



Episode 414 – Shihan Chris Santillo and Renshi Holly Santillo | [whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com](http://whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com)



**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Hey there, everybody! Welcome, this is whistlekick martial arts radio episode 414. Today, I'm joined by my guest, Shihan Chris Santillo and Renshi Holly Santillo. My name is Jeremy Lesniak, your host on this show, the founder at whistlekick and I love the martial arts. I love traditional martial arts of all kinds and I've trained in a bunch of them and now, I get the opportunity to talk to some of the best martial artists in the world and some of the most interesting people and those aren't always the same thing. We bring you different sorts of stories and topics and interviews twice a week. On Mondays, we bring you interviews like this episode. On Thursdays, we tend to bring you some kind of focused topic discussion, maybe something personally from me or maybe I talk to somebody else but you can find every bit of it at [whistlekickmartialartsradio.com](http://whistlekickmartialartsradio.com). If you head on over to [whistlekick.com](http://whistlekick.com), you're going to see everything that we make and you can use the code `PODCAST15` to save 15% on every single thing over there from our uniforms to our protective equipment, comfy sweatshirts, you name it. There's a bunch there, super cool stuff so check it out! My guests today, Shihan and Renshi Santillo are, as you might imagine, married and they are embarking on this journey that I don't really want to ruin. I want to let them tell you about it because it's fascinating and through our discussion of this journey, we learn about their relationship to martial arts, their relationship to each other, their family, the schools that they run, their goals, so much more. It's a powerful, fascinating discussion that, to be perfectly honest, is motivating me to make some changes in my life and I hope that you have, if not a similar experience, at



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least, at enjoyable time listening to the conversation so here we go. Shihan Chris Santillo, Renshi Holly Santillo, welcome to whistlekick martial arts radio.

**Holly Santillo:**

Thank you so much, Jeremy! We're happy to be here.

**Chris Santillo:**

Good to be here.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Well, it's great to have you here. That maybe the longest string I've ever had to use. It was almost, I almost needed a breath there using two titles and two first names and two last names. I don't think we've done that before but that's fun and, of course, so, we've got 2 same last names here. We've got a male and a female voice, listeners are probably guessing and they're guessing accurately...

**Chris Santillo:**

Would you believe it's a coincidence?

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

We randomly found 2 guests that wanted to talk about the same thing and they were willing to be in the same place at the same time and they're not married. No, no, I would not believe that with all that so am I assuming correctly in that you are married? We actually didn't confirm that before we said that.

**Holly Santillo:**

We are married and for those students out there who didn't know that, we're married, guys.

**Chris Santillo:**

Yeah!

**Holly Santillo:**

Early on in our career we tried to show that but we thought it was really important for our professional relationship with the students to not show that and some of them thought we had something going on on the side but yeah, we're married, guys.

**Chris Santillo:**

Yeah, that had weird implications that we finally just said it's easier, no, we're married for 15 years.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**



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That's the other end of the dynamic. Of course, there are plenty of schools, and we actually did an episode about dating within the martial arts school and I caught some heat for it because quite a few of my friends have married people that they, not only trained with but trained under, there's this whole dynamic and there's a long conversation. There's a lot of nuance that goes along with that and yeah, a lot of people will hide it.

**Chris Santillo:**

Yeah, and there's pros and cons like you said.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

There certainly are. There absolutely are. I'm not going to lie. I've always kind of wanted that. I don't think I ever dated anyone that I've trained with.

**Holly Santillo:**

Some of our happiest memories as instructors are the ones where we matchmade in the dojo, matchmade in the studio.

**Chris Santillo:**

Yes, we want to say student and another student.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

And when it works out...

**Chris Santillo:**

Yes!

**Holly Santillo:**

Yeah, there's someone...someone got actually married in our studio.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Seriously?

**Holly Santillo:**

Yes!

**Chris Santillo:**

No, to be fair, there was an informal wedding for benefits...



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**Holly Santillo:**

Military benefits, that's true.

**Chris Santillo:**

Military benefits and...

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

That's probably a good clarification.

**Chris Santillo:**

Yeah, and they had a more formal ceremony with family but then, when they thought where should we get married, they thought themselves we should do it in the dojo with Bob [00:04:48]

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Did Bob officiate?

**Holly Santillo:**

He made the photos.

**Chris Santillo:**

But he was in the photos, it was different.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Oh, what a riot! That's great. If you have access to those photos, please send one over because I want to see it and I'm sure the listeners do too.

**Chris Santillo:**

Yeah, we'll look through the archives.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Now, of course, this is not why. I mean, this is not why we brought you on. We always have this early chatter and almost never has anything to do with the real martial arts and martial arts subject of any substance. It's weather, it's what did you eat for lunch? It's these kind of silly things but I enjoy that because it gives everyone the opportunity to let their guard down and go, okay, we're just having a chat, you know? But we're talking about martial arts. We're talking about a lot of things related to martial arts today and so what I'd love to do is get some context for everything else we're going to talk about and for each of you to tell me, to tell the listeners how you got started in the martial arts?



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**Holly Santillo:**

Chris should go first because he started first.

**Chris Santillo:**

Okay. I had always wanted to study martial arts. One of those classic like I always wanted to and I was forbidden by my parents and, I hope my mom won't listen to this, I hope everyone else does. Yeah, she wouldn't let me and she had, it's because we're going to find out later, she had this image of the martial artists as portrayed in '70s and '80s movies of this thug that goes out and picks fights and whatnot that go I will not fight you, I will not fight you. Okay, I will fight you and she didn't want that and so, when I got to college, kind of the second she wasn't watching, I went and signed up for the dojo down the street and so, a big part of my early career was this mission to change everybody's mind and the whole world what it means to be a martial artist because if my mother thought that martial artists were thugs who went around and picked fights, then other people in the world thought that too and it's kind of on this [00:06:49] that no, I'm a pacifist. I remember it was one of my assistant's girlfriend, this girl sat down next to me and like one time, just sit in and she looked really nervous and I'm like hey, why do you look so nervous? She's like it's just such a weird environment to be. All these martial artists. She said I'm a pacifist. Well, I'm a pacifist too. We have that in common and she just was taken aback. She didn't know how to respond to the notion that martial artist...because that went against what she thought what she knew about martial artists but yeah, that was my start as a martial artist and I, during college, I spent more time at the dojo than I did in classes which, I don't know if that's a good thing or bad thing, it's turned out just fine and then, I became an instructor and opened some schools and that kind of stuff.

**Holly Santillo:**

So, somewhere in there, Chris and I met.

**Chris Santillo:**

Not in the dojo.

**Holly Santillo:**

Not in the dojo. At the time, I was really into dance and the stage and music and he encouraged me to try martial arts and I resisted because, in my mind, martial arts were for little brothers like mine, smelly little brothers, and it had nothing to do with me.

**Chris Santillo:**

I hope he's listening to this.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Smelly little brothers. Can I ask how old you are at this time?



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**Holly Santillo:**

I am 40 and he is 35.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

No, not now but when you started. When that conversation, because most adults don't think...at least, around me, I don't have siblings. They don't describe their younger siblings as smelly little brothers when they're adults.

**Chris Santillo:**

Well, no.

**Holly Santillo:**

I guess that I pick up my brother from things like martial arts and he was really smelly afterwards so I associate things together, you know what I mean?

**Chris Santillo:**

I really hope he listens to this. He's no longer little, he's one of my senior students and always here and a very talented person overall.

**Holly Santillo:**

He's the best younger brother in the world and so admirable. Very talented martial artist.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Now, what about his hygiene?

**Holly Santillo:**

Excellent! He's excellent now.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Okay, he transcended that.

**Chris Santillo:**

I have absolutely zero comments on that. I just have no interest in...

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Well, she brought it up so I thought we needed to close a loop on that.

**Chris Santillo:**



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That's fair. That's fair.

**Holly Santillo:**

So, in my mind, this was something ii was never going to do and he pestered me for a good year and, finally, when he stopped asking then I thought to try it.

**Chris Santillo:**

There's probably a lesson in that that I refuse to learn.

**Holly Santillo:**

Like I said, I was into dance at the time and I still remember my first lesson with my, I revere him so much but that first day, it was so embarrassing because he put me in the horse stance and I was like sir, are you sure it's not like this and I kept trying to put my toes out in plie and like I think it's like this and no. Honestly, I was so excited about the physicality of it but it was when I went to support Chris at a tournament, my first tournament experience, watching the high-ranking black belts compete that I was then smitten. It was a certain grace and strength that this iron, this liquid metal, was what it was to me that I want it and that the other things I was doing couldn't provide.

**Chris Santillo:**

Liquid metal, I haven't heard that before.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Like The Terminator. That's what I was imagining.

**Holly Santillo:**

Oh, absolutely with a spear!

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

The Terminator with the spear might be the best complement anyone's ever given a martial artist ever.

**Chris Santillo:**

Oh, for sure.

**Holly Santillo:**

And I want you to understand this terminator had long, curly hair. This woman, I don't remember who. I don't think I've ever met her but yeah, she was who I wanted to be.

**Chris Santillo:**



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This was all that I didn't know.

**Holly Santillo:**

I still have things that you don't know about me. That's still good to know.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Good, that's what keeps it fresh. How long have you two been married?

**Chris Santillo:**

I don't know. Seems like forever.

**Holly Santillo:**

17-ish.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Wow, okay, that's awesome. Alright, so, you're at this tournament and you're seeing this example of someone that you would aspire to be, skill-wise or presentation-wise. At some point, did you bring your passion for dance in the way that you, I assumed, performed dance into the way you trained and maybe performed martial arts?

**Chris Santillo:**

No. Dance is forbidden in the studio, thank you very much. A discussion of dance, comparison to dance movements, these choreographed dance statements will be banned and punished.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

So, that's not what forms are? They're not pre-arranged dance-like movements?

**Chris Santillo:**

They're pre-arranged movements with leaping.

**Holly Santillo:**

Oh man, yeah, anytime I do any kind of anomaly to dance or music in the dojo is just opposing sides.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

There's no toes out, horse dances?

**Holly Santillo:**

There's not.





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**Chris Santillo:**

I'mma plie you to death.

**Holly Santillo:**

Hey, those dancers are strong.

**Chris Santillo:**

Yes, they are.

**Holly Santillo:**

But no, I was just a fledgling dancer at that time. It wasn't something that defined me that I knew I needed to bring into it. I was easily moldable and my instructors were happy for that.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Now, of course, at some point in there, you two got married and I'm guessing based on the title and conversation you've had before, you're running the school or schools together so how did that happen? How did all of that kind of coalesce into, what I'm assuming, is more than a team effort now?

**Chris Santillo:**

Yeah, I don't know. Do we have a team? Are we on a team?

**Holly Santillo:**

I am always the team.

**Chris Santillo:**

We opened our first school and, as some people who have opened schools can relate to, we didn't have any money and we were massively in debt and the landlord expected us to pay rent every single month and so did our mortgage bank and so Holly went and got a real job. She came by after work and trained and whatnot but she had a terrible job.

**Holly Santillo:**

It was grueling, desky, desk, desk job.

**Chris Santillo:**

It was customer complaints and stuff like that but a real company and they paid with real money also which was cool but she kind of hated it and so, once the studio can support us, I just told her she should quit her job if she wanted to what she did then she started hanging out at the dojo and, I'm not sure if



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you used this very endearing term, a dojo rat is the term that we used sometimes for that person that kind of hangs around the studio whether they have classes or not and so she became our first dojo rat in our new studio and if you hang around your studios long enough, as I think many people can relate to, eventually do things so you go start this class and go to this and whatnot and she was just a volunteer, a full-time volunteer for years and years and then, when we're getting ready to open our second school and, I don't know if we should...

**Holly Santillo:**

We had 2 guys lined up to be the main teacher, Plan A and Plan B like Thing 1 and Thing 2, and they both were unable to do that.

**Chris Santillo:**

Yeah, we'll just leave it at that. There was a little bit of tragedy involved.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

So, you were Plan C?

**Chris Santillo:**

She was Plan C.

**Holly Santillo:**

I was Plan C and you know what, you know I told you, I never wanted to study martial arts. Well, I finally let go and studied it. I said, but don't ever ask me to teach because that's, I'm not going to do that and then, turns out, when I left that job, I really liked teaching!

**Chris Santillo:**

And she wasn't Plan C because she was awful but she was Plan C because she refused to be Plan A.

**Holly Santillo:**

Yeah, okay fine. I'm going to teach but I'm not going to run a studio, just don't ever go that crazy!

**Chris Santillo:**

And then, I, she agreed to be Plan C like so, I could develop the courage to sign this giant lease and make the commitments necessary to open a new studio and she said, well, everything should be fine. You won't need me to run it and what happened, happened and she went off and ran our second school and she was the best chief instructor I've ever employed and did that for a number of years, very, very wonderful and well. It was a neat relationship because I think anyone who's managed multiple studios knows that one of the challenges is knowing everything that's going on and, studios aside, anyone that's



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ever managed anyone, you'd really like them to bring you their questions and, oftentimes, people are shy about bringing their questions to their boss because I don't want to admit how to do things and all that kind of stuff and that just didn't happen. We'd have long conversations, we'd go to dinner after.

**Holly Santillo:**

Yeah, it's really cool to talk shop together at that time.

**Chris Santillo:**

It was a good time. I could've told you back then, every restaurant in a 5-mile radius that was open past 10 on a weeknight and we'd meet at the restaurant where we talked and recapped and she'd ask the questions and we'd get to have a lot of learning together so that went really, really well. You know and then, she had kids. My kids, our kids. It was cliché, right?

**Holly Santillo:**

People don't always stop being an instructor when you do that but that was my choice. I was looking forward to being a full-time mom so that was my graceful exit from that period of our life together. It was a really nice time. We really talk about going back to it where we running a school together.

**Chris Santillo:**

Yeah, the kids are ages 6, 8 and 9 now or 6, 8 and 10 and they take up a lot of our energy, needless to say, so we have opened a third and a fourth and later this month, I'm excited to say we're opening our fifth.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Wow, congratulations! Now, during those early days where you were somewhere between co-worker and boss-employee but also married, how did you navigate that dynamic especially...

**Chris Santillo:**

I don't know if we did!

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

I'm guessing, that you've set some boundaries at some point. Every time I talk to a couple that runs a business, they end up with some kind of boundaries about we're not going to not talk about work on this day and in these scenarios where it's...how are you able to work through that and, obviously, remain married for long?

**Holly Santillo:**



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Yeah, I hear what you're saying, Jeremy. You would think that we would have to not talk about the dojo at some point. It's all we wanted to talk about and what's so funny is at the end of the day, even when you're side by side at the end of the day, we'd get in the car and we'll still have things that we had to talk about because we didn't have the same experiences even if we were right in the same room with the same student. We'd still want to talk about it.

**Chris Santillo:**

We still ask the question a thousand times because, like you say, so many people run studios together and some have a lot of trouble with it and we just never did like there was never challenging, there was not a weird authority dynamic. It was never...I joked with somebody, I was purely joking and someone called me up and said, how do you make this work? My wife's thinking about going to the studio and teaching and whatnot and I said, well, at the studio, I'm in charge and at home, she's in charge and it all balances out. We just meant it as a flip-it joke and he says, well then, that won't work for us because I'm in charge at home too and I said, okay.

**Holly Santillo:**

Was that really what he said?

**Chris Santillo:**

And I said, okay.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Wow!

**Chris Santillo:**

This won't come as a shock to anyone and we're not using any names but they're not married anymore. That was just...yeah.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Yeah, that doesn't sound like a healthy dynamic.

**Holly Santillo:**

We did, maybe it was helpful that Chris set out his expectations early and like I said, we had our relationship...

**Chris Santillo:**

Absolute perfection. That's our expectation. Absolute perfection.



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**Holly Santillo:**

We had our relationship in the beginning and so, it was very easy for me to just pretend that you are my instructor and nothing else and so, calling him sir and giving him a 100% deference was just fine and he just is a great manager, if I can toot your horn a bit, you are not paying me for this.

**Chris Santillo:**

I just never considered myself a really good manager but that was really nice.

**Holly Santillo:**

Well, maybe it's because we know how to work together, right? He knew how to motivate me and encourage me and despite the fact that I was playing this role of subservient student person, you never lorded over me or made me feel...

**Chris Santillo:**

Well, nor should one lord over. You know, regular students or employees, one should treat all of their students and all of their assistants and all of their staff with respect. It just kind of goes. I don't see there's any difference.

**Holly Santillo:**

I think it just boils down to we had clear guidelines of what we were going to do.

**Chris Santillo:**

We were going to crush it.

**Holly Santillo:**

No. Yeah.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

It sounds like you are crushing it and one of the things that I think is really interesting with what you're doing now is that you're not living the lifestyle, excuse me, at least at the moment, that most people would expect a married couple running multiple martial arts schools so let's take a bit of a hard left here and let's talk about what you are doing?

**Chris Santillo:**

Is this because we're 2,000 miles away from the studios right now? Is that why?

**Jeremy Lesniak:**



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Yeah, I think it's, I don't know of any schools that are run, owned and run, remotely in any kind of an active way. I'm not going to say unique but it's certainly uncommon and there's a reason behind it, right? We talked a little bit beforehand and I know a little bit about what's going on with you guys so, why don't you tell the audience why you decided to go 2,000 miles away and not be there for the day to day operations of your schools.

**Chris Santillo:**

Well, 2,000. We're just getting warmed up. We are officially and formally on a sabbatical and I'd like to say a sabbatical because midlife crisis just doesn't focus real well but we have, as you said, extricated ourselves from the day to day operations which is only possible because I have the most wonderful and glorious staff that anyone could ever ask for and we are travelling around the world with our 3 children.

**Holly Santillo:**

Yeah, the sabbatical, I think, is a good word aside from Chris's humor. It's a good word because we're really excited about learning from the world instead of being in our own microcosm. We've been there before. At 17 years, we want an opportunity to learn, martial arts included, we're very excited to be headed over to Asia and see with our own eyes the things that we just been interpreting up until now but beyond the world of martial arts, we want to grow as people and understand where, what direction we want to take our life and our career.

**Chris Santillo:**

Yeah, we've had a, like she said, it's not exclusively martial arts but there's definitely, have been and will be, some martial arts component. We've just been in the U.S. so far. We have 2 more months in the U.S. before we head over to the east coast of Asia and we stopped in to visit some studios, people we know, kind of the host as we have made it to a conference and I have another conference coming up and we have a seminar at the end of next month that we're going to and a promotion we're attending and so, there's a certain quantity to that but then like she said, be in Asia, spending some time in Japan and then China and then Thailand and whatnot, the Philippines and kind of get on some of the roots.

**Holly Santillo:**

It was wonderful at this past conference in Chicago ran by Pro-MAC.

**Chris Santillo:**

Denver.

**Holly Santillo:**

Sorry, we flew from Chicago to Denver, yeah, in Denver with Pro-MAC exposing those boys of ours to a whole world of martial arts. Up until now, they really only known our dojos.



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**Chris Santillo:**

Yeah, it's pretty great. There were 500 attendees at hand and 3 of them were under 18.

**Holly Santillo:**

So, former Olympic judo champion said that they could come attend his class on takedowns. That was definitely one of their highlights and another gentleman who trains in Kali was going back to some of the more indigenous roots of it, Sinawali, and oh man, they loved that class so we're so excited to be exposing ourselves and them to what the world has to offer beyond what we've known up to this point.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

That's great. How are you choosing where you're going?

**Chris Santillo:**

Where it's like do you have a dart board and a map?

**Holly Santillo:**

It actually has a lot to do with those martial arts blips.

**Chris Santillo:**

Yeah, actually, a lot of the market tours is like oh, okay, we have to be here on this date and here on this date then lets kind of lets see what's in between. There's a lot of that and then there's a lot of trying to be logical in terms of we're planning on spending a couple of years doing this so we hope to see the whole world has this little life but it gets really, really big but we want to get to a lot of places and so, we're just kind of going on from one place to a place next to it so when we get over to Asia, we'll start in Siberia and kind of work our way down Siberia because it will be late summer and a good time to be in Siberia and a bad time to be in China and from a weather standpoint and work our way down from there as the year gets cooler.

**Holly Santillo:**

We're so excited about that.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

And what are you travelling in? 5 of you travelling, I'm assuming, this is not a Toyota Corolla.

**Holly Santillo:**

We're in the Midwest right now about the National Parks so it's like oh, so you're doing that RV thing, huh?



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**Chris Santillo:**

We're in a mid-sized sedan.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

And are you getting on each other's nerves? How are the kids handling this?

**Chris Santillo:**

I don't know. Are you getting...?

**Holly Santillo:**

There's a little bit of backseat...we joked that at Yellowstone we're like oh, look, we have the classic Yellowstone Family experience.

**Chris Santillo:**

We're going too fast, there's like too much. There's too much to see, there's too many friends to visit and places to be so we're like oh, look, Yellowstone. We have 24 hours to tour Yellowstone, off we go! So, we're going very quickly.

**Holly Santillo:**

For the most part, people always ask about our boys. They can hold on and are the best of friends.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Good. Now, when people talk about sabbaticals, I mean, of course, the term sabbatical comes out of academia usually, university-level academia and quite often, in fact I'd say, every time I've been familiar with a professor taking time off on a sabbatical, there's a purpose behind it. There's some advanced research they want to do, there's a place that they want to go, there's a book they want to finish. There's some goal. There's some kind of finish line that they're hoping to achieve.

**Holly Santillo:**

That's right. Well, we already finished our book.

**Chris Santillo:**

Our book actually published the day after we left like it was meant to be.

**Holly Santillo:**

Yeah, we got in the car on Monday and on Tuesday, the book came out but it is. It's research for how we want to live our life because we realized that we were doing it just kind of accidentally. Slipping down





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the slide of mainstream without a lot of conscious thought and I know that the folks out there who are thinking well, martial arts teachers aren't exactly a classic job. That's true.

**Chris Santillo:**

I thought about that for a minute. No, we wanted to spend some time exploring the world and learning about it and learning from it and kind of broaden our horizons and everybody who hears that we're doing this with our kids are very quick to say, oh, this will be so good for your kids, and I believe it will be, but we were motivated to do this regardless of the kids and we're excited about what we're getting them out of it as well but we're excited about meeting people and learning and having a deeper and broader understanding of the world.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Two questions that kind of go together: do you have expectations of what you will be learning and do you have hopes of what you will learn? Or to say it slightly differently, rather than learn, change. Do you have expectations of how you, your family, may change? Do you have hopes, the hopes maybe being a bit broader, grander, than the expectations?

**Chris Santillo:**

I think, like anyone who studied martial arts for a long time, I've come to appreciate the value of incrementalism. I've come to appreciate when I was a purple belt, I went to my first seminar and you're training for how many months, I wanted to learn, form new forms and depth touch, and if I get anything less out of these seminars, that's really terrible disappointment and now, all these years later, and if I attend a seminar and I just get a glimmer of greater understanding of one form of movement, I consider that to be a win and that's something I can put in my back pocket, I can take with me from now on. I don't know if I have grandiose hopes. I don't expect that at the end of this, I will be able to speak with animals or walk on water but I do...

**Holly Santillo:**

Good examples.

**Chris Santillo:**

Thank you but I hope to just have a slightly more nuanced kind of view of the world and our place in it and, of course, I have the same hopes for the kids.

**Holly Santillo:**

Yeah, I think that's an excellent answer. I'm finding myself wrestling with, we're on a martial arts podcast right now, so I think all the folks out there are going to have this determination with them with the discipline of a routine life, trying to maintain that while having an absolutely upended life so I think



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that my hope is that I can still be a person who is disciplined while doing this but you were asking more about the end goal and I want to maintain an open mind to not having an end goal aside from when we are done with this, being an ever more close-knit family and one that values family, including our extended family and beyond that because I feel that we have that already, I want to be a better world citizen and that is my hope.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

What does that term, world citizen, mean to you or a better world citizen, how would that, how would you know you've accomplished that?

**Holly Santillo:**

It means looking beyond my community, my immediate, out my front door and understanding how my action impacts, or my lack of action impacts the world at large and I think, I'm hoping, that by being out in the world out large and seeing humanity face to face instead of having it just be a concept but to be in the places that I hear about on the news and to have my hands in the dirt there that I will understand and have greater motivation for acting in the world's interests. Does that make sense? I know I sounded big.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

It's romanticized, certainly, but I'd be interested in following up on this question when you come back at the end of your sabbatical and finding out, maybe we can re-listen to this episode individually and have a chat about it, about what changed, what was the reality versus the expectation, the hope. How long have you been on the road now?

**Chris Santillo:**

Less than 2 months, so far, but we're at the very beginning.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Yeah, there's a lot that can and, I would expect, will change. People to take journeys of this scope without having something change, it isn't always dramatic but it tends to be substantial and it's not always substantial in the moment, sometimes it's in hindsight. One vacation I took in 2013, and it was the first vacation I ever did solo, and I had this feeling going into it like these big things were going to happen and, if either of you have ever read Way of the Peaceful Warrior, classic book we've talked about it on this show a number of times, very pivotal for me, I was expecting some kind of crazy journey like the stuff Dan had experienced and I didn't get any of that but over the next couple of years as I looked back on it, I realized how transformational it really was. I just needed more context and more time with the lessons to fully understand what they were so it will be interesting to see what kind of journey this sabbatical becomes for each of you.



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**Chris Santillo:**

And we'll give you an update on the speaking with animals and walking on water portion of it.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

By all means, if you offer some kind of online program on how to speak with animals, I mean, we would certainly want to promote that for you. Maybe give the listeners a discount code or something. That will be cool.

**Chris Santillo:**

Perfect.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Now, what are your students thinking about all this? You've left this pretty deep, solid, I mean, it's got to be this solid group of people, this solid community. You talked about the instructors that you're leaving these schools with and they being solid but anybody that's trained at a martial arts school that maybe as not strong on community might look at what you two are doing and think there is no way my school would survive the instructor leaving so I think that this says a lot about, not only who will carry the torch for you while you're gone, but the people that you have training so what was their response when you told them all, hey, we're going to bail for a while, see ya!

**Chris Santillo:**

That's exactly what it is, right? To be honest, we've been talking about it for years and years and that's always been the thing holding us back and it's me needing to feel like it was secure and solid and that everyone is going to continue to have this positive experience of the studio that they needed so we've been kind of backing away slowly for quite a while until Holly hasn't done a ton of teaching since the kids were born and then, she'd been handing that off for quite a while and I haven't been full-time in the school for quite a while either and so kind of backed off to the point where I was kind of teaching only black belts and volunteers and staff and had to back off but even fewer and slowly and gently handing over some of my students to my staff and so it wasn't a very, it wasn't a precipitous drop. I wasn't in the studio 6 days and then zero. It was 6 and then 5 and then 4 and et cetera, et cetera. It was gradual and there was a lot of over the last couple of years, it was like let's go to Ireland for 3 weeks and see how this works if we're not there at all and that worked pretty well so let's go to...and a little bit of a time so it's been gradual and it felt very solid before we took a leave.

**Holly Santillo:**

Even so, Jeremy, I'm going to hide the risk of baring too much because I hope I don't, he was really concerned and the dojo's not surprisingly were what was holding us back from going. He did not want to feel like he was abandoning his people and it was a moment, a moment of realization that finally



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convinced him to do it that while he was in this role of being the instructor of the studios and always there for folks to lean upon, that those folks will never get the opportunity to rise to the amount of leadership of which they are capable and so when he realized that and was able to speak from the heart and leaving that to these people, it was not of an I'm leaving you conversation but I'm stepping aside to offer you to grow into who you are and that felt good.

**Chris Santillo:**

Well, the 5<sup>th</sup> school that we mentioned opening and I'm not opening it. our senior instructor back there back in Virginia is opening that and she had that opportunity because I'm not there. Implicitly or explicitly preventing her from taking on that role and being responsible for all of that and she's going to make it up.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Now, anybody that's ever started teaching knows that you learn a lot when you don't have someone looking over your shoulder. It can be nerve-wracking, it can be powerful and it can be, I would suggest, one of the most growth-oriented times in a martial artist's life. That first year or so that they're teaching second only to probably their first year of training.

**Chris Santillo:**

And I remember the first time someone told me that before I had been in that position myself and I thought he was just talking. I thought he was just trying to sell me and everyone else in the room like convincing us that they were going to be better than it was to go off and do the things in schools and being in that position but he was absolutely right and you are absolutely right that there's so much to be learned in that time when you have to figure out answers yourself and it parallels every form of education. The answers that are provided to us are never as meaningful and never stick as well as the things that we figure out for ourselves.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Now, in the 2 months that you've been gone, I imagine that there have probably some hiccups, some things that have popped up.

**Chris Santillo:**

Honestly, no.

**Holly Santillo:**

Not yet.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**



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None, really?

**Holly Santillo:**

Yeah.

**Chris Santillo:**

Things are going smoothly.

**Holly Santillo:**

And he's checking in regularly, of course. I think the only hiccup was only trying to be a part of the Tuesday Instructor Workout.

**Chris Santillo:**

Oh yeah, we thought like one weekend we're like hey because we miss the studio.

**Holly Santillo:**

Oh yeah, we can't wait to share stuff, guys, because we went to this conference and we just interrupted their mojo instead of...

**Chris Santillo:**

They're like can we go back to our workout now? We respect, sure, but we're doing fine without you.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Nice, nice and when you're checking in, what are you seeing of their growth because I imagine that they're, if you aren't having hiccups, it means that either you are brilliant fortune tellers and saw everything that could go wrong and made sure everyone was prepared or they're rising to the occasion. I'm going to guess it's the latter.

**Chris Santillo:**

I guess so. We could've, I think we could go with the former like genius, that's just super prophecies.

**Holly Santillo:**

Soothsayers.

**Chris Santillo:**

I'm going to get a new hat that says soothsayer. No, they're just encountering things and instead of, and they are still asking me or we talk phones or magical and that kind of stuff, and so we have a client correspondence but mostly they're like hmm, I'm just going to go ask him but maybe I can just go figure



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that on my own. Okay, look, I figured it out and we're all fine and they've had a couple of small events and they've all gone wild and planning some bigger ones and like I said, there's a school being opened and new staff are being hired and interviewed and whatnot and everything is going as it's supposed to be.

**Holly Santillo:**

And they have each other. We've been a tight team for a long time.

**Chris Santillo:**

Yeah, they're a great resource for each other. I've said it a thousand times to them that if they could each learn from each other everything that they each individually know, they would surpass me and everybody else that they can imagine and I think they're doing a good job of doing that, of being resources for each other.

**Holly Santillo:**

Oh, they're like that transformer creature, right? Like individually they have all their powers but when they come together, what's that thing again?

**Chris Santillo:**

I don't think that's Transformer. You're thinking of Voltron.

**Holly Santillo:**

Voltron! Sorry, guys.

**Chris Santillo:**

Such an embarrassment.

**Holly Santillo:**

I'm sorry.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

There's a subset of martial arts nerds right now that are cringing at that but that's okay.

**Chris Santillo:**

Hush, hush, stop it. Stop it, Terminator Girl.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**



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Yeah, this has come at an abrupt halt but let's see if I can bring it back. I think that we have a lot of martial arts instructors listening who might be thinking I would love to take all this time off and I have some great senior students and even the economics of what I have that it would support that but I don't know how to get from the point that I'm at to being able to leave so what things did you have to put in place, because if I'm assuming it wasn't day one when you started your school that, you know, I'm going to make sure that all of my senior team knows how to run everything so I can take off.

**Chris Santillo:**

If you intend to keep in mind to be in school 7 days a week, I was going to be in multiple schools at the same time.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Yeah, and that's what most martial arts instructors plan on doing.

**Chris Santillo:**

A lot of it was taking, definitionally, it was taking me out of the equation and taking my ego and need for prominence out of the equation. Our schools are run by the men and women who run them and yes, they have an instructor named he or she is named Chris Santillo or whatever and they call me. He exists and he's out there and he comes to town once or twice and does a seminar but, first and foremost, they look to their instructor and that's an important nuance that they did and I don't know that dynamic exists in every studio. It's not the studio, the studios are not about me. The studios are about the students and then to a lesser extent the individual who runs that studio and that took a lot of setting my ego aside and letting it be that way and then, the gradual implementation of pulling back and seeing what people can do on their own and letting them do more and people tend to respond very well to the expectations that you have for them and if you have low, demeaning expectations from them then they tend to have low, unimpressive results so you have high and lofty expectations for them, they tend to rise to the occasion to so a lot like what we say about marriage.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Nice, nice and yeah, I don't believe it's a dynamic that we're used to seeing. It's not a dynamic that I've seen often in that the school owner, let's call it figurehead, the people who are responsible for managing everything are kind of a step removed, are showing up occasionally, it seems to be much more the majority of the time and let's say you have 5 schools, you're at each one day a week but it doesn't sound like that's what you're doing.

**Chris Santillo:**

There's certainly a phase that we went through that and then, the discreet generating of confidence that the people running the schools are qualified to do so like you have to get to the point in the end



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that they can run these schools. They are qualified to do this and the reality as you look back, it's so funny, everybody running a school right now has more teaching and martial arts experience than I did when I opened my first school by myself and they have each other which I didn't have and they have [00:44:16] they are highly qualified and highly skilled and you just have to believe that and know that doesn't mean they're perfect and know that that doesn't mean they answer every question and I no longer have the value in the world but rather just that they're going to handle these difficulties that they encounter as well better than I would handle the ones that I encountered way back when and we survived so they'll survive.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Gotcha. Now, let's talk about this book. We kind of buried the lead on that and that was intentional because books tend to lead to a lot of different conversation that I think we need context for. We need more stories before we can fully understand them.

**Chris Santillo:**

Fair enough.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

So tell us about this book that was published Day Two of your sabbatical so you could be on vacation the rest of it if we look at it academically.

**Holly Santillo:**

Absolutely.

**Chris Santillo:**

Oh, we try to stay away from the V-word. Don't say the V-word.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

No?

**Chris Santillo:**

I'm not saying it's inaccurate, Jeremy, it sounds bad.

**Holly Santillo:**

I think all the martial arts instructors out there can identify with the, and I say this because I've talked to a lot of them at the conferences and they say yes, I would like to write that book, of seeing what's working for parents and what's not working for parents. Just witnessing their dynamic in their lobby, the interaction between those two people and wanting to say something about it to help out. In our dojos,





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we have the voice to those parents that gave it to us, we had the opportunity to be a voice in their choir, so to speak, but we thought what if we could bring the knowledge that we've gained from teaching and from interacting with parents and kids to a greater audience and help folks out with the lessons we have from martial arts.

**Chris Santillo:**

So I'll just state the obvious and of what we just call resilient parenting. Raising resilient children in an era of dependence and detachment independence and like Holly said, well if I can take it a step back, as most martial arts instructors know especially with the younger children, the most valuable things that we teach and provide to young children have nothing to do with what people visualize martial arts is that we teach them respect and discipline and focus and confidence and how to interact positively and politely with the people around them and how to be confident and how to stand up in front of a judge or an instructor, announce who they are and do what they're here to do and put themselves out there in public and all these wonderful skills that are important to and complementary with that have nothing to do with punching and kicking per se and so, that's where the opportunity was and so, the book is written from our experience as martial arts instructors and, of course, as parents but to a much larger extent for all of the years that we've been teaching the thousands of kids that we've had the honor of teaching and kind of trying to distill those lessons and then present them, obviously, in a way that's accessible to martial arts but also, more intentionally to anyone regardless of whether or not they are martial artists so that parents who, for whatever reason, are putting their kids in a martial arts program and I'm sure that you feel the same way, believe they all should but even if they're not going to, perhaps they could pick up this book and [00:47:45] a little bit of what the martial arts offers in a way that's helpful to them.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Absolutely. Yeah, we have a saying on this show, I have a saying that everyone should do martial arts for at least 6 months because there's nothing else to give you lifelong impact in six months the way martial arts will.

**Chris Santillo:**

Or 12 months.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Or more is better, certainly, but in this world where people were...what's that?

**Holly Santillo:**



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I'm saying as adults, in particular, because adults, we just have parents in our lobby so often say, this is just for them but we still often see adults who aren't willing to challenge themselves in a potentially embarrassing but yeah, revealing way.

**Chris Santillo:**

This is going to be our next book/crusade to follow up on is the message that martial arts is for everybody. It's not for kids, it's not for adults. It's for everybody at every phase of life it has things to offer and help us develop both physically and mentally and emotionally in all of the ways that we need to develop and make sure that we bring that to everybody successfully.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Great! You know, I actually just recently received some feedback from a show listener this morning and he was telling the story pretty much as you had just articulated about. He brought his kid for years and watched from the sidelines and finally, one day said, do you offer adult classes? And he described it in very, very good detail the emotional response when he went to his first class just to watch and watching what he saw as these big, strong, tough-looking martial artists coming in with their uniforms and everything and this feeling of I'm not going to belong in this group and his desire to literally run. No one's going to know if I leave now and he convinced himself to stay and it was just so well-articulated that it really, granted it was only this morning, but it really stuck with me.

**Chris Santillo:**

I want to pull that instructor aside and I want to say, don't let people watch. Explain that makes their student and this is my instructor training coming up. It intimidates people and it's much more comfortable to be lined at the back of the class with a senior student assigned to you as your partner and saying that this Sierra is going to be your partner for today and she's going to answer any question that you have as you go through class and that's much more comfortable situation and you also have an inside of the studio with a senior right next to them so if they do try to run, you can like knock them down.

**Holly Santillo:**

Yeah! Even as someone who's been studying martial arts for more than a decade, I still get nervous coming into a class of unfamiliar martial artists of tough guys. Yes! It is intimidating

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

That feeling never goes away, at least for me, I've been training a while and I'm going to school tonight ran by friends. They took it over from another friend when he retired and this is my first time going to this iteration of this school. Now, it's the same spot that I've been to plenty of times but I'm still nervous.



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**Holly Santillo:**

Yep.

**Chris Santillo:**

Sweep the leg. Sweep the leg!

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Are you two watching Cobra Kai?

**Chris Santillo:**

No, we're not.

**Holly Santillo:**

No.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

It's so good. It's so good! Everyone out there, you should be watching Cobra Kai. It's a brilliant show. If you really are a fan of the Karate Kid movies, which says something, you're probably of a certain age if you are.

**Chris Santillo:**

Of course. We were like number one a lot and number two pretty much and number three not so much, et cetera, et cetera and I heard that there's but I don't...

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

And then we don't usually talk about number four which is ironic because number four has the, is the only one that has someone that I know personally in it and I don't believe she listens to this show, so...

**Chris Santillo:**

We'll tell her if we run into her. We'll tell her if we should.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Yeah, so let's start to kind of wrap some things up and connect some of the dots that we've been putting out here today. First off, where can people learn more about the book?

**Chris Santillo:**



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One can learn more about the book at our website, [resilienceparenting.info](http://resilienceparenting.info), and again, of course, it's available on Amazon and lots of other places as well.

**Holly Santillo:**

The reason why our listeners today would go to it whether they are teachers or parents, and I have even had adults just say, it's good advice for living. The book focuses on principles from the martial arts. We did our very best to bring it to an audience that's broad to distill what it is about martial arts that helps people become resilient and we boiled it down to learning integrity and service and the third part of the book actually helps teachers just to be better teachers. It focuses on how to engage with younger people successfully.

**Chris Santillo:**

Yeah, part three was a lot of stuff coming from our instructor training, directly from our instructor training. That's how you can get better. Well, part one sets up the dynamic that a parents should approach parenting as a teacher with a teacher mindset as an instructor would.

**Holly Santillo:**

So if any of those things sound of interest or curiosity to someone, then I hope they come check it out.

**Chris Santillo:**

I joke about it that, because she said it's kind of applicable to everyone. I wanted to write was a book telling people how to live their lives better but I realized those things are never as well-received as books about how you can teach other people to live their life better so it's just like the parent in the lobby, that's so true though, right? That the parent in the lobby is absolutely positive that their kid should study martial arts so that they can be a better version of themselves but somehow, as we talked about, they can sit in the stands and somehow, not realize that that same logic applies to themselves so often.

**Holly Santillo:**

Which is why the book would be good for someone who's not a parent is what I see.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Yeah, now, one of the questions that we've skipped over and it's the question that I want to make sure that I ask is around stories and your favorite stories from your time training, could be directly training or indirectly training because that's really the heart of the show is telling these stories and you've told a lot of stories today but I'd love to hear from each of you, when you reflect on your time whether it's just over the last couple of months or for the last years, as it relates to martial arts, what are your favorite stories?



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**Chris Santillo:**

I'll share a tournament story if I can. So, when I started studying martial arts, the school I was at was a part of a large organization, lots of schools, and my school was relatively new. I was one of the highest ranks in that. I think I was in the first brown belt test that ever occurred here and the first batch of brown belts to come out of that one school and we were headed to this big central tournament and there were 300, oh, I'm sorry, 3,000 participants of this big college event center and whatnot and one of the events was weapon forms and it was the last, Holly's smirking because she now knows what story I'm telling, and it was the last event of the day, they cleared the rest of the floor. I think there were 40, 50 maybe even 60 of us in the group doing weapons forms and a whole bunch of other students from my school state watched after their events had finished because I was the first person from our studio to do a weapons form at tournament and this was really exciting and whatnot and I stood in this long, long, line with my weapon and I was using the spear for a Chinese form and the master such and such who was doing the attendance, he went through the line and then he said, is there anyone whose name I haven't called? And I go, me, sir. Okay and I came forward and gave my name and whatnot and then halfway through the group of people, I heard him call my name and I raised my hand and he said, I thought you said I didn't call your name. I said, maybe I didn't hear it, I'm so sorry, forgive me, whatever, I stammered, too intimidated by the gruff voice of master such and such and he says, sit down! You go last! Yelled at and put back in line, set my spear back down and then the other 40 or 50 or 60 people they all finished and he was like now, you! You go now and I went up there and I got my spear, took a deep breath and I looked up the lights and I set it on my shoulder and I did my salutation, I did my deep breathing and I went through and I did movement 1 and movement 2 and movement 3 and somewhere around movement 4, I slammed it into my shin and it flew out of my hands and it went plink, plink, plink across the completely empty stadium with everybody watching and ran over, picked it up, bowed, sat back down and the guy next to me was so nice, he was like, that was so good until you dropped it and that was a wonderful experience.

**Holly Santillo:**

My story is going to be about failure too and I guess it's because sometimes it's how you deal with failure that defines us.

**Chris Santillo:**

Well, and 6 months later went back to my tournament and then I hit myself on the shin but didn't drop it and kept it and got third or something and I think I went back 6 months later.

**Holly Santillo:**

And that's one of the great lessons in martial arts because we, in training the martial arts, we're constantly putting ourselves on the line. If we're doing it right, we're putting ourselves past the comfort zone into things we know we might fail and then, hopefully, pushing on for the next goal, right? The joy



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of martial arts, the joy of training is seeing ourselves improve and knowing that then, we can transfer those reactions in a way that we design to deal with failure, taking that into our daily lives outside of the studio, off the mat. I think that's what our book is about, too so my story comes from very recent embarrassment and such and such failure. Chris successfully broke 2 baseball bats with his shin under the training of Chip Townsend at this conference.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

I was just thinking of Chip. The first thing that came to mind is man, you and Chip are crazy. Chip went on this show. I love but he's nuts!

**Chris Santillo:**

He's awesome. I just think he's one of the greatest guest. We hope to visit him in November down in Texas.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Just for clarity, it can be both. You can be crazy and wonderful and I can still think the world of you. I don't want listeners to think, I think, poorly at all of Master Townsend. He's a great guy.

**Holly Santillo:**

So yeah, we're at this conference and Chris is, you know, you should do it. There's some other folks doing a single bat break on Sunday, why don't you do that and I'm looking at my, the mole and the hair on the side of this half-past a freckle, I'm looking at my proverbial watch.

**Chris Santillo:**

This was about 36 hours before this was going to happen.

**Holly Santillo:**

I said, I have not practiced this, are you crazy? And he said, of course you have, you've been training for years. Your roundhouse kick is great and you can do this and took a lot from me to say yes. I did not want to do this and it's because I was afraid. Breaking a bat on your shin, I was like you can hurt someone and I didn't know if I was up to the task but as we do so many times in the studio, we put faith in our instructors and we say, okay and I am up for this and I'm going to do it and so, then I practiced for the little bit of time that I had and I felt really confident after working with Chip and with his daughter. She was wonderful. My kick felt strong and I was like alright, I got this. Out of the five people, five women, who stepped out of how many hundreds of people at this conference, we decided to do this, I was the one who did not break the bat and I've never seen anyone not break the bat under Chip Townsend's leadership just to add a little bit insult to injury and a little lemon juice to all that is, of course, it's being streamed live on Facebook.



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**Chris Santillo:**

If you want to watch, you can find this on Facebook.

**Holly Santillo:**

I kicked that thing again and again and again and it won't break!

**Chris Santillo:**

We'll post this from the blog. The first show comments that came back was [01:01:13] which I didn't reply but all I said was I replied with a smiling face.

**Holly Santillo:**

So yeah, that was a bit demoralizing but I have to say that I, very sincerely, afterward felt proud of having put myself into that position to begin with.

**Chris Santillo:**

Well, there were 500 people who could've been there that morning and they chose not to be but I think that the...

**Holly Santillo:**

And then, the other side, I'm guessing you're about to say, is that it just fired me up to train more and, not only that, but it was so revealing that when my children came up, they wanted to explain and give excuses for why it didn't happen.

**Chris Santillo:**

Our 6-year old started crying. It was fascinating.

**Holly Santillo:**

Our 6-year old was crying, he was so disappointed, that you're all riled up to see this and they were broken by this and so, for me, to have failed in front of my children and then have an opportunity to react in a way that I want them to react, a model, okay so, you give everyone a high five and say, good game, and say, thank you, to your instructor and I'll be there at the next one having trained some more and next time, that's what I want to see in you and that's what I want to do.

**Chris Santillo:**

We touched on that a lot in the book the idea that one of the tendencies of parents and instructors, for that matter, is to hide their own failures, their missteps to kind of pretend that they never happened and we just think it's a really big mistake. If we don't share our failures and our difficulties with our



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children and our students and we miss an opportunity to show them exactly how it's done because none of us have gotten where we've gotten in life without a certain number of failures. I can talk about my first business and the number of times we almost went bankrupt with our studio [01:03:21] and all the things that didn't go right but it's much more fun to talk about our successes and talk about our 5<sup>th</sup> school opening and talk about my X-degree black belt promotion. Those are the fun things to talk about and so, we tend to talk about those things but I think it leaves the impression with our children and our students that the successful people amongst us have never failed and have never had a difficult day and I think that that's a terrible, terrible illusion to give them, because then, when they do fail, a) they've never been shown how to do it gracefully and how to learn from it and how to get up and continue on the next day and but also, I think they risk making them identify as failure instead of understanding that failure is an event. It's not a person, it doesn't define us and they'll say, oh, mom and dad have never failed at anything and I just failed this test and I must be terrible and faulty and whatnot when the reality is yeah, you failed this test so or whatever you failed, mom and dad has failed in some things too and so, that by sharing then, in this case firsthand, not just a story or right there, live feed with our kids, it gives them an opportunity to really learn in that experience and grow and realize that failure doesn't define us and we get up and we get up tomorrow morning.

**Holly Santillo:**

It's how we react that defines us. It's what we decide to do after.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Absolutely, this has been good stuff. Now, if people want to follow you, they want to check out this journey that you're on, is there a way that they can do that?

**Holly Santillo:**

Thank you! We're having so much fun writing about it. you mentioned early on that you hadn't, you needed some time to reflect on your travels before it meant something to you and we're doing our very best to reflect as we go. I know, it's true there will be things that percolate to the surface over the next few decades from our experiences but in the meantime, we are trying to make sense of it all and share it. We would love for people to join us on our journey.

**Chris Santillo:**

So our blog is called [fivebackpacks.family](http://fivebackpacks.family) and, at the risk of the tone, our latest blog post went out yesterday is failing to summit a mountain. Our ten-hour odyssey of trying to make it to the top of this snow-custed mountain and 2,600-feet up and failing miserably, crawling on our hands and knees and it was really bad.

**Holly Santillo:**





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Yeah, it seems that we fail a lot!

**Chris Santillo:**

I know we do. We succeed at things too.

**Holly Santillo:**

I'd like to think so and someone else might want to clue in because we wrote a lot about before leaving and what it was like to boil our possessions down to 5 backpacks and 12-square feet in the closet and sold everything and donated everything.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Oh, we missed this part!

**Holly Santillo:**

Yeah, if anyone's...

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

So, in my mind, you shuttered your house for this time. This was not selling everything and literally living in a car.

**Holly Santillo:**

And then, selling the car in Seattle at the end of this part and living out of a backpack.

**Chris Santillo:**

We get to Seattle and sell the car before we...yeah, 5 backpacks, fivebackpacks.family, that's the...

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Which by the way is a great name. I'm a marketing consultant and I don't usually recommend going outside of that come but that works. That works beautifully! I love it!

**Chris Santillo:**

It's been fun, thank you and yeah, so that's been part of the journey is realizing what's important and what's not important.

**Holly Santillo:**

What little we need to live our lives effectively and wonderfully.

**Chris Santillo:**



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The kids were so excited because I bought them new toothpaste because they were running out of toothpaste like really, you bought it for us? We've lowered so much; the expectations are so...

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

So great! What was the hardest thing, before we start to wrap up, what was the hardest thing for each of you to give up?

**Chris Santillo:**

Dining room table. I loved that dining room table. It weighed 400 pounds, solid wood, it was amazing. Best dining table we could ever ask for.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

And how about you?

**Holly Santillo:**

My, it's so silly! I really enjoyed finding new homes for things, if that makes sense, I didn't realize that it was going to be such a joyful process.

**Chris Santillo:**

Oh, we spent a year, almost a year getting rid of stuff, trying to gift it to people who would appreciate it.

**Holly Santillo:**

I was surprised at how attached I was to certain things and so, mine is there are these goblets that Chris absolutely hates.

**Chris Santillo:**

I hate those goblets.

**Holly Santillo:**

Yeah, they were this solid glass. They were all these different colors, they don't really fit in the cupboard and they're really molded and shaped in funny ways with flowers all over them. They were a wedding gift. It rarely came out of the cupboard so it was obviously something that we're not going to keep but as I passed them over to Goodwill, my heart was sad. Such a silly one so yeah, it's been a process realizing just how tied we are to things and why, kind of questioning and can we let that go.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Yeah, absolutely, now of course, folks, if you're listening, we're going to have links to everything we've talked about today at [whistlekickmartialartsradio.com](http://whistlekickmartialartsradio.com) so if you're on a treadmill or driving a car, please



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don't risk life and limb to jot down all these links and they're even more, I mean, you shared some today and you already, when you emailed me, you gave me even more so we're going to have all of those over there and I really appreciate you coming on. It's been a fantastic conversation and you got me looking around my office right now, saying, how could I scale this down, what can I get rid of and can go within my car?

**Holly Santillo:**

It feels really good.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

It's something I've long thought about but you may have just kicked me over the edge.

**Holly Santillo:**

That's great! I love to hear that if that's true.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

And, of course, if I do that, everybody's going to hear about it because that's what I do because of the podcast but we ask all of our guests to kind of send us out with some parting words of wisdom and I'd love to hear from both of you. I don't know how you're going to slice it up but what would you share with everyone listening? Just kind of wrap up what we've been talking about today and send them off into the world.

**Chris Santillo:**

Sweep the leg!

**Holly Santillo:**

Oh, come on.

**Chris Santillo:**

Oh, shoot. That doesn't count?

**Holly Santillo:**

No.

**Chris Santillo:**

I just like to assert that all of us have the potential to reach our, oh gosh, I'm going to reuse my words, have an opportunity in life to reach our highest potential and that we can be a model of, like Holly said before, of learning and integrity and service that we can be all of those things and we keep cultivate



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those and learn and grow, as we touched on earlier, that martial arts isn't just for kids, it's for adults that we can continue at every age to continue to learn and grow and be the connected, independent self that we want to be.

**Holly Santillo:**

I guess, to tail that, in order to be that person, I think it's so important that we write down what it is that we want ourselves to be and continually reflect on how we're going to get there and whether or not, we are on the path and also, reinventing as it becomes necessary because we don't want to be a static person but always changing and growing.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

I have to say, the idea of selling everything or giving it away, packing up in a car and just driving to see where the world takes me is incredibly exciting. It's something that I've contemplated doing, it's something that I'd love to do and I feel like I'm one step closer after listening to Shihan and Renshi today. I look forward to checking out their book and getting an update and hopefully, bringing them back to talk to all of you. hope you enjoyed this one. I certainly did. So, Shihan, Renshi, thank you so much for coming on the show for talking about your journey and I look forward to checking with you more in the future. If you want to find the show notes, you can head on over to [whistlekickmartialartsradio.com](http://whistlekickmartialartsradio.com). We have photos and links to everything we talked about today and, of course, if you hit [whistlekick.com](http://whistlekick.com), you can use the code `PODCAST15` to save 15% on everything that we do and maybe check out some of the other projects we're involved in like martial journal and well, there's more. I won't give you a list. I'll let you check it out. The best way to help us is actually not to make a purchase but help us spread what we're doing. Tell friends, tell family about the show, about everything that we've got going on. If you know a martial artist, talk to them about whistlekick. Help us grow because then, in turn, we can do more for you and for the martial arts community at large. Our social media is @whistlekick on Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Instagram and you can email me [jeremy@whistlekick.com](mailto:jeremy@whistlekick.com). I love your feedback. That's all I got today. Until next time, train hard, smile, and have a great day!