



Episode 406 – Sifu Abe Santos | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com



Jeremy Lesniak:

Hey there, everybody! Welcome, this is whistlekick martial arts radio episode 406. Today, my guest is Sifu Abe Santos. My name is Jeremy Lesniak, I'm your host of the show, I'm the founder of whistlekick and I love martial arts. I love all kinds of martial arts, specifically traditional martial arts and that's what we get to on this show. We talk about traditional martial arts. Karate, Kung Fu, Taekwondo, Filipino Martial arts and historical European martial arts and Capoeira and so many others. In fact, if I was to make a list, that would be a very long intro and I'd still find a way to leave something out and I would offend someone so if I didn't mention your art, please don't get hurt. I just picked a few off the top of my head that, statistically, are the biggest ones based on our past guests. If you want to see all the episodes with past guests and topic shows and all of that because we do this twice a week, you could head to whistlekickmartialartsradio.com and see all the episodes with the guest notes and pictures and a ton more. If you head to whistlekick.com, you're going to find everything that we do because we do more than the show. We have products and you can purchase those with 15% off with the code `PODCAST15` but we also do a lot of other things. We're behind a lot of projects on the web, just trying to help grow the martial arts and spread the benefits of martial arts training so go there, find out our other stuff. Check it out! Tell a friend. We've had a lot of wonderful guests on the show but not everyone of those guests has the legacy of training at the first school that Bruce Lee set up but Sifu Abe Santos does and, in fact, that school recently closed down and he is carrying on the legacy himself. Now, of course, we talk about Bruce Lee, we talk about Bruce Lee's student who became his instructor and we talk



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about a lot of things that are not Bruce Lee-related. Sifu and I had, I thought, a wonderful conversation, had a really good time with this one and I think it comes through. We talk about his life, we talk about training. We talk about a lot of philosophy and, honestly, in hindsight, that makes sense. Someone training in Jeet Kune Do, being philosophical, yeah, that makes sense so, let's check out this episode. Sifu Santos, welcome to whistlekick martial arts radio.

Abe Santos:

Hello, Jeremy, thank you so much for inviting me on. I appreciate it very much.

Jeremy Lesniak:

I appreciate you being here. Am I pronouncing your last name right? I should have done that before we started.

Abe Santos:

Yes, yes, Santos is fine. Perfect.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Where the inflection goes in that A can vary a lot.

Abe Santos:

It's usually the Santos, it's pronounced Spanish.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah, yeah, I was reading it but yeah, how are you? We were just chatting, of course, I'm sure the listeners know we were talking for a few minutes before we got rolling here. Make sure technology's working and all that.

Abe Santos:

Yes, yes, I'm doing very, very well. I'm in Seattle and it's a little sprinkling right now but, for the past few days, we've had 83 degree weather so we've been fortunate, yes.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Really? That's unseasonal and, listeners, of course, I was sharing with Sifu before the show that I woke up to snow this morning so I don't know if it's intentional but it feels like he's rubbing it in.

Abe Santos:

It's a little sprinkly now. It's actually warm. The sun's coming out but there was sprinkling a little bit earlier but I believe it's going to get sunny a little bit this afternoon.



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Jeremy Lesniak:

It's amazing how much weather impacts. I mean, the weather impacts, of course, the climate and plants and animals and people's mood but it can be so much more than that. I've talked a little bit on this show. My last career was in IT and we had a consulting firm and if the weather was bad, computers broke more often because people were inside more often so there's something that you don't really think about but when the weather was bad, the business was up.

Abe Santos:

Oh wow, I didn't realize that. I guess that's true. If you're inside more, you're using the equipment more and basically, tiring it out more so that's when you need to repair it.

Jeremy Lesniak:

And then, of course, here in New England, if we have an unseasonably nice day, if it's early May or even April, and it's a beautiful, beautiful day, martial arts classes are going to be very poorly attended.

Abe Santos:

That's what we found through the years is that, it's funny, because in the summer time, there'd be less and less people coming in the summer because everybody goes on vacation and it's difficult when class begins at a certain time and it's nice and sunny. You're with your family and it's difficult to force yourself to go to class and say, oh, I need to go to class. Some people do it but, for the most part, I think everybody usually try to stay away and take a break and I think, if it rains more, it's exactly when I think people will be in class.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah, because what's more fun to do inside than martial arts but then, of course, if you can be outside as much as I love training outside, I mean, that's not the way most classes are formatted. Most schools don't have the opportunity to train outside.

Abe Santos:

No, especially when it's really hot or it's raining then it's easier to have it inside especially that's less, what do you call that? Less people watching and less distraction from people and so, that's why we typically have it inside.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah, it's hard enough to teach people, especially children, inside. To take them outside and deal with the distraction of butterflies and birds and a dog running by is always a nightmare.

Abe Santos:



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Yeah, it's very, very hard. You keep it inside in a room, in a box, you finish what you have to do and then, you can get done with that and then, you get back outside. Work hard while you're in there, no distractions and then, you come out and then you can play again.

Jeremy Lesniak:

That's right. Now, I introduced you as Sifu so I'm going to assume that you are a practitioner of some manner of Chinese martial art so can you tell me about that? Where does that title come from for you?

Abe Santos:

Sure. The martial arts style, system, that I teach is called Jun Fan Jeet Kune Do and Jun Fan, everybody knows who Bruce Lee is, Jun Fan is Chinese for Bruce Lee and the Jeet Kune Do, in English is the way of the intersecting fist. You can call it as Bruce Lee's Way of the Intercepting Fists. My teacher was Sifu Taky Kimura which was, is Bruce Lee's first assistant instructor in Seattle. When Bruce Lee first moved to Seattle in 1959, he started a school, the Jun Fan Gung Fu Institute in Seattle until he left in 1964 and Sifu Taky, after Sigung Bruce left, continued to teach and, basically, continued to teach, perpetuate what Bruce Lee taught him through the school and we were at underneath his grocery store for many, many years and he owned a grocery store on First Hill called the Shop Rite and, basically, we worked out on the basement of the grocery store so very simple and, in 2002, we moved to Woodinville to a barn and we continued to teach in there because Sifu Taky sold the grocery store in 2001 and, basically, renovated the barn and we continued to teach there until I left at the end of 2017.

Jeremy Lesniak:

So, you're saying that the training space you were in up until 2001 is the same one that Bruce Lee started teaching in in '59?

Abe Santos:

When Bruce Lee was alive, he and Bruce Lee passed away, he wanted Sifu Taky to close the school, to set the school down, basically. When Bruce passed away, Sifu Taky moved the school to underneath his basement because he didn't...I think, initially, Bruce Lee wanted to have a lot of schools of martial arts but I think, as years pass, I think he changed that philosophy and he decided that instead of opening a bunch of schools, he wanted to kind of keep it as small as possible. Quality versus quantity and that's kind of the rationale that Sifu Taky that kept all these years where we basically taught like a private club where nobody knew at the basement of the grocery store where people would ask us, what were you doing? Because we would clean the parking lots every Monday evening and we would always tell people that we were in work release and so, people wouldn't ask questions and if you go down to the basement of the store, you wouldn't know that there was a school there but that was a school that Sifu Taky Kimura taught Jun Fan Gung Fu and Jeet Kune Do for many, many years until 2001.

Jeremy Lesniak:



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That's a long time to be in one space.

Abe Santos:

Yes, yes, it was a family grocery store that they owned and since he owned the grocery store, he had that basement clear and open and if anybody knows who Sifu Taky is, they understand that Sifu Taky, when Bruce Lee passed away, he never want to...if people ask if he want to...basically, doing seminars or open up a school but Sifu Taky never wanted to do that. He just wanted to maintain it very small and continue to teach a small group of people out of respect to his best friend Bruce Lee and that's what he continued for all these years. He didn't do it for the money. He basically didn't charge any dues. In fact, I remember when I first started in the '80s, there were no dues charged and maybe in the '90s, maybe 1993, 1994, they started charging \$2 a month and then, it became \$5 a month but that money didn't even go to anything. That money just went to keeping the equipment that we had downstairs and also, it also basically went into a summer party that we had every summer where Sifu Roy Harris, another one of Bruce Lee's students that taught class there, would host a party at the basement and people at the school would come and attend the party every summer so that's where that money went to was that. It was basically a private club. Sifu Taky didn't collect the dues. He paid the insurance that he had to pay for it out of his own pocket and that's what we did for many, many years.

Jeremy Lesniak:

So, if it was that secretive, how did you find it in the '80s?

Abe Santos:

In 1983, I went to a Kung Fu demonstration. It was hosted by John Leong which was the teacher for the Gung Fu club in Seattle and he held a martial arts demonstration every year and one year, 1983, was held at South Pacific University and at that time I was taking Shorin-Ryu Karate for a few years and I wanted to attend that so my mom and dad actually dropped me off there and I attended that by myself and I was 13 years old and 13 just turning 14 and I, basically, watched it and I sat in the bleachers and in the pamphlet there was something that says Taky Kimura, Bruce Lee's friend, Bruce Lee's best friend something like that with a photo of Sifu Taky and Sifu Taky didn't do anything. He just, basically, got up, stood up and introduced him and he went back down and as soon as I heard Bruce Lee, I wanted to find as much information about him because I was always a big fan of Bruce Lee. I've seen his movies, I watched Enter the Dragon at a big theater around 1980 when it went on the theater and I wanted to learn as much about Bruce Lee and one of the first books I bought, in fact, the first book I ever bought was about Jeet Kune Do when I was 10 years old and I bought it at a Uwajimaya grocery store, a Japanese grocery store in Chinatown and I still had that same book today with my notes and everything as a 10 year old, 11 year old, the writing in there and looking at the print and reading it but didn't understand what I was reading at that time so I knew about Bruce Lee and I used to buy posters and take the bus to Chinatown to buy Bruce Lee posters and watch all his movies so as soon as I see Sifu



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Taky, someone actually knew him in Seattle, I tried to find as much information about Taky Kimura and he was in the white pages and it just said Taky Kimura with either, I think, it was an address. 9th avenue and that's it and basically, I wrote him a letter when I was 13 and he responded and I met him and I met him at a different grocery store. It was a grocery store that he also owned. It was on Capitol Hill and basically, I met him when I was just a young teenager and he was wearing a kind of a shirt and tie and he had a boardroom and it was so formal when I first met him but anybody that joined the Jun Fan Gung Fu in Seattle always know that Sifu Taky always interviewed everybody that came in. He always asks you questions to make sure that it's the right fit. I remember he asked me questions and asked who I was and we talked and basically, that's how I first met Sifu Taky and that's how I first joined the Institute of Jun Fan Gung Fu Institute of Seattle. The official time you can start was when you're 16 years old so I couldn't really officially join but at time, I would come and watch the class and the classes were held Monday evening at 8 PM so I'd watch sometimes. I'd come down, I'll watch the class when I was a teenager but I was very young, though, so I couldn't really go there unless someone dropped me off or picked me up. I came and watch but I couldn't really officially join until I was 16 but I remember visiting Sifu Taky when, before I can join and even after that and he come and he talk to me and he's spend, as busy as he was, he'd spend time with me to talk to me and he would even show me techniques, tell me things to work on and after I joined, after I became 16, officially joined and came to class but I wasn't even consistent coming to class because I became a teenage father when I was 17 so I basically was so busy with being a parent and working full-time that, although, I tried to go to class, I wasn't consistent in class until a few years later but Sifu Taky, any time I come, I visit him or call him, he'd always be open and sometimes, he'd call me back and ask me when I'm coming back and that's the kind of person he was and that's how I first met him in 1983 and I've been with him since just until last year, end of 2017.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Anybody that's been a parent at any point knows how difficult that is. It's a challenge but to be 17 and a parent and the fact that you didn't stop training, you didn't abandon it entirely, you were less consistent, that says something about, either your time management skills; I think it definitely says something about your time management skills but also your passion for training; which, at that age, there's something there. There's something about why it was so important to you. Can you talk about that?

Abe Santos:

I just really loved the martial arts. I think when I was younger growing up, I didn't have that much confidence in myself. I had kind of a speech impediment where, anytime I had to, I would be so nervous when in class I have to read a section in a book and I would stammer and stutter because I was so nervous when I had to talk a lot in front of people and I think, at that time, when I was 8, 9 years old, my buddies and I would get bullied while playing in the playground and that first led me to want to take Shorin-Ryu Karate because I didn't want to, I felt so helpless. I was so scared. When you're 8 years old, 9 years old, you feel so helpless and scared, your brother and sister were getting beat up by bigger kids



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that you didn't want that to happen again so that forced me to want to take Karate so I had my mom and dad sign me up in Karate and I did that but it's funny because it became more than just me learning how to fight. I became confident in myself. I wasn't as nervous in front of other people anymore. I wasn't so nervous to read in front of class. I had a little more confidence and I think it showed to the way I carried myself even after when I became 10, 11 or 12, I just had that kind of that confidence and I think, and then after I joined the Jun Fan Gung Fu Institute in Seattle with Sifu Taky, I didn't want that to stop. I enjoyed myself while I was going there and, as difficult as it was, while I was going to school because I worked full-time, I was working 30, 35 hours a week. One of my schedules while I was in school at 18 when I was at the, I went to school called Seattle University, was that I kind of grew up when my daughter was born and when she was born, that's when I realized I need to get my life straightened out so I worked and my schedule was I'd work 2 o'clock in the morning, 2 to 4, and I'd deliver newspapers and it was when USA Today first came out so I delivered at different stores and I would deliver the Valley Daily Journal newspapers in front of people's houses and it was paper route and then, at 6 o'clock in the morning, at 5, 5 o'clock in the morning, I would, basically, be I was a phlebotomist. I basically drew blood from babies and then, at 8, 9 o'clock in the morning, I started school from 9 to 2 o'clock, to 3 o'clock and that was my schedule until and I did homework at 1 and I finally graduated, I graduated as an engineer. It took me a little while but the common thing, what I had during the entire thing besides my family was the Jun Fan Gung Fu was Sifu Taky. If I didn't go to class because I was working because I was busy, Sifu Taky would call me and ask me if I was coming back. I enjoyed being in class, working out with the people that were there and enjoyed the camaraderie that we had and basically sparring with people, we had the chance to spar, basically go in there and coming into class and feeling good about myself after I left and you feel good while you're there because you're sweating, you're working hard but you feel good when you're done. You feel confident, you feel healthy, you feel like you have something. I'm very a firm believer of you have to have something you're passionate about. Something you really take that you really enjoy in life. It doesn't have to be martial arts. It doesn't have to be...it could be anything. It could be art, it could be reading, it could be tennis. It could be anything but I feel like you need that something to make you feel good about yourself so no matter how much hard work you're going through, how much tough time you're going through in life, you had that that you can come back to that that made you feel good, that made you feel whole and complete and, to me, the Jun Fan Jeet Kune Do while I was there did that. It made me feel good about, it's what held me together during all my tough times when my daughter's mom and I didn't get along and Sifu Taky gave me some really great advice when that happened and it gave me, a lot of times when I was working really hard and going to school and working and going through all the stress of being a parent at such a young age, all that adversity, it was the Jun Fan Jeet Kune Do that got me through it.

Jeremy Lesniak:

What was it like learning martial arts in a school founded by Bruce Lee? Was there a pressure there?

Abe Santos:



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I...I didn't really feel the pressure of anything there. At that age, I didn't think that I fathomed how...what I was, where I was at because I was just a young kid. I was busy with all the other things that I was doing. It wasn't until, probably, until 1993. It was the 20th anniversary of Bruce Lee's death anniversary and I remember we went, the senior students in class, we went to a dinner function at the house of [00:22:23] and I remember at that function that was the first time that I saw some of the original students of Bruce Lee that came and visited Seattle at that time. I met people that lived her like Jesse Clover, Skip Ellsworth. I remember talking to him for a little while and other people like Sonny Umpad who was a Filipino practitioner in Visayan martial arts and Ted Wong. These people came here in 1993 and talked about Bruce Lee, celebrating his life and then in 1996, we had the first Jun Fan Jeet Kune Do nucleus meeting in January 1996. That was held in Seattle and yet, all the original students of Bruce Lee, not all of them but a lot of them. you got people like Dan Inosanto, Ted Wong, George Lee, Allen Joe, Larry Hartsell, Richard Bustillo, Dan Lee, people like that, Herb Jackson, Bob Bremer, Pete Jacobs, Linda and Shannon were there, of course, and, of course, Sifu Taky and it was just an amazing feeling right there and say, hey, wow! We are really an important part of the Jun Fan, of the Jeet Kune Do of Bruce Lee's legacy because we are, we all began in Bruce Lee's first school so that right there, hit me right there, saying how important the Seattle era of the Jun Fan Jeet Kune Do is, in terms of the whole realm of the Jeet Kune Do legacy, the Jun Fan, Bruce Lee's legacy, how important we really were. I mean he's buried in Seattle and, because, Seattle was his favorite place to be at. That's his favorite place to be at. That's what he felt most at home and it was just amazing. That's when I realized how important, how lucky I am to be part of the Jun Fan Gung Fu Institute , to be, to have met Sifu Taky so many years ago, to know him through all these years, to be part of that, that's where I felt very, very lucky and very fortunate.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Sounds like an honor, not just the style, but the legacy. One of the things that a lot of people resonate with in the martial arts seem to be that connection, the legacy. I think that's why so many people push lineage and make it so important. So and so taught so and so and I learned from them but I don't think anybody can argue that to be 2 degrees, 2 degrees of separation from Bruce Lee's instruction, pretty powerful.

Abe Santos:

I feel very, very lucky and very happy because, to think that I wrote Sifu Taky a letter when I was only 13 or 14 years old, and he responded to that letter and I contacted him and here I am today, 2019, and it's an amazing feeling. In fact, because if we think about it, when we had the first annual Jeet Kune Do nucleus meeting was 1996, Bruce Lee passed away in 1973. Now, it's 2019 so there's a 23-year separation between that time period and now, this time period and I was just thinking about it the other day and I feel like, I feel really old because I was like those students, the original students of Bruce Lee that were there 23 years later, they all met in Seattle. Here I am 23 years later still in Seattle and most of those original students of Bruce Lee have all gone. They have all passed away so I feel very fortunate to



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be here, still, with Sifu Taky. To have met a lot of them through the years, to know them and to talk to them about Bruce Lee, to be associated to this, I feel very honored to be part of this legacy and I think one of the reasons why I wanted to start the school, because when I first...23 years ago, I didn't think about opening up the school. There was really nothing that interest me in opening up the school. I just wanted to work out, continue to learn, be with Sifu Taky and that was it but it was years later maybe when we did the first seminar in France in 2012, 2013 and I met people that, I'm telling you, Jeremy, that met people that were basically crying to me how honored they feel to have us come there to teach them, how they feel like they were closer to Bruce Lee than any time in their life. I have a student in France I saw earlier this year that, last year when I first saw him, he told me that he analyzed Bruce Lee for all these years and he never felt closer to Bruce Lee until he went to my first seminar last year because I was so close because I'm learning from Taky Kimura which was Bruce Lee's best friend and Bruce Lee's higher ranking student. I'm friends with Sifu Taky. I'm friends with Linda Lee and I've been part of this for such a long time, they felt so close to it and these people can never go to Seattle. They can never visit United States. It's difficult for them, very expensive. It's hard to get a visa so I felt so lucky that I'm part of this that I felt obligated to kind of help perpetuate the legacy by going to help teach them and don't teach them for the money or anything like that. Basically, these people who are interested in learning Bruce Lee's original art and, not for any ranks, not for any certificates, but just learning. To be closer to Bruce Lee in that way and I'm happy to teach people like that and that's why I do what I do and why I opened the school is we want to continue what Sifu Taky started through us where our school is not profit. We don't charge. I don't get paid to teach. I do it out of passion and my passion to perpetuate Sifu Taky's legacy and Bruce Lee's legacy and that's why we continue to do this: to continue what he started.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Good stuff! now, it's hard to talk about Jeet Kune Do without Bruce Lee. It's hard to talk about Bruce Lee as a martial artist without Jeet Kune Do. A lot of martial artists read his writings as, in an attempt to understand his martial arts philosophies. I'm going to assume that you've read the same books?

Abe Santos:

I've read many books. I don't read too many books anymore but I read many books in the past. I heard many things.

Jeremy Lesniak:

What I'm curious of, because the majority of us who read those books, like to think that we understand what he was saying. What his intent was, what Jeet Kune Do was all about but, of course, spending decades training in a martial arts style and a system is going to give you far more indication of what was really going on assuming that it hasn't been changed too much and I'm going to doubt that it was with the reverence that you're speaking of and your Sifu, I'm assuming, instilled in you, that reverence for



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Bruce Lee so what I'm curious of is...is our understanding, the wider martial arts community, is our understanding of Bruce Lee and of Jeet Kune Do based on his books, is it accurate?

Abe Santos:

I think everybody has their own opinion and their own interpretation of what Jeet Kune Do is. I think you have to understand that Jeet Kune Do is more than a martial arts. It's a way of thinking, a way of thought. It's a way of life and Jeet Kune Do is, if you're defining the martial art, Jeet Kune Do in Chinese is the way of the intercepting fists. The core, if you speak in relative terms just in martial arts itself, the core of Jeet Kune Do, what Bruce Lee trained in; his official training was in Wing Chun Gung Fu when he was 13 until he was 18 so he had 5 years of training in Wing Chun so the core of his training when he started Jun Fan Gung Fu he started was the Wing Chun Gung Fu but as he progressed through the years and as he learned judo, he learned judo here in Seattle with many people here. One of the people that he learned with was Fred Sato. Fred Sato was a Japanese. He was an Olympic judo blackbelt and he learned judo from him and he learned different other styles and he read a lot of books on martial arts and he used and he combined what was useful and what worked for him, what worked for his particular body style and as he left Seattle, he went to san Francisco, to Oakland and he started a school there and he fought Wong Jack Man in that movie, Birth of the Dragon, where he found out that Wing Chun had limitations because he couldn't chase people down with that because the Wing Chun, if you remember, Wing Chun was started by a woman and the style of the Wing Chun is you come to me. It's not a pose where you attack. It's more like you come and it's more like a defensive measure and you come and attack me and then I respond counter and Bruce Lee, he evolved. He changed what he was doing because he added, later on, when he went to LA, he met people that were bigger than him. People like Lou Alcindor, Kareem Abdul Jabbar. People like Larry Hartsell, Bob Bremer, that he couldn't do certain things with them so he had to adapt. He had to change instead of doing one of the chi sao, for example, that he did in Seattle, he did more of the foot work. He added fencing, he added boxing and he adapted his style to fit, at the time, to fit what he wanted to work on at that time period. Does that make sense?

Jeremy Lesniak:

It does.

Abe Santos:

And so, he adapted himself, during that time, he made himself better each time but the core of what it is is still the Wing Chun Gung Fu because I've seen letter to Sifu Taky that Bruce Lee wrote to Sifu Taky and, in those letters, and Sifu Taky would get letters and would call, would get calls to Bruce Lee and say Taky I don't want you to do this anymore because Wing Chun isn't all, all. It's still important but when you face bigger people, you have to do something like this so, at the time, when he moved to Oakland, to L.A., he'd focus less on the chi sao and focus more on the mobility, for example, the boxing. It doesn't mean the stuff he taught in Seattle, Oakland wasn't important, it just meant that at the time with the



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people, the kind of students he had, he adapted and he did what he wanted to work on to fit that individual to fit what would work at that time period but the core of everything that still comes in still from the sao period, still from, and even sooner than that, is still from the Wing Chun and I think that when Bruce Lee went to Seattle, he went to Seattle twice a year because they visited Linda's mom because Linda's mom still lives here and he wrote Sifu Taky letters all the time telling him what he was up to speed on in Oakland and L.A. and told Sifu Taky, I want you to work on this, I want you to work on this more and then when I come to Seattle, I'm going to show this to you and that's what Bruce Lee did with Sifu Taky, always kept him in a loop with what he was doing in respect to the Jeet Kune Do but it was Bruce Lee's Jeet Kune Do. It's what worked for him. It's what...it was what Bruce Lee's expression of the Jun Fan Gung Fu. The Jun Fan Gung Fu, it's basics and the core, it's still, a lot of it is still Wing Chun but his expression and what he added afterwards with the boxing, with the fencing, with the savate, with the judo; all those things became Bruce Lee's expression of the Jeet Kune Do so that was Bruce Lee's Jeet Kune Do. It was Bruce Lee's way of intercepting fist but, even if the name, you think about it. A lot of them, even the name, Wing Chun has a lot of countering and has a lot of interception techniques, even the name goes back to the Wing Chun so people have this conception that Bruce Lee took away all the Wing Chun. That's not true. He still felt that was important. It just wasn't what he was teaching primarily at the time and you still have to have the core of the Jun Fan Gung Fu. That's all that things, the kicks and the punches and everything, that's still the Jun Fan Gung Fu but your expression of that, the core, is the Jeet Kune Do. When the nucleus formed in 1996, January 10th 1996 and we had the meeting in Seattle. I was fortunate to be part of that, to be there at the time, even had a video of that, still, and sometimes, I still look at once in a while and it was formed because there were people teaching this, people teaching that. There wasn't a consistency. There was people that attended a few seminars but didn't really understand the art. I remember in 1993, I went to Denver for work and I remember, I looked at the yellow pages and I look at the martial arts. I always do with every city I go to and I saw Jeet Kune Do in big letters. I called that number and I said, can I come and watch because I was working and I was just at the hotel and, at first, the person said, we don't allow visitors to watch but then he asked me where I started, told him I was from Seattle and he asked me if I train and I said, yeah, I'm one of Sifu Taky's students and, sure enough, he came and picked me up 20 miles away and I watched this class and at the end, I saw his class and he asked me or I asked him so where did you learn from and he said I attended a few seminars here and there and then, I was watching his techniques and then, afterwards, some of the students came and asked me afterwards and said oh, can you come and show something so I showed them a few things and they came and when the instructor wasn't there, they said to me, you should teach the class but what happens is that you have watered down version of the Jeet Kune Do, Bruce Lee's Jeet Kune Do because people who are learning this, learning that and they come, they don't really understand the full art of Jeet Kune Do so they're teaching the watered down version is like, for example, someone teaches one thing but only touches the surface of it, 30% of it. they don't really understand it because they're learning a different technique all of a sudden without really fully understanding the first technique then, all of a sudden, they open up a school after a year, 2 years. basically, they're teaching that person that they learned 30% of the original technique from the source.



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Let's say, Bruce Lee, they're only learning 30% of what he knows. Does that make sense? So it's a watered down version and people are learning all these different systems and combining together and they're thinking that's Jeet Kune Do but Bruce Lee Jeet Kune Do was not that. One of the rules that we had in school in the Jun Fan Gung Fu Institute before was that if you learn from us, you only stuck with us and you didn't learn anything else and there is a reason for it and I didn't realize that until later and the reason why is because to really, fully understand an art, a technique, you have to really learn it. If you're trying to learn this and that and this and that, what happens is beginners that you learn, you think that you're combining the different techniques together without even knowing it because you don't really understand it so what happens is that, and then you come on a class and you started thinking that's what you learn but that's not really what you were taught. That's what you think you were taught but that's what you learn and that's the problem with now is that, and they call it Jeet Kune Do, but it's their Jeet Kune Do. It's their own interpretation of that art but it's not Bruce Lee's Jeet Kune Do and as long as you understand that that it's not, no longer, Bruce Lee's Jeet Kune Do, once you start adding all these different things to it, once you start putting your own tweaks to it, it's no longer Bruce Lee's Jeet Kune Do. It's your own self-expression. One of the things that came out of that nucleus meeting was that they wanted all the different schools from Oakland, Seattle and L.A. to teach the same Jun Fan Gung Fu meaning the same techniques throughout each of the schools so there was a consistency that everybody was taught the basics, the same thing no matter what school you were. I have a copy from the original curriculum from L.A., Seattle and Oakland and, believe me, they're very, very similar and, but now, what happens is that when you start putting money involved and you start adding, trying to make money and you start doing this and that then you start changing it to get people excited about things. They say oh, I learned so much, I learned this, I learned this but you lose the simplicity of the art. You learn the originality, what Bruce Lee was trying to portray, or trying to teach and, it's not to say it's wrong, but you lose the core of what Bruce Lee was trying to do and I think, one of the things that I was fortunate enough to be Sifu Taky's student for a long time, he kind of told me all this for many, many years that he understood the totality of the art of what Bruce Lee was trying to go from here to there and what he taught at the Jeet Kune Do level in Seattle was that he taught what Bruce Lee actually taught him. He didn't change it. He didn't add something else to it. He didn't add his own techniques to it or a different martial art to it. He kept it as pure as what Bruce Lee taught him as Bruce Lee taught him 20 years, 30, 40 years later and what Bruce Lee taught him, not only what he taught him when he was in Seattle but we also taught him when he came back to Seattle twice a year so that's why Sifu Taky said he understand where Bruce Lee was trying to go in terms of the totality of the art of the Jun Fan Jeet Kune Do and because he kept him responsible. The reason why he can keep it as pure as possible is because he didn't do it for the money. He wasn't trying to keep students. He was trying to, basically, just teach Bruce Lee's art the way Bruce Lee taught him and that's why, at the original school that we had, a lot of people left. They didn't stay consistently. They left after 2, 3 years because they got tired of why are we doing the same thing over again or why are we doing this or why are we doing all the advanced techniques that the next group is doing? It was a way for us to filter out, to weed out the people who weren't serious about learning Bruce Lee's art. It was...people just want to



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learn really fast. Good things take time and you have to learn the core and the basics of the technique to really fully understand it, to really be able to teach it. you have to understand that. You can't rush into it. You can't run before you can know how to walk so everything's a step and in Seattle, Sifu Taky was able to do it, teach it the way he want to teach it because he wasn't trying to keep students. It was a private club. We didn't do it to make money. He jus, basically, taught exactly the way Bruce Lee wanted to teach it.

Jeremy Lesniak:

When we talk about any martial artist there are obviously a lot of influences and you've spoken very highly of your Sifu, Sifu Taky, through our conversation today and, of course, Bruce Lee's influence on you can't be argued but if there was somebody else that we could name, if we were to take those 2 people off the list, who would you say has been really influential for you?

Abe Santos:

I think, I'll probably say my mom and the reason why I say that is because my mom is the one in the Shorin-ryū karate, she's the one that drove me at class twice a week to take me to class. She was the one that made my dad drive me to South Pacific University to watch the first martial arts demonstration when I first saw Sifu Taky and she was the one that basically supported me through the years and driving me to the Shorin-ryū karate and, also, even sometimes driving me to Seattle. Going with her to Seattle while she was working to allow me to even take the bus to visit Sifu Taky when I was a teenager and she did that and she supported me throughout the years and still supports me to this day through what I'm trying to do which is to perpetuate Bruce Lee's legacy as much as possible and Sifu Taky's legacy as much as possible and I'll probably say my mom, in that sense, is without her support I wouldn't be here right now.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Did she understand how important martial arts was to you as a kid?

Abe Santos:

I think she did. I think that's why she drove me there twice a week to the Shorin-ryū and she didn't drive that much and she was willing to drive me and no complaints. She drove me every Tuesday or Thursday or something like that and pick me up 2 hours later and take me to class and there was a lot of that for 4 or 5 years until I basically went to Jun Fan Gung Fu.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Cool. Now, if you could train with anyone that you haven't, and again, I want to take Bruce Lee off the table here because that seems like an obvious answer. We're trying to get into some new stuff. If you



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can train with anybody anywhere in the world, any style, alive or dead, who would you want to train with?

Abe Santos:

I would probably want to train... and you take Bruce Lee out the table, right?

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah, yeah.

Abe Santos:

I would probably say there's...I'm trying to recall the name of...there's a famous Japanese swordsman.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Musashi?

Abe Santos:

Musashi, yeah, and you hear about all the stories about him, how great of a samurai he was and what he did. I'd like to follow him around and learn from him because I like samurai movies very much and I enjoy the samurai flicks that you see like the Lone Wolf and the Cub series or The Blind Swordsman Zatoichi so I really enjoy kind of the samurai aspect and the ways the samurai, their way of life and also, the way they train and also, to see how he was as a skilled swordsman because you hear the stories about the samurai and they're very, very skilled swordsman so to see that in person, I think that would be great thing to do.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah, and certainly, not an uncommon answer on the show but I want to dig into something. You used a word, a specific word, that I found interesting. You'd like to follow him around and when you talked about your start with Jeet Kune Do, you were observing. So I'm curious if that word choice has anything to do with your notion of education, especially martial arts education.

Abe Santos:

I think it's very important to watch, to observe and then to learn from them as much as possible but to do it in a way where they teach you freely that are themselves. That they're not teaching you or are doing this where it's forced. I want to see them in their natural state, basically, and see what they are as a person, an individual and I think you see it's not just martial arts. It isn't just learning how to fight or learning how to move a sword or learning how to punch. I think martial arts is more important. I think like the Jun Fan, the Jeet Kune Do, it's kind of a way of life, in a sense. At first, it becomes physical, you want to learn how to fight, you want to learn how to protect yourself but, in certain times, it becomes



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kind of mental, in a way. You just reached that point where you're confident in yourself where you walk and you have pride in what you do. You want to be the best in what you can do. No matter what it is, to do your best, to be aware of your surroundings, to kind of learn as much as possible and I think that way of life, that way of, basically, way that you can take from martial arts to life, in general I think, is very, very important because these people like Musashi, they weren't just people that did martial arts and then was done. That was who they were. That was their very being. That's what made them who they were. The martial arts isn't what defined them. It's what made them who to where they were. It was part of their journey but to see them in their natural state, to see them fully, I think that would be a great thing.

Jeremy Lesniak:

The world is certainly changed from that time, from the time of the samurai and the need for the martial arts on a physical level, on a self-defense...people make different arguments, I would say, it's lessened but I think we can make argument for the other aspect of the martial arts, maybe even, being more important today. As you've started your own school, how do you reconcile the differences or...how do you teach, not just the physical aspects of martial arts, but how do you make sure that you're working with people on the philosophy, the personal growth, the understanding of themselves, how do you balance all that?

Abe Santos:

I think when you have a student and something that Sifu Taky done in the past, he screened people who want to join, I do the same as well. I see what they're interested in. where do you want to go in this? If they want to, basically, I get emails. Oh, I want to be in movies, I want to open up a school, I want to teach this and after a few year, get a rank here but I have to put them down to earth and tell them that's now what we're about. If you want to learn real martial arts and you want to learn from us, and same way to what Sifu Taky told me many, many years ago, is we teach you how to become better people. I tell them first off the bat, we're not here to teach you how to fight. We teach you how to become better individuals because I think, as people become, and they basically understand that and they understand that we're not going to go and try to put them on a routine where after 1 year, they can go and beat everybody up or they open up a school. That's not what we're about. We're upfront with people with that. We tell them that. This is a process, this is about the learning, of learning the technique to fully understand it, to have patience, to teach you patience. To teach you, how after you understand the technique, and you learn the technique and you know how to fully apply it, you know how to express it in combat, express it without, I mean, I have to think about it and with that, as you learn more techniques, you become confident in yourself. You become confident in your ability where you don't have to show off. You don't have to tell people, oh, I take martial arts. If someone basically is making obscene gestures at you or calling you names, you can walk away from it and you can just smile and just say sorry, I'm just going to go on my way, because martial arts is your words. It's using your mind. That's real martial arts. It's not the physical. In the beginning, it's physical but as you progress and



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you become confident in yourself. It automatically becomes mental where you don't have to prove yourself. You're not this spirited, young, brash kid that has to prove yourself to everybody who challenges you anymore. You go in a sense now where you, basically, you don't have to prove yourself because you're confident in your ability that you can do exactly what you need to do and that's it and walk away from it where words, even just the worse words that people say to you, that you can just brush it off because it's nothing. It's just words and, in that sense, you have confidence and you can take that outside of martial arts. You can take that in your life where you stress when in martial arts, when you're training, you become good at it. You can bring that outside of that to anything that you do in life. To be the best you can be. To have confidence in yourself that you're just as good as anybody else as long as you work hard at it because it's not easy. It's work. You don't have to compete with anybody else but yourself to be the best you can be and we lay that out for people from the beginning. We tell them that go at your own pace, do the best you can, that is the most important thing and they learn. As they became confident in their abilities, they learn to use that same philosophy elsewhere in life where they do the best they can in anything that they do and they're confident in doing it.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Well said. Now, you brought up Enter the Dragon earlier in our conversation and I like to ask guests about movies and TV and the martial arts kind of pop culture stuff that they enjoy. Do you still watch martial arts TV, movies?

Abe Santos:

Oh, yes, I do.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Do you have favorites?

Abe Santos:

Besides Enter the Dragon and the Chinese Connection, I watch a lot of Jet Li movies. I watch, one of my favorite movies is called The Raid. It's with an Indonesian actor. I think his name was Iko Uwais.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah, we've talked about this movie on this show quite a bit.

Abe Santos:

Okay, yeah, that's one of my favorite movies and I always watch the movies that come out in theater like movies of Jason Statham that comes out so whenever there's a martial arts movie, I try to see if it's any good.

Jeremy Lesniak:



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Cool. What future plans do you have? What are you working towards?

Abe Santos:

We still have the Jun Fan Gung Fu Academy. We're so many years with Sifu Taky, we decided to leave to go on our own path. I think the academy was started on the same context of trying to start a school where we didn't do it for money, where we weren't paid to teach and taught for the purity of the art and kind of teach Bruce Lee's art, what Sifu Taky learned from him, and we pass off to students who are interested in learning. We try to do in that sense of the academy and so, we opened last year, early 2018, we opened it up and we're in the Chinatown area and then, also, I do a few seminars a year. I have a regular job during the day so I don't do it for the money but, what I try to do is, the people that I met in the past that were interested in learning Bruce Lee's art and Bruce Lee's Jeet Kune Do, Bruce Lee's Jun Fan Gung Fu is I want to come back and still teach them because they're so passionate about learning and it's good to keep that. You're never going to learn, part of a real martial art by just going to seminars, that's not the case. But most times, people can't do that. They can't stay with one teacher like I have for 35 years. it's just not possible. It's unreal now, in these days now, where you can have that but I was fortunate to be with Sifu Taky for such a long time and I want to, kind of, give back at the institute, the Jun Fan Gung Fu Institute of Seattle when we moved to the barn after 2002, I taught the Wednesday night classes from 2002 to, basically, 2017 and it was Wednesday night at 8 PM, 8 to 10 PM. I, basically, we didn't do it for the money. I didn't do it to get paid for that. We were just there to help Sifu Taky out so he wouldn't have to teach because Sifu Taky would still be trying to teach if I wasn't there and so, I would be there to teach a class so he wouldn't have to so Sifu Taky would sit there and watch class but if he saw something he didn't like or he saw some people who are not doing it correctly, he would have them do it over and over and over again and that's just the way it was in class. Sifu Taky is no longer with me at the academy but he's 95 years old now but we want to continue the class as much as like he was still there like I can hear his voice in the background telling, Abe, these guys aren't doing this right. Abe, don't do this. it's funny, I remember at a demonstration in Chinatown that we had, maybe 5 years ago, it was July, it was really hot and it was like in the '80s or something but the demonstration was held at 6 o'clock at night on a Saturday and there was a few of us in the class that came and did the demo and I remember I was talking in the microphone and Sifu Taky was behind me and these guys were behind me as well doing the demo and I remember Sifu Taky saying, whispering in my ear, Abe, these guys aren't doing it right. He had me continue doing the kicks and I didn't realize it and I was looking at the audience. I look back and a lot of these guys were so strained because they were doing 300 kicks already of sidekicks or front kicks and they were so tired and they're moving to the left leg and they look really sloppy because of fatigue so I had to move them to a, I tried to say stop and say go on to something else but that's the way Sifu Taky was. Sifu Taky was a perfectionist. If you are not doing something correctly, even for a demo, he'll want you to do it again and again and again and again until you got it right and that was his philosophy. That's the kind of philosophy we keep. That's the way I teach at the school that's why one of Sifu Taky's other longtime students that I started the academy with, Michael Hilo, he's there with me and that's the way we teach class and even though, we aren't



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part of the institute anymore, we still teach it like we're still part of the institute because we're the ones teaching all those years so, in the sense, we're kind of extended that to what we have now at the academy.

Jeremy Lesniak:

That sounds great. Anybody that's moved on and started their own school knows how exhilarating it can be. What's been your favorite part, so far?

Abe Santos:

I think, my favorite part, is just talking to the people. Meeting the people that are there, that are interested in learning and watching them grow. I mean, we just celebrated our one year anniversary in march and to see their growth when they first did the technique, 9, 10 months ago, 11 months ago to where they were now, you can see the growth of where they have and to see that growth and to see the glimmer in their eye when I give them a compliment that they're doing much better, it gives you kind of a good feeling that you're helping them along. One of the people that are in class says that when she feels, when she goes to class and she's a woman, she said she feels strong outside of class. She feels empowered and that's a good feeling to have is to have that confidence that you instill in people because they feel good when they're in class and they come on a class so I think, doing that kind of helping them along in their life, helping along in their path to the martial arts and learning Bruce Lee's art as close to what Bruce Lee was teaching when he was still alive, I think it's a great thing and I think it's a good thing because that's what Sifu Taky had wanted us to do and, like I said years ago, 20 years ago, I had no thought of opening up the school but it was these past 7, 8 years where people were asking me what's going to happen when Sifu Taky can no longer be there, what are you going to do? What's going to happen to Jun Fan Gung Fu in Seattle and I tell them I don't know. It's supposed to be his son is going to take over but a lot of these people have told me, how come you don't do it? how come you're not opening up a school? How come you're not doing a seminar, continue doing a seminar because it's important for you because you've been with Sifu Taky for such a long time and you know him so well and you learned from him that you don't teach what you know then what you know dies with you and that made me realize that I have to share some of my knowledge that I learned from Sifu Taky because it's not going to go anywhere. I'm not doing my part to perpetuate Bruce Lee's legacy if that was the case and that's why we were continuing what we're doing here is me and Michael Hilo that continue to teach what Sifu Taky taught us.

Jeremy Lesniak:

If people want to find you online, websites, social media, things like that, where can they go?

Abe Santos:



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We have a Facebook page. We have the Jun Fan Gung Fu Academy. We have Instagram, the Jun Fan Gung Fu Academy. We're working on our own website but we have a general website for the Jun Fan Gung Fu Seattle. That's the part of the school for about many years and then, if anybody wants to contact me or email me directly, it's at junfangungfuacademy@gmail.com but we're available, we're around and we're in Seattle. We don't advertise for students at all. We're kind of a private club as well and if you go outside our class, you don't even know there's a school there. Basically, it's just word of mouth. It's exactly the way the school was started years ago. It's just word of mouth and you have to be recommended by somebody to come and if not, we interview, we talk to you and see if there's a right fit but you have to be willing to learn and learn the proper way and not the fast way but learn it properly to fully understand the art.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Wonderful. I really appreciate talking with you today and as we wind down here, you know our standard parting question, what advice would you give to the people listening today?

Abe Santos:

I think I would tell people that if you really want to learn martial arts and Jun Fan Jeet Kune Do or anything then it's never too late. You can still learn and as long as you understand that good things take time, to be patient and it's not learning so many things all at once. It's trying to be good at one thing first before you start turning so many things. That's where you can really understand, to go deep into the art, to understand the art completely to fully explain it and how you can apply it in real combat or real life and I think that's very, very, important or, I think, if you are not, then you are just only skimming the surface and what happens is that many, many teachers, they do a technique but if you really watch them closer and they're really not doing the technique correctly but you'll have to be kind of experienced to see that but it looks like the same thing but really isn't and Sifu Taky was so good at that. He can look at something and say, oh, they're not doing it right, they're not doing this and that's because they didn't really understand the technique or they didn't really understand the art before they did something else. They kind of wanted to do so many things because it's nice, it's exciting and the rule of thumb these days now is learn as much as you can and do as much as you can but the problem is you don't learn each one really well and one of the things that Bruce Lee did and always said is that quality versus quantity. Do it correctly. Understand it so you don't have to think, you just do. Your hands, your feet just moves by itself. You just feel and that's important. When we practice the chi sao which is a sensitive exercise in class, I tell all the students is that once you get to that point, you don't think, you feel. Your hands move by itself and you don't even notice by the time everything's done. [01:06:29] because your hand moved by itself, you don't even know what happened because your body just moves on its own and that's the kind of mentality and that's where you want to be at. Be patient. Learn the technique correctly. Don't be in a hurry. You have to be able to crawl to walk before you start running. Like I said, it doesn't have to be martial arts. It could be anything in life. Whatever makes you feel good about yourself, that is the most important thing. It doesn't have to be martial arts but, for me, martial



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arts was just the thing that I enjoyed and the Jun Fan Jeet Kune Do and being fortunate to be a student of Sifu Taky for such a long time and for so many years that a lot of the people, this doesn't happen these days anymore. A lot of people leave and they don't come back because they want to do something else like get busy in life but, for me, I love to be there and I've always said that as long as Sifu Taky's still here, I'll always be with him and that's like what I've done is be with him as long as I can so I think that's important. Find something that you enjoy, passionate about and do it because it's never too late because it's the mental aspect, not the physical, the mental that makes a difference in your life that you can't find anywhere else in your life.

Jeremy Lesniak:

One of the things we've talked about in this show quite a bit is the notion of the right way and the wrong way and I feel pretty strongly that there is no right way or wrong way, there is just differences and what I really liked about our conversation today was that Sifu Santos talked about, not the right way, but Bruce Lee's way and you train and you make it your way and his way and this way and what I like about that is that it pays homage to lineage. It expresses the importance of knowing where you come from but, also, recognizes that you have to follow your own path and do your own thing and when I look at this episode in that way, that comes up quite a few times, the notion that Sifu is very reverent of his instructor, Sifu Taky, he mentioned him by name quite a few times, but also talked about certain elements of him and his own training and I think it strikes a good balance and I think it's a good lesson for the rest of us. Sifu, thank you so much for coming on this show. Thank you for your time and I hope to talk to you soon. You should head on over to whistlekickmartialartsradio.com, check out the show notes. This is episode 406 and you can see photos and links. We talked about social media and websites and you can find links to all that in there and you can find all of our other episodes. Sign up for the newsletter so you know what's going on. We've been rolling out some original content in the newsletter, stuff you're not going to find elsewhere and, of course, whistlekick.com is our digital hub for everything that we've got going on for all of our projects and products. Don't forget the code `PODCAST15` gives you 15% off there. If you want to follow us on social media, and you should, we're @whistlekick everywhere you can think of and my personal email address is jeremy@whistlekick.com. I love feedback and I'd love to hear from all of you. Until next time, train hard, smile and have a great day!