'd sit along comfortable but it's new and it's there and it's called [teakdstudio.wordpress.com](http://teakdstudio.wordpress.com) and it's about martial arts, it's about travelling with the cup of tea always and use some creative writing out there too and I do some, I have been freelance writing for one of our martial arts associations. PUMAA Professional Unified Martial Arts I'm not sure I think that's the acronym Professional Unified Martial Arts Association.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Make sure it's in the show notes.

**Jessica Henderson:**

Yup. And I've been doing some freelance articles for them and that's pretty new that's baby just like my blog. If everybody can go and check everything out, that'd be great.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

We'll have links but of course you know [teakdstudio.wordpress.com](http://teakdstudio.wordpress.com)

**Jessica Henderson:**

Yes, so T but it's spelled out t e a.



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**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Like drinking tea.

**Jessica Henderson:**

Like drinking tea right but.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

You're twisting it up.

**Jessica Henderson:**

I know.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Making it weird.

**Jessica Henderson:**

Making it weird. [teakdstudio.wordpress.com](http://teakdstudio.wordpress.com).

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

What kind of stuff of people find over there?

**Jessica Henderson:**

Martial arts stuff, I got a couple of articles. I have some really great interviews actually that I started doing for...

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Wait you can interview people in words? You can write it out and doesn't have to be audio?

**Jessica Henderson:**

Yes! Yes!

**Jeremy Lesniak:**



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Oh bizarre.

**Jessica Henderson:**

Yeah. It's just another way to do it. Some female martial artists that are there (1:01:30) have a couple. And the project does called Fortune of the (1:01:35) and it's just lady martial artists just how they feel about being a leading martial artists how to be feel about being a woman in general. And you know how they stay inspired and what inspires them you know the questions are a little different for each woman depending on who they are and what I know about them and they've been willing to share some really great stuff so that project they hope it will continue but for now I just have a couple of ladies on there.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Well of course I've played dumb as I'm asking you this questions but I have read some of that stuff and it's great stuff and I hope that the listeners do check it out because we're never going to be digging deep on the written word with their show. At least not until we bring on more people doing the work because the irony is that I've spent a lot of time writing and editing professionally but I enjoyed this format this is what I dig.

**Jessica Henderson:**

This is different.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

This is my gem.

**Jessica Henderson:**

This is fine let that be your gem.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

It is. So you have any parting advice for the people that are listening.

**Jessica Henderson:**

I mention something earlier in the show about getting out your own way and not rushing. I think I might have mention that when I was talking about my hiatus not rushing into you know the life experience kind of let it let it feel you, let it you know, I would be a very different black belt today then I would be then vice versa or whatever. And you know just give yourself the time and a space to grow and get out your own way and try to get out of your head a little bit when it comes to doing martial arts, you're not



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going to be perfect at it. Nobody's perfect at it. You have lots room to grow. When I was in the teen class as a white belt to the black belts I saw that a lot. They still had room to grow. I certainly have lots of room to grow. So just take your time and remember that we're trying as the instructors are trying to feel you up and turn you into a black belt and turn you out from a black belt to a master and from master to a grand master and all the way up. So you know kind of come to class with an empty, come to your classes with an empty glass. Somebody could be filled with stuff and just don't rush it don't try to pour all and spill it everywhere. Just take your time and get out on your own way and don't expect to be perfect. Nobody is.

### **Jeremy Lesniak:**

Thank you for listening the episode 86 of whistlekick Martial Arts Radio and thank you to Ms. Henderson. Head on over to [whistlekickmartialartsradio.com](http://whistlekickmartialartsradio.com) for the show notes including links photos and references to the other episodes we mention on today's show. If you like the show, make sure you're subscribing or using one of our free apps that are available for both iOS and android. For those of you kind enough to leave us review remember we randomly check out the different podcast review sites like stitcher in iTunes and we find you're review there, we mention on the air, be sure you email us for your free box of whistlekick stuff. If you haven't left us review yet please do help us out leave one. Those reviews are a lot more important than you may think. If you know someone who would be a great interview for the show please fill out the form [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 too. You can follow us on social media. We're on Facebook, tweeter, Pinterest and Instagram pretty much everywhere you can think of and our username is always whistlekick. Every episode is also on YouTube so check us out there if you prefer and remember the products you can find at [whistlekick.com](http://whistlekick.com) or on amazon are zip up hoodies our whistlekick.com exclusives so head on over it there to check those out. If you're a school leader or a team coach, you should check out our whole sale program at [wholesale.whistlekick.com](http://wholesale.whistlekick.com) it includes discounted pricing and some other great benefits. But that's it for today so until next time Train hard, smile, and have a great day.