



Episode 396 – Professor Cindy Hales | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com



Jeremy Lesniak:

Hello there, everybody! Welcome! What is going on? This is whistlekick martial arts radio episode 396. Today, I am joined by Professor Cindy Hales. I'm Jeremy Lesniak. I'm your host on this show. I'm the founder of whistlekick and I'm just a guy. A guy who loves martial arts in all forms and so we bring you this show twice a week, all for free and you could find every past episode, show notes and a whole bunch more at whistlekickmartialartsradio.com. Now, if you head on over to whistlekick.com, you'll see all the projects that we're involved in from martial journals, there's a bunch of stuff over there, first cup, tons of things so check out whistlekick.com and while you're over there, if you do make a purchase, you can use the code PODCAST15 which is going to get you 15% off anything that we make whether it's sparring equipment or uniforms or apparel, there's a bunch of fun stuff no matter what you do, who you are because it's all about martial arts and bringing everyone together. I've said it before on this show that we all have more in common than we have separating us and today, our guest, Professor Hales has a slightly different story. She started later in life than most of us but, if anything, that seems to have given her the space to dedicate more to her training to more fully explore who she is as a martial artist. Now, as much as I have in common with her, there's plenty that she's got that I do not have and I say that with nothing but admiration so I hope you will enjoy this episode because I certainly enjoyed talking to her so here we go. Professor Hales, welcome to whistlekick martial arts radio.

Cindy Hales:



Episode 396 – Professor Cindy Hales | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com

Hey, Jeremy, how are you?

Jeremy Lesniak:

I'm doing great, thank you. How are you?

Cindy Hales:

I'm doing great. I'm really excited to chat with you.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah, yeah, me too. As I'm looking out the window and listeners know that I often use the most cliché conversation starter you ever could, which is the weather, and I'm looking out and it's dark and it's grey and you mentioned that you're in Seattle and I'm wondering if it's also dark and grey and kind of drizzly there.

Cindy Hales:

It is also kind of dark and grey and sort of raining where I'm at, yeah.

Jeremy Lesniak:

That's the stereotype for Seattle, isn't it? That it's always like that?

Cindy Hales:

Totally. Yeah except when it's not and then it's really beautiful.

Jeremy Lesniak:

you folks definitely don't have the snow that we do so dark and grey versus snow. I think it's a bit of a toss-up.

Cindy Hales:

This year we had some crazy snow. There's like two feet of snow at my house, yeah. Like which is not normal for Seattle at all. Yeah, crazy.

Jeremy Lesniak:

One of my favorite things about this show is that we talk to people from all over the place, all over the world and we talk to them, not so much about the weather, but about martial arts and one of the goals of this show, and I don't say this too often, is to get people to realize that wherever you are and whatever you train, we're far more alike than we are different. The world is far too divisive and it drives me crazy so...



Episode 396 – Professor Cindy Hales | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com

Cindy Hales:

100%, I agree with that.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Good! Good, I'm glad. Let's bring people together by talking about you and let's start that process by talking about how you started in the martial arts. What's that origin story like?

Cindy Hales:

I didn't start martial arts until I was 26. I actually, a friend showed me the UFC tapes, you know? The Royler Gracie, or Royce Gracie, UFC and I saw those and I wasn't into any martial arts or anything but it just really stuck with me. I was like what is that that he's doing and then about 6 years later or a few years later, I was riding a bus and saw a school and was like I saw that stuff, I got to go learn that stuff and it was a Marcelo Alonso school in Tacoma, Washington and yeah, I went in and I was like immediately hooked. It was Brazilian Jiu Jitsu. It was crazy.

Jeremy Lesniak:

We've had a number of people on over the years that they had some spark, some initial experience with martial arts in whatever form it might have been but there's that delay you talked about it, what did you say, 6 years?

Cindy Hales:

Yeah.

Jeremy Lesniak:

A delay until they could start but something stuck with you. Something took hold because you're not mentioning anything happening before your mid-20s that settled itself into your mind as far as martial arts so what was it about those UFC tapes that stuck with you so strongly that 6 years later, you said I have to do this now that I can see where I can do it?

Cindy Hales:

I think I knew fighting looked like punching people. That was just my common conception of what fighting would be, I guess. I didn't really think about fighting but if I thought like what is fighting? It's punching people and maybe kicking people and then I saw Royce Gracie like kind of grab on to people and take them down and do his stuff and I was just like, I didn't even, I was like what is that? How is he doing that? There was no frame of reference of what it was. It's just like magical like that's some weird magic. He was a little guy. He would seem like this underdog guy like you never though he was going to win and then he won and I was just like, that's crazy, I want to learn that and then it just, yeah, 100% stuck with me where it was like when I saw there's my opportunity, I didn't even know it was something that you could learn. It was like the same thing I saw from this weird tape and it's like oh my god, there's



Episode 396 – Professor Cindy Hales | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com

an opportunity for me to learn how to do this and it's right here on my bus stop. Why would I not take it? How could I not take it? So yeah, went in and was like I got to learn this. What do I need to do?

Jeremy Lesniak:

And so, what was that like? What was the other side of that moment of what do I have to do to take this?

Cindy Hales:

I went into...I started in 2001. It was just a small gym. Marcelo was from Brazil, didn't really speak a lot of English. The rest of the people in the gym just kind of seemed like I was a little intimidated. I wasn't used to that environment. I didn't even know what I was getting into but I was just like I have to be here. I have to come here and Marcelo welcomed me in and on the first day showed me some keylock and basic stuff and let me get the moves and was like oh, good job and it was just like my god, this is a thing I could learn. I could learn this. There's a guy and I just started coming back and I just came back every day. Eventually I just quit my job and trained full time. I was completely hooked.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Okay, hold on. You literally quit your job to train fulltime?

Cindy Hales:

Yeah, yeah. I had a corporate job. I was managing a call center and I was not real happy of my job and I thought I need to, I had gotten married, I was trying to kind of like be an adult and got this job and then I started Jiu Jitsu because I was actually pretty unhappy with my job and I was like, okay, found Jiu Jitsu like this thing that just appeared in my life and then I started doing it and I did it for about a year and then I was just god, I'm really not happy with this job. I just was really happy when I do Jiu Jitsu so I'm going to go do Jiu Jitsu and then took some lesser jobs, filled in when I would...I was training, I was working in Seattle and I was actually training in Tacoma which is about an hour away and I was doing all the stuff and I was like man, I just want to focus on training, what makes me happy and yeah, I've done that ever since like 2002. I basically just been filling in with little odd jobs and training and then I started teaching and now, I run a school and I literally just fell in love with Jiu Jitsu and it just like consumed me.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Now, we're going to get a little personal for a minute and I hope that that's okay. There's a...I'm sure people can empathize, they can understand with the starting training and wanting to do it all the time, that's something that I bet a lot of listeners right now are nodding along saying, yeah, I get that and then you've got people saying okay, yeah, her job is teaching, I get that. that makes sense and to say that you are training fulltime, that makes sense. You go to the gym or the dojo or whatever you call it and you're training on your own and you're taking classes and you're teaching class, that makes sense but there is a gap in the middle, right? Because you don't start teaching your 1st year, your 2nd year. Usually takes a



Episode 396 – Professor Cindy Hales | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com

few years to start teaching so I'm going to guess that there was some support. You said you were married, from your partner, through all this. What was that...there must have been a conversation and, I'm going to guess, there was a kind of a weird conversation. Honey, I want to quit my job and go do Jiu Jitsu fulltime. What was that like?

Cindy Hales:

I think he kind of knew that well, that's what she's going to do. I'll be honest. We ended up splitting up. I'm actually great friends with him now. He's still a part of my life but the relationship didn't continue in the way it was. I'm maybe a little different from other people and I get very focused on things and sometimes I can look back and say, maybe it was not the best decision but it's like I was just like this is where I need to go with my life. I think, often, people think oh yeah, it would be great to quit your job and go train. It didn't come without a lot of hardship and worry and concern and doubt and all of the things that are also a part of it. Yeah, it was probably like well, a lot everyone in my life was like that's not a smart decision. Why are you doing that? That's not smart. You have a great job. You're doing well. Don't do that and it's like I have to do it. I have to do. This is what I'm going to do and it was, as I was leaving my relationship with my husband, I was living in someone's basement and driving all around. There were points where I was just like I don't have a car and I can't afford it and I don't have rent money and that's the struggle of what like pursuing a passion is. I see some people do things as a hobby. I do some things as a hobby but Jiu Jitsu wasn't one of those things. I often question myself about it like wow, was that a good decision? Where would you be if you stuck all that energy into a job? Well, when I stuck all my energy into a job, I was very unhappy and so, now, I get to do what I like to do. I've gotten tons of opportunity through it. It's certainly very scary. I think, currently, I've had a huge shift in my, I was on a team for about, I left once before and came back for the last 5 or 6 years, grew a school and then was asked to leave and then I'm starting my new school and so, it's just all these challenges and evolutions of oh, I thought I would be doing this forever and then, something changes and it's like well, here's a new adventure and so, it's just like I just dive headfirst into it. It's terrifying, quite honestly, but I always think good things come out of there.

Jeremy Lesniak:

I firmly believe that when people are following their passions, whether they're, we'll say, extracurricular passions or professional passions or, in this case, the intersection of the two, I think good things come out of it if you're being honest about your why, your reasons for doing those things and it doesn't surprise me that people would question your decision because I'm finding, even me, I'm listening to this and if you were telling me this in real time, I would be questioning your decision.

Cindy Hales:

I question my own decision. Do you know what I mean? Yeah, no, I went back and forth and I...you talked about how you don't really teach after 2 years. It's like I kind of started teaching kids and it was in 2002 and there weren't that many people. It wasn't like now where there's that many people doing Jiu



Episode 396 – Professor Cindy Hales | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com

Jitsu and it's like I'm just going to try and be as available and learn everything I can and walk around and do this. I was teaching but I wasn't making any money from teaching. I was just like teaching kids or doing that and learning everything I could and I would go get like...I went from having a profession basically, a job that was providing me well and then I went to I would get a job in the middle of the night like putting labels on boxes because I need some money and I'll train all day long and I'll go work in the middle of the night and I was just like this is what I needed to do. I think, now, looking back, I think I could have balanced the corporate job with training but really, what it tells me is I didn't want that corporate job. I was a call center manager. It was not fun. It was talking about complaints about coffee and it was soul-crushing. I just...you just find ways to make it work and I try and remind myself that now, as I go through one of the new stages, is like you just have to find a way to make it work. When people like once it's all done, when you win something or have something, it seems like oh, that was easy and it's like oh, no, it's not easy. You're just seeing the end result of it like getting your black belt is all the days in between. It's not the black belt day. It's the crappy days in the middle. That's where the magic happens.

Jeremy Lesniak:

You're saying that maybe you could've balanced but I don't know you. This is our first time talking but you even described yourself as being kind of singularly focused and it doesn't sound like the story could've unfolded any other way for you.

Cindy Hales:

I don't think so.

Jeremy Lesniak:

It's not only okay. That's you. That's your story. That's your truth if we want to use that word and there's something really special on there.

Cindy Hales:

Yeah. That's what I like to think. Just living the life that I think I should be living.

Jeremy Lesniak:

This is a very different sort of origin story. Everybody that comes on the show is very different and everybody that comes on the show has a lot in common. I'm sure if we get right down to it, if we came up with these objective metrics to compare you to other guests on martial arts radio, we'd find that you checked a bunch of boxes just like everybody else but this kind of, this root, this jumping with both feet to, what some would call, the sacrifice, I think maybe we can more fairly call it a shift away from, a lot of people would call, a more traditional or easier or socially acceptable lifestyle. I mean, this is...you chose to do things differently and that's great because it led you to where you are now and I'm sure all along



Episode 396 – Professor Cindy Hales | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com

the way, you've had some pretty great stories. You mentioned teaching kids. I spent plenty of time teaching kids. I know that kids give you some remarkable story so whether it's from time with children or any of these other things, if I were to ask you your favorite martial arts story from your time training, what would that be?

Cindy Hales:

I think my, honestly, I thought a lot about this question. It's like I think I would say the relationships, I can say, in terms of teaching, I have one family that I've taught. The oldest son, I've taught since he was five and he's now 15, and to me, impacting or even like being in someone's life that long, teaching them something when it's not someone related to you, not even like oh, it's a friend, it's like this person that came there and we met through martial arts. I met them through teaching and he has 3 brothers so I've trained all of them. I watched them come up like I remember we were at one of my schools and the smallest kid, his name's Joaquin, he was in diapers. He's learning potty training and so we would give them medals. We would have left over medals from tournaments and we would give him medals when he would use the bathroom. Just stupid little stories of watching these kids grow up. Oh, I met you when you were 8 and now, you're in college. I just start seeing all these people, like those overtime stories that's like I have so many relationships like that. Another guy I was just talking to he's like yeah, I'm in the Masters division now and I'm like what the hell are you talking about? The Masters division. I met you when you were 17. You're like 35. As a child, as a kid, I have moved around a lot so I never really experienced that like being in one place and having long-term relationships like that unfold where you were in a place for a long time and met everyone and now, through martial arts, I've kind of had that experience where you have this vehicle that you get to interact with people over time and see people change and hopefully, I get to impact that change a little bit in a good way as a teacher and so, to me, it's not like any isolated story. It's all the stories of all the people I've meet and to be able to be a part of so many different people's lives that I would never have been a part of their life. You talk about divisiveness in the world, through Jiu Jitsu I've been able to hang out with so many different people that I don't think I would really come into contact with outside of Jiu Jitsu and really share those close relationships with so, for me, I just am mostly excited about that and Jiu Jitsu and kind of the ongoing story of Jiu Jitsu for me. The story is not even done yet. It's just unfolding everyday like all these opportunities that just open up through Jiu Jitsu for me. So, that's kind of the overarching then there's whole story of Jiu Jitsu in my life is I think my favorite story. I don't even have one story.

Jeremy Lesniak:

It is one story.

Cindy Hales:

Yeah, it is one story.

Jeremy Lesniak:



Episode 396 – Professor Cindy Hales | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com

The whole thing and that's...and I agree with that and that's kind of why, quite often, I'd discuss that first question that how'd you start. That's the origin. The origin of the story, not just the origin story. As you're talking about some of these people who've been in your life, who you've been in their lives for a long time, it sounded like there was some emotion coming up and not everyone who listens to this show had the opportunity to really spend time teaching and fostering the growth of other martial arts so it sounds like that's a pretty important part of it for you and I'm wondering if you might talk a bit about that?

Cindy Hales:

Yeah, for me, it's a huge part. I think making connections with people and seeing them develop and those connections don't just develop the other person. They develop me as well and just that I see it really as a gift that like oh, I get to teach people move and teach them what I've learned about Jiu Jitsu and I get to learn so many things from everyone who comes into my room. They teach me so much and I just feel super grateful. I can talk about all the hard times, I can talk about the good times, bad times, all of these things but it's overall, it's so many adventures that I found to go on and different people that I've been able to meet, different experiences, different opinions and perspectives on the world and just like, for me now, what I'm looking at is I think I approached martial arts more as a sport like I just need to learn those moves to take people out. I just want to be that guy and then, over time, after being in for almost 20 years, it's like man, this had had such an impact on me and I really want to share that with other people and give people that opportunity whether they become a Jiu Jitsu person or not. Just really, I see my job as encouraging people to really follow whatever they want to do and if I can give them some tools through Jiu Jitsu to better do that, that's what I'm most excited about and I do feel kind of super emotional about it because man, everyday it's just like I have a gift and it's sometimes I think I take it for granted or I don't really, like I think ugh, this is hard. Some days in training is very hard. You want to not be there and if you push through that, you look at all these rewards and that's what I see through the story of my journey in Jiu Jitsu and it's like a lot of times, people only want to talk about the good things but it's like man, there's a lot of hard things in Jiu Jitsu. I have suffered a lot and struggled a lot but I've come out as way more than I could ever experience doing like the easy path.

Jeremy Lesniak:

You're kind of setting me up for the next question and I appreciate that. I don't know if that was intentional but we talked about stories, we talked about how you started. I'd like to talk about those tools, those skills that people developed through their training that they're able to use, not just in training, but outside of training and you kind of hinted on some of those challenges. I wonder if you might tell us about a time where things were challenging and how you worked through that.

Cindy Hales:



Episode 396 – Professor Cindy Hales | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com

I've had lots of challenges in my training and I look at it and say I kind of think I'm really obsessed with the idea of mentors right now. I think, often, in my past, even currently, sometimes there's good mentors and bad mentors and lecture, learning from people. I think everyone's a mentor in some way. You're learning things and it's trying to really understand like well, people are learning all these things from me and what am I putting out there and what am I putting into the world, putting into people? I'm really trying to be like what do I think is the best thing? It's like if I wish I would have had some of those things or identified it a little easier along my journey, because I think it would have made it simpler. I think the notion of struggle, I think that's the biggest thing that's impacted me. Being able to get through things, I've had, let's say, I've had many, many injuries, I've had cervical fusion, I've had 7 or 8 knee surgeries. I'm looking at oh my god, I'm going to have a knee replacement. I've gone through many financial struggles. I've gone through huge losses in my competition career. I went to Abu Dhabi when you were invited to the Abu Dhabi tournament. The Abu Dhabi I went to was actually in Trent, New Jersey. In 2007, I went to Abu Dhabi tournament which is kind of a big deal in Jiu Jitsu and it was right after I had a neck surgery and I was out for a whole year. I haven't trained for a whole year because I had a spinal fusion and got the opportunity to go to Abu Dhabi and I trained for one month and it was like okay, I just have to put everything into this and I lost first round and it was crushing. I was like ugh and how do you rebuild from that? it was like seeing those losses and seeing what you can go through and then winning and losing becomes...it's something different. I don't know. People say when you learn all these things it's just like, I think it's just the struggle of it. I think you learn a lot within that about yourself and I'm really into exploring that, I guess? I don't know. I've had a fight in Japan where I had a huge weight cut. That was another thing that I've done that was probably not a smart decision but it was the opportunity of a lifetime. I got to fight Megumi Fuji and that was my 2nd pro fight. I needed to cut about 30 pounds. It was totally ridiculous but it's like well, I'm going to do this because I love Megumi Fuji and I just want to meet her. She was like an idol and it was just like everyone's like what are you doing? That's a crazy weight cut and I did it like 6 weeks and it was just like what the hell are you doing? Don't do that and I lost that fight but it was just like man, I went through a lot. I basically quit eating. I went on this crazy 400, 500 calorie a day diet and I was just really pushed myself to limits that I didn't really think I had and I like to show people, okay, yeah, if you do these things may not win but you'll really get these great stories and adventures and you'll learn about yourself. Internally learn about yourself. You don't really need a medal or a trophy to learn about yourself. I just kind of embraced that area of struggle, I think. I really kind of like man, I always kind of done that. I don't know what makes me do that. I just try to think it's, I don't know if it's inspiring, but I try to show people like my students like well, this is what you should do. Go follow your heart and work really hard at whatever you want to do and I think good things will happen. It might not be wins but good things will happen and I've had my share of wins but yeah, truly, I've really enjoyed the losses more and it's one way because I think all my losses were to really amazing people and I had to push myself so hard and if I just scooted by and won something easily, it's not as impactful. I just try to show people that. Every day I show up in the gym and train, teach and I'm there for people.



Episode 396 – Professor Cindy Hales | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com

Jeremy Lesniak:

Nice. Now, you kind of glossed over this idea that you had a spinal fusion in you took a year off training and I kind of want to go back to that. What happened?

Cindy Hales:

I don't know the one incident. I used to get...people would sometimes slam me on my head or do...we train pretty rough back then. That was kind of the environment and anyway, my disc ruptured inward onto my spinal cord so it was being compressed. I actually, I had this injury and I got the opportunity to do this grappler's quest tournament, which was back in the day was a pretty big deal. I got invited to this pro division tournament against Gazzy Parman and Felicia Oh. Amanda Buckner was there. All the heavy hitters at the time and it was my first No-Gi tournament. My neck had been hurting. I was getting all these stingers but I was like well, I'll go to the doctor after the tournament. I went to the tournament and I actually won that. I came out and I won the tournament and then I came home and I went to get to the doctor, went to the spinal specialist. They did an MRI and showed me that my fused, my disc was like compressing my spinal cord against the far wall of the vertebrae and it was compressed in half and they were like, you shouldn't be doing anything. If you slip and fall, you might be paralyzed and so we need to do this surgery and they gave me a spinal fusion in the C5-C6 and then I didn't really take a year from training. I think I was back in the gym within about a week teaching, being in the gym, doing what I could do but I wasn't sparring. I did all these other stuff and then I got that opportunity to go to the Abu Dhabi and went and did that tournament and didn't go my way but again, that was like I got to like compete on the big stage and see what all that's about and just keep trucking along. Now, I'm looking at it, as I'm getting older and I've been in the sport, and I see a lot of my peers, now, it takes a physical toll on you and it's real and now, I'm looking at how I can train smarter. How I can encourage people who I'm teaching like hey, maybe don't make all the mistakes that I made or choices or if you do make them, at least, know that you're making them. I knew a lot of well, this may not be a smart decision but this decision is what I'm going to make because I want to do this thing. I'm a certain kind of person and I think like I had certain goals and I don't think that just anyone should just put themselves at risk. You'd need to understand the risk and see if it's worth it and make those decisions intelligently so I'm looking at that as well and how can I continue Jiu Jitsu with my injuries now. I think Jiu Jitsu's amazing because with every injury that I've had, I totally revamped with my whole game. I totally get like after my neck injury, had one coach. He was like well, we're just got to keep everyone off your head and the best way to do that is to just stay on their head and just choke them constantly, just be on their head choking them all the time. I totally learned that side of the game. I went from being a bottom guard player getting stacked up all the time to wrestling and clubbing people's heads and then I had a knee injury and changed how I was doing a lot of things and I had a full shoulder rebuild and I learned how to grapple with one arm. It's always reinventing yourself.

Jeremy Lesniak:



Episode 396 – Professor Cindy Hales | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com

And that's one of the things that I love about martial arts is that, no matter what discipline you're in, you can find a way to work around. You can, I suppose unless you are trying to be a boxer, a traditional boxer and you don't have arms, that's really the only scenario I can imagine where it's not going to work. You can always find some way to adapt.

Cindy Hales:

Totally. Yeah. I think that's the lesson of martial arts is the adaptability. To be good, you have to be adaptable.

Jeremy Lesniak:

And one of the things that I see that I think the Jiu Jitsu community is leading the way on is options for what used to be called handicapped or physically challenged or more modernly tends to be called adaptive athletes. Folks who have something and I'll be honest. I've seen some footage of some fairly large adaptive divisions at Jiu Jitsu tournaments whereas, unfortunately, if you attend a more traditional karate, taekwondo et cetera event, there might be one person out of hundreds who ticks that box.

Cindy Hales:

Oh yeah, Jiu Jitsu's great for that. I have a friend here in Washington and her name's Jess Hunter and she's gone to the para-Abu Dhabi and all of these different adaptive athlete tournaments and she competes in normal, regular Jiu Jitsu tournaments and it's incredible. Just finding different ways, there was that wrestler that didn't have legs who's a stud. There's all these guys and man, it's incredible what a body can do. You can find a way. Like you said, if you're trying to kickbox and you don't have arms and legs, maybe that's going to be hard but Jiu Jitsu, because it's such a full body, three dimensional with so many tools, people are making it work in all kinds of ways. People who are blind, all kinds of disabilities, there's...it can really be for everyone. I think, on some ways it's just like, well, everyone approaches it differently but that's kind of the beauty of it and if you're older, you can still do Jiu Jitsu. If you're young, you can do Jiu Jitsu. Anything. It's really cool. If you're willing to put the work in and try and fail a bunch of times of how to figure it out then yeah, you can make it work eventually.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Absolutely. Now, we've talked a little bit about competition but we haven't talked about how that started or why that started. I know that competition in the BJJ world is a little bit more prominent than it is in other martial arts but there's still plenty of people who never "compete", at least, not outside of their own school so what was it about competition that made you jump in so completely that you're flying across the world and doing 30-pound weight cuts?

Cindy Hales:



Episode 396 – Professor Cindy Hales | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com

I'm just naturally competitive. I think it goes along like man, I just want to do this. Back when I was really active in competing, there weren't a lot of tournaments. Not like when there are today. Man, I wish I was coming up right now. There's so much going on but I just, I want to always see if my moves work. I even did another silly thing that I did. I'm 45. A few years ago, I had a shoulder rebuild and then, for rehab, I sat in my house and taught myself all these boxing. Just shadow boxing to basically rehab my shoulder and then I met someone who was teaching me all this boxing and so I was learning all this boxing and I had stopped fighting MMA because I'm getting too old but then I was learning all this new boxing. I think I better go get a fight, see if this boxing's working. I just always...I like to test out and see if stuff works and so, I just do that and I think it's hard sometimes, at least for me, it's like well I like competition. It's like how am I doing? How is this working? I don't want to say it works if it doesn't work so you got to go battle test it. I have this whole kind of system that I use and I just go do tournaments and just try to use my move just to see if it's working and if it doesn't work, revise it, kind of refine it. This person killed it this way, I got to go fix that. what else can I do? I just kind of look at it like an experiment. I used to really stress about competing. I took it very personally in a lot of ways. I kind of get crushed emotionally when I would lose but then it would just fuel me to do more. Now, I kind of just look at it like it's just a place where you take out your moves and see if they really work and a setting where people are trying and the gym you're like the person giving it to me, this or that, so I just like to go do that in competition now. I don't compete as much as I used to. I've been doing, did Masters World a few years and I planned to do it this year if I can. I won that a couple years in a row so that was kind of pretty cool. Yeah, my approach to it now I'm just like I don't really train extra for the tournaments. I used to have training camps and everything. Now, I'm in the gym everyday so my approach is like just want to see if regular Cindy is good enough so I just go to the tournament. I don't cut weight. I just see if my moves are good enough. Are they going to work and so, man, luckily, I won a couple years in a row so it's a good thing or good enough. I think it's like especially being like that's my job. I should be sharp and testing myself. Things like it's hard to tell other people to do things when you're not doing them so it's like I don't push people to compete. I don't think that's not where I see all the value in Jiu Jitsu but it's like if I want to push anyone to compete, I should push myself to compete and then, if other people want to follow that, they can follow that. I think it's a really personal decision so yeah, that's how I approach it now.

Jeremy Lesniak:

How does that shift in attitude reconcile with your competitive nature?

Cindy Hales:

I think life and time and getting older is like I could ignore it and I took that MMA fight and I was kind of like ignoring time and then, I realized, in that fight, I used to be really hungry when they talk about young athletes being hungry and I remember I just go in and be like I'm going to crush everyone and I'm just like I just want to see if my boxing works, I'm really into my boxing. Look at this foot work and yeah, that's not the approach that you need to have when you're fighting a 20 year old because they want to



Episode 396 – Professor Cindy Hales | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com

kill you and so, I'm kind of like learned about like man, you can't run away from time. Life changes and my goals have changed and you just kind of learn new things with that. now, I've really shifted. I'm really more focused on teaching. How to grow up a good school like a school that represents the values that I believe in and I'm really kind of obsessed with how to be a good business person. I've always steered away from business and the notions of business. I was a punk rocker kid and kind of thought I didn't want to be a man. Just kind of didn't really care about that and that's how I could quit my job. I just want to do this and now, I'm like man, there is an art to business. There's technique to business. I have a business partner now and I've spent a year studying business and looking at successful business people and what are they doing? How can I apply that to my life and to making Jiu Jitsu better and my opportunities in the world better as I apply to Jiu Jitsu. It's like if you want to help people, you need money to do that. If you want to spread Jiu Jitsu and you want to have nice facilities and you want to have good training and all of these things, it takes money. I want to see how I can kind of merge those things into my life now. I always kind of ran away from them and now, I'm kind of want to look at that and so, I just am taking all the lessons I've learned in Jiu Jitsu in perseverance and struggle and well, this might seem hard but not as hard as not eating and getting punched in the face. You kind of look at like well, I've learned about patience a lot in business and you learn that in Jiu Jitsu. Sometimes the best thing to do is sit and wait. Sit and wait and see what the person's going to do. You don't need to freak out. You just need to sit and wait and have a measured reaction and I think that's true in business and I'm just taking the lessons that I've learned in Jiu Jitsu and trying to expand those into the rest of my life and seeing how you can do that and just learning new things. It's kind of like what I was talking about earlier. I just get to meet so many cool people in Jiu Jitsu. All these cool people come in to train at my school and truly crazy because I'm charging them but they're all teaching me all these stuff. there's so many smart people and I'm just like what do you know? Tell me about what you know. I'm just really trying to learn everything I can right now. I feel really hungry for new knowledge and what's after being a fighter? It's like well, I want to be a good business owner, good coach, a good mentor. I'm focused on that stuff now.

Jeremy Lesniak:

You mentioned all the people you've trained with. You brought up a few of them by name but if you could train with someone you haven't, I'm sure you're aware of a tremendous number of people throughout the world but if I gave you a golden ticket to train with anyone of them, who would that be?

Cindy Hales:

Oh man, I think probably Marcelo Garcia. I'm just a huge fan of Marcelo Garcia and just his attitude. He just seems like he loves Jiu Jitsu and he just loves what's he's doing and he's always just something about him I just really, really like. He's a great competitor and man, one of the best of all times in Jiu Jitsu and so I would really like to train with him. I think Megumi Fuji. I wish...I'm really stoked I got to compete against her but I really just like train with her. Those are a couple people I'd really like to train with. Trying to figure out how to make that happen. I guess you just show up at their school and that's



Episode 396 – Professor Cindy Hales | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com

the cool thing about Jiu Jitsu is that well, if you really want to train with someone, just go buy a plane ticket, usually go to their school and train with them.

Jeremy Lesniak:

It's one of the beauties of martial arts is, for the most part, it wasn't necessarily like this 30, 40 years ago but you just show up somewhere and say I want to train and they'll usually let you.

Cindy Hales:

Totally, yeah, it's cool.

Jeremy Lesniak:

So it's a great thing. You brought up kind of the younger version of yourself being a little bit rebellious and described yourself as a punk rocker and not wanting to turn into a man so what do you think the younger version of you would think of you now having a, you started off in your martial arts career and your Jiu Jitsu career in a very kind of punk way. You abandoned the trappings of traditional society and said this, I'm going to make this my life my passion and now, it's becoming a job and it is a job and you're growing a business. What do you think would younger you would say to that?

Cindy Hales:

I hope younger me would think I was awesome. That's like every day I'm like you better be making younger you think you're awesome because I was real idealistic and I was really passionate about things as a kid and as a teenager and then, I feel like my foray into the regular world kind of lost that and then, ran in the other direction and I was always just try and make sure that I'm doing things that I can be proud of and that's kind of what I focus on is what makes me happy but what impacts the people around me in a good way and hopefully, I'm in a bit course with that. I try and look at even the people I surround myself with just like right now, just be really mindful of this direction that I want to be in. there's a person that's going to take you towards a goal or a way of being that you want to go to. Before I didn't always know which direction I wanted to go. I wanted to be a winner in Jiu Jitsu but I didn't know what that meant like getting medals. Now, it's like means running a business that you can be proud of. I think, I don't want to be the man, but I think you can have a successful business that's responsible and ethical and does good and that's what I'm really interested in how can you take those Jiu Jitsu and make it even better and help more people? I have a lot of projects I'm working on. I've been going to Nicaragua for a few years and kind of met a team down there and tried to work on helping them, bringing some gis down there. They don't have a lot of help. It's hard for them to get that stuff and I'm working on affiliating that school under my new team with some friends and seeing how we can use Jiu Jitsu to help people that maybe don't have Jiu Jitsu and not as many opportunities. I was a punk rocker kid and I came from kind of a social service background and Jiu Jitsu's done so much for me that it's like how can I use Jiu Jitsu to positively impact different communities and explore the world more and



Episode 396 – Professor Cindy Hales | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com

explore what's out there and what can I do to help stuff? I'm just really excited about those kind of things and less excited about medals and more excited about like I think Jiu Jitsu can do a lot for people. It's done a lot for me and how can I facilitate that? That's really what I'm looking at. Super excited, like I said, about this whole project I got in Nicaragua with some friends and we're also looking at a school in Costa Rica and doing some destination camps and just helping the teams down there. So, yeah, I'm doing that and I started a school in Seattle that I'm working on building. I'm just super busy and wanting to put out my style of Jiu Jitsu and share it with people and people who like it, well, it's going to be great.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Take a few minutes and tell us a little more. You've been talking about you in a very story-telling way and almost a bit of a selfless way and I like the guests to get the opportunity to talk about your projects and share not just the passion side of it but admittedly, the commercial side of it because we all have to eat. You mentioned camps and schools and things so why don't you give us the skinny on that and if how people can find you online, websites, social media and all that.

Cindy Hales:

Okay, well, right now, I'm starting a new gym in Seattle and it's called Sleeper Jiu Jitsu and I'm also starting a team called Roman Fight with some friends. Roman Fight, we're going to be doing a school here in Seattle. The school I'm working on and then the school in San Juan del Sur, Nicaragua and then, also, the school in Puerto Viejo, Costa Rica and kind of trying to help the local communities there. Also, doing some destination camps. I have my friend down there that have an eco-lodge out on the jungle about 5 minutes from the beach. We're going to set up some camps on kind of like it's been exciting because I've been able to like who am I going to train with and then kind of calling those people up and being like hey, I want to run a camp and so, I'm going to actually kickoff a tester camp here shortly going down to Nicaragua and doing like a Jiu Jitsu and surf camp and then starting to bring more people down there. Kind of go pick out those people I want to train with and trying to rent them, bring them down to Nicaragua and do some destination camps there. Bring some tourism back to the country and expose people to the beautiful lifestyle there. It's a gorgeous place and then, starting to expand that out into Costa Rica. Now, I'm just really excited and maybe, I mentioned I was on a team and we parted ways and then I had this friend, they called me like come down to Nicaragua and then this whole new project emerged. I've been going down there vacationing, bringing gear, training and teaching when I'm down there and then, through that then my friends were like hey, let's start this team. Let's do this. I'm just really excited of those kind of opportunities popping up and so, I've got that going on. My friend, Alex and Johnny, we're working on that and then, my school here in Seattle will be affiliate under it. It's called Sleeper Jiu Jitsu so, do that and I'm working on some podcasts. Kind of funny, I've actually recorded about 20 but I get really nervous to release them. I haven't released any. It's almost like this selfish endeavor where I just like...



Episode 396 – Professor Cindy Hales | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com

Jeremy Lesniak:

You got to do it. Let me know if I can help if I can help.

Cindy Hales:

Yeah, mainly just get over my anxiety over like ugh, I say some crazy things. I don't know what it is. I'm going to release that so I've gotten really into podcasting. They're projects, I guess, that's it for right now.

Jeremy Lesniak:

I don't think you can use the words that's it.

Cindy Hales:

That's it, yeah, maybe if you want to come to vacation in Nicaragua, check me out. I'm going to be...that's the thing I'm mainly excited about it. Getting some really quality Jiu Jitsu down there, helping the kids down there and getting people to see that and then, my school here in Seattle. Just real stoked about that. you can find me on Instagram or on Facebook and yeah.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Nice. Well, it's funny you mention Puerto Viejo. That's the one town I've been to in Costa Rica.

Cindy Hales:

How'd you like it?

Jeremy Lesniak:

Ten years ago. It's a beautiful, beautiful little town. Just as you were talking, I pulled it up on my phone. It looks like it's grown quite a bit in the last decade but an absolutely wonderful, wonderful place and had a ton of fun?

Cindy Hales:

Do you surf?

Jeremy Lesniak:

I don't .

Cindy Hales:

What were you down there for?

Jeremy Lesniak:



Episode 396 – Professor Cindy Hales | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com

Just to hang out. Just to get away.

Cindy Hales:

Awesome, yeah, it's wonderful there. Anytime I go down, it's just like man, this place is amazing. Just the feeling and how hot it is and people are so nice and yeah, just great.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Super good people. Alright, well, this has been a lot of fun. We've talked a lot of great stuff and I want to remind folks that the links of things that we talked about, we're going to have those for you at the show notes pages, whistlekickmartialartsradio.com, is where you'll find that but I'd love to trouble you for one more thing as we kind of fade into the distance. What wisdom, what parting words would you offer up to everyone today?

Cindy Hales:

I will just tell people that they kind of find what they love to do and to just chase after that. If you do that and are open to opportunity and possibilities, good things will happen.

Jeremy Lesniak:

At the end of the day, I think we all hope that we find our purpose, our place in the world. A lot of people spend a lot of time and a lot of money trying to figure out what that is but I have zero doubt that Professor Hales figured out where she fits into the world. I have no doubt that the people who have the opportunity to train and compete with her and, ever more so, learn from her are very fortunate and I hope they realize that because I felt blessed just to have an hour on the phone. Phone? We'll call it the phone. I felt blessed to have an hour on the phone with her. Thank you so much for giving up your time and for sharing as you did today. If you want to see more including the links like social media and websites that we talked about today as well as a bunch of photos, head on over to whistlekickmartialartsradio.com and check that out. Episode 396. If you hit whistlekick.com, you can see all the stuff that we've got available for sale. Shirts and hoodies and tees and gear and uniforms and a bunch more. Use the code `PODCAST15`. It's going to get you 15% off and it lets us know that, you know what? The people listening, they're going to support us and helps justify putting future resources into this project. If that's not the best way for you to help us, that's okay. We appreciate any support you can give, whether that's sharing an episode, leaving a review, ideally on iTunes but any place that you can leave a review is great. Sharing something on social media, hey, it really doesn't matter. We love to know and I, personally, love to know what this show means to you. If you want to email me directly, jeremy@whistlekick.com and our social media accounts are all [@whistlekick](https://www.instagram.com/whistlekick) no matter where you go. Thank you so much for your time today, for your support and until next time, train hard, smile and have a great day!



Episode 396 – Professor Cindy Hales | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com