



Episode 402 – Mr. Brent Philpot | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com



Jeremy Lesniak:

Hey there, welcome! This is whistlekick martial arts radio episode 402. Today, I'm joined by my guest, Mister Brent Philpot. My name's Jeremy Lesniak. I'm the host of this show. I'm the founder of whistlekick and martial arts is my life. It is something I am so passionate about I turned it into a job and that's what we do here at whistlekick. We produce things for people that are passionate about the traditional martial arts and that includes this show which we bring you twice a week. Every Monday, we bring you an interview like today. Every Thursday we bring you some other show. Something focused on maybe a subject or a particular aspect of history and you can find all of our shows at whistlekickmartialartsradio.com. If you want to find all of our projects, you can go to whistlekick.com and you'll see links to everything we've got going on including our products. We make a ton of stuff and if you use the code `PODCAST15`, you can save 15% off everything. Now, today's guest first reached out to me almost quite a while ago. As an avid listener to the show and, dare I say, even a fan which is an uncomfortable word for me to use but we have a great conversation going over email and he expressed an interesting, maybe not unique, but certainly uncommon personal story and I said, you know what? You've got that black belt test coming soon. I have every faith you're going to pass it and when you do, let's talk about bringing you on this show. That's what happened and that's why we have him on today's episode. So, let's welcome him to the show. Mister Philpot, welcome to whistlekick martial arts radio.

Brent Philpot:



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Thank you very much, Jeremy. Great to be here!

Jeremy Lesniak:

It's great to have you here. I've been looking forward to this. We've been emailing for a little while. We knew that this was coming.

Brent Philpot:

Yes we have!

Jeremy Lesniak:

I've been looking forward to it. Yeah, so now, you've crossed that threshold which I know we're going to get into later. Listeners are talking about, what is he talking about?

Brent Philpot:

What's he talking about?

Jeremy Lesniak:

What's he talking about? Well, listeners, a little bit of trivia. We don't have people on this show who aren't either equivalent to or you know, black belt rank and so, if I've got my history right, we've started talking a while ago as you're approaching this.

Brent Philpot:

Yes, I was a red belt, I think, whenever we started talking.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah, and we're...I won't spoil it. I'll let you do the reveal when it seems to come up organically but there seems to be something a little bit different about you and your training and what you experienced in your day to day life that most of us are unfamiliar with and I think it's going to make for some good conversation, for some good story.

Brent Philpot:

Well, it might.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Well, let's start...you know how we start. Let's start that kind of boring but so important foundational way. How did you first find martial arts?

Brent Philpot:



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I found martial arts by the movies. It wasn't one necessarily but the one movie that I really got into was Bloodsport.

Jeremy Lesniak:

It's a classic!

Brent Philpot:

And Jean Claude Van Damme, he just opened my eyes to a new world but due to issues that will come up later, my mom, as a kid, wouldn't allow me to partake in martial arts and due to that fact, I wasn't introduced to Taekwondo, which is what I practice now, till about three years ago and I am 46 now so, yeah, I was about 43 whenever me and my girlfriend/fiancée/wife walked in the McCain Mall and somebody walked up to me and said, hey, sir, have you ever thought about taekwondo? I said yes, I thought about taekwondo quite a bit and they said, why don't you come try out 3 classes, see if you like it and let's go from there? And that's where it started for me and now, I am a first degree black belt and studying to be an instructor.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Wow, that's awesome! So, I want to go back. I want to go back. You said Bloodsport, right?

Brent Philpot:

Yes, sir.

Jeremy Lesniak:

So, Bloodsport. Pretty impactful movie for a lot of people who are of roughly your age, maybe even down a little bit to my age. You got a couple years on me but what was it about that movie?

Brent Philpot:

It was the contact and everything into the emotions that got to me whether it be whenever he's in that big fight scene at the end or when...everything just revolved around martial arts with him, it seemed like, and it just grabbed me.

Jeremy Lesniak:

What were you into as a kid if it wasn't martial arts, if your mother wasn't cool with the idea of you training, what were you doing?

Brent Philpot:

I was doing choir, band and track.



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Jeremy Lesniak:

What were your event in track? I'm curious.

Brent Philpot:

My events in track where I was a distance runner and I was a field expert whether it be shotput, long jump, things like that. It was just something to keep me active, I think, more than anything because I wasn't the best. I wasn't the fastest, the strongest throwing, whatever, I reached 4th place in a field event and I thought that was good enough. Hey, I got fourth! Yay.

Jeremy Lesniak:

I don't know that it's come up on this show but I ran track in high school a little bit and I was terrible but so few people ran hurdles that I was one of the top point getters on the team despite being last almost every meet but last out of five still got you points.

Brent Philpot:

I was on the same lines as you in high school but if I would have had this, I think things would have gone a little bit better for me.

Jeremy Lesniak:

How do you think life would have been different if you had martial arts as a child?

Brent Philpot:

I wouldn't be this bullied as much. Let me go back just a little bit to tell your listeners a little bit about me. I was born in 1972. I had 10 fingers, 10 toes just like everybody. I was the fastest reader in first grade. They even put a reading for just me reading because nobody could keep up with me and I had reached 3rd grade reading level by the first grade, if that tells you anything and then, on March 2nd 1979, I was ran over by a delivery truck. I won't say the name on it here but you can imagine back in those days, there was only one or two but I had 22 skull fractures, a split palette and the doctors said I'd never walk, talk or see again. When I was in coma for over 6 weeks and I had multiple, multiple surgeries and so, my mom, being my mom, she was going to stay by my side for the entire deal and she did and I had a lot of other family support too but on Easter Sunday, she left this tape with this nurse of my favorite music and she found out that when she was gone, I would grab tubes and pull them and I needed my mom's voice or something soothing to help me along so she found out that playing this music helped and so, she started up the music and went to church to go pray. She came back and they said, Miss Philpot, it's about your son. She didn't wait to find out what about me so she opens up the door and I'd see you and there I am, sitting up, tapping my leg, keeping in time with the Kiss and I had a long struggle besides that but that was the number one reason why mom wouldn't let me get into physical, let's say,



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where you could hit your head. She didn't let me wrestle. Nothing like that so she wouldn't be a mean mom, she was being a concerned mom.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Protective.

Brent Philpot:

Yes, yes, very and after I got out of the hospital, I gained a little bit of sight. I can see 10/300 partial vision in my left eye which means what you see at 300 feet as a "normal person", I see at 10 feet but it's in a tunnel and I ended up going to Blind school and I graduated there in '92 and went on to college, went to UCA which is the University of Central Arkansas and I graduated there in '97 with a Fine Arts in Communication degree and a Special Ed minor and that's basically the back story.

Jeremy Lesniak:

So, obviously, and if anyone has ever experienced any kind of limited vision, I'm not even going to pretend to understand what it's like to have 10/300. I started wearing bifocals at age 8 so my eyes were, to most people, considered terrible. I can imagine a little bit of the spectrum that we might be on, in terms of ability to not see as well as others, and I know how much that impacted my life, in general. Just the little things that would go on, the ways that I couldn't relate to the world. To go on the water, for me, and not be able to see. I didn't swim with glasses, we couldn't afford fancy prescription goggles. That was pretty different. I am able to have a, I guess, a little bit of empathy for what it might be like but I'm not going to pretend that I understand.

Brent Philpot:

That's fine. I mean, any perspective that you have, me being me, I mean, I joke about a lot of what happened to me but, I used to say when I was growing up, I was ran over by a delivery truck, scraped up by a fork and a knife and put back together with Elmer's glue because, basically, that's what they had to do.

Jeremy Lesniak:

I'm curious because, here you are, you're pretty young and clearly, you're talking about your mother needing to leave you with a tape to keep you calm. At that age, something that traumatic, it's scary, it's unsettling but you're making jokes about it now so at some point, you did a complete 180 there. You went from, at age 6 to 46, and somewhere in between, you made peace with this. Do you remember when that was?

Brent Philpot:



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I actually do. When I was in college, growing up with sighted friends was hard because they got cars and everything like that. I tried to be as normal as possible and me and my girlfriend, at the time, she ended up giving me one of her bicycles. What's a visually impaired person doing riding a bike, I know, but she wanted me to be as normal as possible so I'd ride back and forth from the apartment to class and I'd leave the bike out on the sidewalk where I now work was and I wasn't walking around with my cane at all and this is...it was kind of like it is today. Kind of rainy, kind of spotty but I was going to ride a bike and I decided to ride the bike on the side of the sidewalk so that nobody could accidentally hit me with a car so I ended up going off the sidewalk, into the grass and so I had to stand up because the grass is a little wet and get a little momentum going and wham! I knocked myself out. I ended up hitting an army reserve post sign that was there on the side of the road and I must've stayed there for 30 minutes, maybe, just trying to get my bearings back and I think, right after that, I'm like I'm not as normal as I am. I'm not that normal so I might want to give other people signals that, if I bump into you, there's a reason for it and so, after that, I started walking with a cane. I have enough vision to get around, possibly. Sometimes, some days it's worse than others but I'll always have my cane even though I walk 90 to nothing because of my track experience back in, I mean, you run distance, you'll always have that fast walk and so, that really opened up my eyes, so to speak. It's all good. I've said time and time again that I would like to meet the gentleman that ran over me so I could shake his hand and tell him everything's okay. I'm okay with everything. I wouldn't be the man I am today had it not been for what happened back in 1979.

Jeremy Lesniak:

I think it's easy when we talk about a situation like this when we talk about whatever the difficulty, whatever the pain that we go through. It's easy to say, oh, I wouldn't be who I am today but I get the sense that you've spent a lot of time contemplating that. that you're able to truly mean those words when you say that and that you're proud of who you are.

Brent Philpot:

Yes, very much so.

Jeremy Lesniak:

How, I think it's obvious how not having your sight has negatively impacted your life but let's flip that, how has it benefitted you? Why and how has it made you the person you are in such a way that you're proud of who you are?

Brent Philpot:

My mom taught me independence at an early age. She told me that she wasn't going to be here forever. That I was going to have to do some stuff on my own and that, combined with the teachers at the Arkansas School for the Blind and the mentors that I had later in life, I ended up...my mom and dad got



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divorced when I was two and when I turned 10, Mom decided that I needed few more guidance so she hooked me up with a big brother. The big brother/little brother association? Yeah, that was what she hooked me up with and I met this young man. He had a family. He had Christian values and he helped me in that aspect of...things could be worse. Whenever he brought me home for the first time he had taken me out to McDonald's and stuff, Mom ended up saying, well, Brent did you have fun? And I'll say yeah, Mom and he's got all kinds of gadgets inside his car like the Batmobile and she's like okay and Paul said, my big brother, he said, yeah, Brent, but what I didn't show you was the ejector seat but going back to what you asked, I mean, I guess it's always been in my psyche or whatever that things could be worse. I could be still in a coma waiting on Mom or people waiting on me hand and foot. I never wanted that.

Jeremy Lesniak:

So, let's talk about your training. Let's talk about what it's like to do martial arts as someone who misses out on, what I would think as, what most of us rely on, which is imitation. The way I've learned darn near everything in my martial arts career has been watching what the instructor was doing and then do it myself. How do you learn?

Brent Philpot:

Muscle memory, for the most part. Just like you but my muscle memory has to be like the instructors all have...what's that called? Personal touch. They know to touch your shoulder, to touch, not touch you inappropriately, but they form my hands and my arms the way that they need to be until I'm to that point and they say, hold that and that's a double forearm block or that's a low block and if I do it over and over again, doing the same thing, I learned it. With my head injuries, it's a little difficult sometimes to keep it inside my head but that's what the instructors are for. I love my instructors. ATA Blackbelt Academy is where I go in North Little Rock and they are phenomenal with the way that they have learned to teach a visually-impaired person and I don't know if you know G.K. Lee, he's the soon-to-be the grand master of ATA. At Worlds, he will be and his wife owns the school that I go to. Her name is Kathy Lee, Chief Master Kathy Lee and she took me aside one day after a tournament, I'm trying to remember, we went to German Town, Tennessee and she took me aside and she said, Brent, I want to let you know that I'm having a conversation with the Blind and the Deaf School because of you and I said, Ma'am, what about? And she said that she's talking to them about doing some classes there at the school and she was wondering if I'd be interested in instructing and I, at the time, my life has been all over the place. I've sang with choir and everything, I have a decent voice. You can find me on iTunes with four of the original songs that I wrote and one cover. You can find me on Amazon, Stories from Grandpa, my book but I'd never thought about instructing. I'd always thought about learning and that's where my place was and then, during the Christmas holiday, I just put two and two together and I said, well, if I'm going to instruct, I need to instruct so all these side projects that I was doing at the time, like trying to form a band, whatever, writing books, I just put them aside. I've gone full-fledged into Taekwondo now and when I'm not working, I'm at the dojang and that and family, I'm currently married



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and my wife is so good. She was the one that actually said, hey, why don't you try out Taekwondo? Things like that so...

Jeremy Lesniak:

How has Taekwondo changed your life? You said it's been a few years now so you've certainly spent enough time doing it that you've become passionate about it, you've dedicated a lot of time to it. You're just talking about how important it is to you and how important you're expecting it to remain, at least in the near future, but there has to be a reason why. There has to have been an impact for you so what is that impact?

Brent Philpot:

That's a hard question. People ask me before I receive my black belt why do you want to become a black belt? I said, and I still believe this to this day, to inspire others and that's my goal in life, pretty much. When you come from to where I am now, I mean, my right side was partially paralyzed in the accident. My fine motor skills on my right side are not like they are on my left but now, with martial arts, they're getting better and that's what I want to do in being an instructor and being in Taekwondo is to inspire somebody to do something. Doesn't have to be martial arts but to have them go outside of their four walls, if that makes any sense.

Jeremy Lesniak:

It does. What was it like for you starting Taekwondo? We hear from everyone and I remember and I've talked to so many people, that first time, that first class is so intimidating, so scary. Now, I'm going to imagine that you and your wife had a conversation with the instructor ahead of time and said, hey, I don't see so well. What was that first class like?

Brent Philpot:

That first class was a learning experience for all of us. My wife and I started Taekwondo together so I had a buddy with me until she got to the yellow belt and they started doing kicks and she remembered, very heavily, that she had a slipped disc in her back and her chiropractor told her never again that you do this but first class, I was a mess. I had no balance. I had no guidance on what to do or how to do it but I knew that I was going to, I knew that I was going to finish class and that's what's most important and then it just went from there. I ended up going to the office right after that first class and signed a contract.

Jeremy Lesniak:

You were hooked after one class?

Brent Philpot:



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Yeah, after one class.

Jeremy Lesniak:

What was it?

Brent Philpot:

It didn't take the three classes that they said

Jeremy Lesniak:

And we hear that a lot from people that there's something for them when they find martial arts, it's almost like it's fate for them to find it. What was it after one class that you knew this was something you wanted to put a lot of time and money into?

Brent Philpot:

I don't know and that's the honest truth. I don't know but I knew that it was calling to me. I knew my grandfather on my mom's side was a teacher/principal and I had gone to college, with that in mind, to become a teacher. That's the reason for the Special Ed minor. The reason that I didn't follow up on that is that I took PPST three times and missed it by 1 point each time in math and they don't let you go further into education unless you pass that test so, I said, well that's not for me but something will be. After I got out of college, I taught disabled adults drama and I did that for 6 years but then, that fell through. I moved to New Orleans. A week later, Katrina happened and all my stuff got taken away by Katrina but I still wouldn't...I'm like, something still keeps me going and after that first class of Taekwondo, it was like this is home and, whether it makes sense to your listeners or not, it makes sense to me and later on, after three years of learning, I want to bestow upon people what I know and I guess it's that teacher mentality in me, from my grandfather, that keeps me going and also, he was a golden glove boxer too and, that might have something to do with it as well, not giving up.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Let's switch gears. We've talked about you. We've talked about what this has been like from your side but let's talk a little bit to what it's been like to others. You mentioned that in that first class, it was a learning experience for everyone. I would assume that included other students and the people that were teaching. What has it been like for the people that have taught you? How have they reacted? What have they told you about what it's been like to teach you?

Brent Philpot:

They've told me that it's an experience. I don't really ask them what it's like to teach me. When my instructor right now, my master right now is a sixth-degree black belt. He's going for the seventh-degree this summer. I did my...I started off with a black belt form what I knew of it which was the first three



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moves and he helped me to continue to the 33rd move in black belt form and he always pats me on the shoulder and says, you are awesome. No matter what you think about what you're doing, you're awesome and I can imagine what he brings home to whoever he goes home to, his wife or whatever, what he might be saying to them but every experience for me, every day is a new day and I wake up in the morning and I say, at least, I'm awake and I'm heading to work so I wake up, 5 o'clock in the morning, let out my three dogs and go to work, then I come back home and then, I do whatever I'm going to do and normally, it's around Taekwondo or my family. I'm sorry if that wasn't the answer that you're looking for.

Jeremy Lesniak:

I'm never looking for a particular answer. I think you know that. We just follow it where it goes and this is why I bring on people from everywhere and different styles and different experiences because we can look at this from two very different, very distinct ways. We can look at this from the perspective of your learning, your training is very different from most people's because their learning is very different or we can look at this from the perspective of you're passionate about your training and you're investing your time to make yourself, your new martial arts better which is a common experience that we all have and that's how I choose to look at it. When I bring people on, we talk about the differences, we talk about the things that are unique to them but I do that, as much because, I get feedback from people who listen that say I identified with that person and in identifying with that person, the reality of how much we all have in common seems to be that much more approachable to them and that's why I like to balance out the show in that way. Have you competed?

Brent Philpot:

Yes.

Jeremy Lesniak:

I know the ATA has quite a few competitions. I don't know if I would go as far as to say that the ATA big on competing but we've had a number of ATA practitioners on this show and they've all, I believe they've all, spoken about a substantial amount of competition so what's that experience been like for you?

Brent Philpot:

It's been tremendous. I'm in, what they call, special abilities classification, physical abilities. Physical, well, physical handicap. I'm sorry. I'm not much PC.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Hey, you know what? This is your episode and if, how do I put this?, if you want to call it handicap, you're welcome to. I don't feel like I have the credibility to decide what term is appropriate but I don't



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think anyone gets to say that you're using the wrong word to describe you and your experience but if anybody does, they can talk to me about it and I'll just ban them from the show.

Brent Philpot:

Yeah, well, I've done a bunch of tournaments like German Town, things like that and we also have regionals which is state competitions where we take three or four states and put them all together and see who wins in that aspect and now, I am going to Worlds for the first time and I'm going to Worlds within the top 10 of my category in weapons, sparring, combat and forms and looking at that on the ATA side, it was like oh my gosh, I'm really, really doing this. It didn't dawn on me that I was competing slash...in the public eye, so to speak, until just about a week ago whenever all the regionals finish and everybody had their scores in and everything and me and my wife looked on my sight or the sight and it said, Brent, you're within the top 10 so I'm going to go to Worlds as a top 10 competitor and to Worlds to start out the tournament so there's going to be 2 competitions that weekend.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Are you looking forward to that?

Brent Philpot:

More than you know.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Why? Tell me about it. What does competing mean to you?

Brent Philpot:

Competing means to me that I'm doing it. It's like you and jumping hurdles. My aspect of jumping hurdles is taking one step closer to where my masters are or were in my time of life or whatever. Three years into the...in Taekwondo, I'm actually not becoming something because I'm already in something but I'm actually making a stamp on the fact that I'm, as I said, I'm doing this. Sorry about that.

Jeremy Lesniak:

No, no apologies. It's a lot of conversation. You are welcome to drink water. What are you doing to prepare?

Brent Philpot:

Going over my forms again and again even when I'm not in the dojang, I have a car port that is, I treat it like my mat at the dojang and I do my weapon which is the, what is it?, oh, it's the staff. I can't think of the word right now but, and the reason that that is my weapon of choice is because of I've used a cane all my life, just about, and it feels good in my hand. It feels at home. I don't think I've ever dropped it.



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Maybe once whenever I was doing a finger roll but your home is your home and I found my home in Taekwondo and the dojang that I'm studying at.

Jeremy Lesniak:

That's great. Let's talk about more future stuff. What are your goals? You've alluded to kind of a general desire to improve and progress towards where your instructors have been or are but do you have anything more concrete than that?

Brent Philpot:

Not really. If I have my way when the time is right, I want to open up my dojang and have it open to, not only physically abled people, but the disabled. I don't want there to be any barriers and so far, there hasn't been for me. There's been a few hiccups but so far, there hasn't been for me.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Now, of course, I imagine that you spend a decent amount of time online. Maybe it's unfair to make that assumption. I had a friend in college, here's why I say this, I have a friend in college who I work with in the IT department and he was pretty darn blind. He could see a little bit, he could make out where there were streetlights, by the light and that's all he had and the only reason I know that is because one day, I was walking him back to his dorm and he made a hard left to stay on the path. I said, wait a second, have you been lying to me this whole time? He said no, I can see from the light, just a little bit of the shadow and just habit, I know where this path is. I said oh, but he was able to spend a fair amount of time online because it was a very democratizing platform. Anything that was out there would, he had screen reader software that could tell him what he's looking at. As an aside, folks, this is why if you make a website and you've got the little box or the alt-text, yes, there's an SEO benefit to putting that in there but this is why they put something on that box because when someone cannot see the photo, whatever is in that box is what would be read to the person using screen reader software.

Brent Philpot:

Yes, exactly.

Jeremy Lesniak:

So that's a very long-winded question. Do you spend a decent amount of time online?

Brent Philpot:

All the time. I'm on Twitter. I'm on Facebook. I listen to podcasts constantly.

Jeremy Lesniak:

If people want to find you, you mentioned social media, give us those handles. How do people find you?



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Brent Philpot:

@Brent_Philpot is my handle on Twitter and Brent Philpot is my name on Facebook. I don't go by anything else and I have a YouTube channel as well that's called Brent Philpot and in that YouTube channel, it's a subchannel called The Eye Opener.

Jeremy Lesniak:

And what would we find in there?

Brent Philpot:

Different things. Me, me doing some Taekwondo stuff, me doing crazy things like...me doing a zipline across a river, I'm a nut.

Jeremy Lesniak:

I can tell!

Brent Philpot:

I've even skydived from 10,000 feet. That was a trip and a half but yeah, you can find me just about anywhere. Make sure that it's Brent Philpot from North Little Rock, Arkansas and I'll friend you or let you follow me on Twitter.

Jeremy Lesniak:

And, of course, folks, we do post all of these links in the show notes, whistlekickmartialartsradio.com so no need to jot them down now and if your memory is poor, you can head on over. We'll make sure that you have all that stuff and links to other things we've talked about today. Well, good, good. As we wrap up, as we wind down, you know what I'm about to ask you. You've heard me ask so many people this before so I've got a feeling you've been thinking about this one so what parting advice would you give to the listeners today?

Brent Philpot:

Don't judge others. What I mean by that? Don't put people in a box like subcategories. It always makes me kind of smile whenever somebody seeks me out in public and they say you're normal. I have to laugh because yeah, I am but if you knew how hard it was to get this way. I was going to say one thing, though, and I guess I can leave your listeners with this: fear is just an acronym meaning false evidence appearing real and that's the way I've lived my life.

Jeremy Lesniak:



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There are many things that I love about the martial arts but today's episode, today's guest, makes me think strongly about two of them. The first is that the martial arts is a place for everyone. Everyone belongs in this thing that we all do and then, the second thing, the thing that I don't think about very often but I'm glad that I'm reminded of is that everyone has something to contribute to the martial arts. Our unique path through life, our upbringing, the things that make us who we are as individuals, when we get to contribute that back to the martial arts, whether that be to a school of our own, or even as a student, we're all better because of that and I don't know that we've ever had a guest that made me think about that so much as today's guest so thank you, sir, for coming on this show. You can find show notes with a whole bunch of stuff. Links and photos and tons of stuff over at whistlekickmartialartsradio.com. While you're there sign up for the newsletter, we've been sending out more and more and we've got some unique, original content coming through in those newsletters. If you haven't seen it, you should, so check it out and don't forget the code PODCAST15 that's going to get you 15% off everything at whistlekick.com. If you want to help us out, whether that's through making a purchase or leaving a review on Apple's Podcast store or another one or maybe share this episode or something else that we've got going on with a friend, help us grow. Help us reach more people. Help us expand the martial arts and if you want to find us on social media, we've got some fun and funny stuff going on there, we're @whistlekick on Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, Instagram, YouTube, we're all over the place and if you want to get to me directly, the best way: jeremy@whistlekick.com. Until next time, train hard, smile and have a great day!