



Episode 468 – Sensei TJ Storm | [whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com](http://whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com)



#### **Jeremy Lesniak:**

Welcome! You're listening to whistlekick martial arts radio episode 468 with today's guest, Sensei TJ Storm. My name is Jeremy Lesniak, show host and whistlekick founder and everything we do in whistlekick is in support of the traditional martial arts. If you want to see everything we do, check out [whistlekick.com](http://whistlekick.com). That's the place to learn about all of our projects and our products. It's also the easiest way to find those things that you can buy and if you visit the store, make sure that you use the code `PODCAST15` to save 15%. Martial arts radio gets its own website, that's [whistlekickmartialartsradio.com](http://whistlekickmartialartsradio.com). We keep it easy and this show comes out twice a week. Our goal here at whistlekick is to connect, educate and entertain traditional martial artists throughout the world and if you want to help this show in the work that we do, you can do a number of things. You can make a purchase, share an episode, follow us on social media. We're @whistlekick everywhere. Tell a friend. Maybe pick up one of our books on Amazon. Leave a review or support us on Patreon, [patreon.com/whistlekick](http://patreon.com/whistlekick). That's the place to go. Patreon is a place where we post exclusive content and if you contribute as little as \$5 a month, you get access to all of it so you can not only thank us for the things that we give you for free but get even more. There are a number of ways you may know today's guest. He's been in movies, he's been on TV, video games, he's provided voiceovers. He's quite the renaissance man but he's also a martial artist and in today's episode, we talk about how he got that start in the martial arts and how it's served him so well as he's gone on to his chosen career. Let's bring him on. How are you? Let's start there.

#### **TJ Storm:**



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I'm really, really good. I took a break during the holiday season because you get kind of plugged in and you don't know how plugged in you are until you unplug.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

I suspect that I agree. I don't know that I've unplugged recently enough to agree out of experience. I'd like to.

**TJ Storm:**

I almost never do and the life of an artist usually doesn't have that much work in it so you, I don't know how everybody else is, I was like a starving artist. I knew I was going to be a starving artist when I first started. I was a dancer and I knew I wasn't going to work that much. You do a job for a while, maybe a week or two weeks or you do a music video or whatever and you just get used to the rhythm of I'm going to work next month then I'm going to twiddle my thumbs for a couple of months and maybe do it again some time so you just plan for that. You plan to eat like that, you plan to do entertainment that way. You don't go to too many parties because you simply cannot afford to. You just lock down and I lived the first several years like that. The one thing I did do for my brain was play video games so, because they have a great value, right, left, play a rig or two so I do play video games and that is my go to, ultra-zen thing.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

What kind of games?

**TJ Storm:**

I play League of Legends which is a PC but I'm also kind of playing Star Wars Jedi: Fallen Order, Han Solo. Yeah, that's what I did. I unplugged and played video games and it was amazing.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

It's funny because I think a lot of people would say that's not unplugging but when you talk about it that way, I completely get it.

**TJ Storm:**

I mean, I do go on hikes and stuff like that but there's no humans there and I like that. I need to be away because oddly, you start to know everybody near where you live and a lot of people hike so I will inevitably meet people and talk to them, hey, you should come over this thing and I don't want to come over to anymore things. Right now, I was so happy to do no things so I completely just...that's how I unplug. I unplug from humanity and just play with digital games.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**



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You know the comedian John Mulaney? He does this great bit talking about how when you're a teenager, doing nothing over the weekend is the worst thing in the world but as an adult, doing nothing over the weekend is great.

**TJ Storm:**

That's the one thing you look forward to.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

What did you do this weekend? I did nothing. It was amazing.

**TJ Storm:**

It's awesome!

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Exactly, exactly or even better, he describes cancelling a thing or not doing a thing as an adult as akin to drug use.

**TJ Storm:**

Yes! It's a bad thing that is so good. That's great. That is brilliant, actually.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

It is. He's one of my favorites actually. He's got a pretty good grasp on reality and what we're all experiencing.

**TJ Storm:**

No doubt.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Well, if you don't mind. I would like us to just keep rolling.

**TJ Storm:**

Ah, no problem!

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

We got some good stuff there and why not let the audience hear it.

**TJ Storm:**

That sounds great.



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**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Cool, cool. We'll introduce you in the intro and everything and they'll know who you are so we can just keep talking.

**TJ Storm:**

Sounds great, sounds great.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Awesome. Let's talk about martial arts now. We've got that base question that we kind of have to get to and then we can spider off from there. It's pretty route so I hope you don't mind answering it. How did you get started?

**TJ Storm:**

It was really quite simple. My mom made me do it.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

She made you?

**TJ Storm:**

No, she didn't actually make me. She made me stay. When I was really young, I started piano lessons and I thought oh, this is pretty cool. I was a little kid so she goes, do you really like this? Yeah. Well, you need a piano to practice at home because it's all about practice and I was like yeah, sure. She was like you don't know, yeah, yeah, sure. We're not rich. If I get a piano, it's going to be a big thing. Our family is going to invest in you playing the piano so do you want to do piano. I was like yeah, yeah, yeah, sure. We got a piano and then I realized what practice is. Practice is being by yourself doing a thing you may not necessarily love but you must do it anyway and I was like I don't want to be inside. I want to be outside playing. I was like 5 or 6. I was really, really young and I got really good. I started doing recitals and stuff like that but I hated practicing. Just sitting there and occasionally, my piano teacher would whack my wrist for resting them on the piano corner instead of my hands above the keys and I did not like it. I was like nope, I'm done so I just went outside and played instead of practice. I was a little kid and there goes the entire investment in the piano and my mom said alright, fine. He wants to be outside, let him be. So, we moved to Hawaii when I was really, really young and I was really tall for my age and I was super skinny and gangly and it looked like I would trip over my own shadow at any given time and worse, I was hyperactive so clumsy and hyperactive are not a pretty combination but my mom found out about martial arts. She probably thought that it helped with discipline and all of the things that I kind of needed. I needed focus, I needed discipline, I needed coordination and she found a school near me and she goes hey, do you, she saw me every Saturday I was watching black belt theater. It was always guys doing kung fu and karate and Chuck Norris, Bruce Lee and Jackie Chan. I was watching them



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all the time and she was like oh, do you want to try that? Do you want to do martial arts? Yeah so, we went and then, he was like oh, come back for another free lesson and I went again. It was fun. You get to try to hit people. it's like playing tag as a little kid and so, my mom sets me down. Well, you did your 2 free classes, do you want to go again? I was like yeah, this was great! I get the whole belt and the cool outfit just like in the movies, this is cool and she was like it's an investment. We're going to have to commit to at least 3 months. Are you sure you want to do this because our family has to invest in your future and I was like yeah, of course, sure!

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

How old are you at this time?

**TJ Storm:**

I'm 7 maybe.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Sure, no real idea of consequence.

**TJ Storm:**

Pain is a good teacher so my parents had learned from me saying yeah, sure, I'll do it. Now, I was about to learn the lesson so I committed to it and then, I started going to class and we had to do bunkai. We had to do techniques where somebody's punching you. You have to block. You have to actually utilize the technique. It's the application of the technique and it's fine do it once if you manage do to it right but doing it 3 times, 4 times, 20 times. That's bone against bone eventually and eventually, it started to hurt which I did not expect. I was like oh, that contact again hurts and I started getting little bruises and stuff and I got pain. Oh well, that was fun. What's next and I thought I was going to quit. My mom was like no, you committed. Now, you committed once in the past and we kind of let it go but you're older now and now you're going to learn what that means. What's that mean? It means you're going back to karate. Oh, fine. So, I go back and then I get dinged up again and you keep getting banged up, dinged up and after a while, I really wanted to sneak out of class. I just wanted to not be there but I started getting belts also. I started training and they started making me do stuff and at a young age, you don't know how hard or how easy a thing is. I didn't know either and I just started to learn and after a while, I started developing a small group of skills. when I was 8, 9, 10, I catch a bus to karate, no big deal but I wanted to quit more than a couple of times especially when I got kicked for the first time, hit for the first time, you fail doing a thing. My mom kept saying got to go, you can't quit. You never give up. You do a thing and then eventually you make a decision if you want to do the thing or not do the thing and she even came to class with me for a little while to show that she could do it. Now, my mom was not in the best shape. We was a little bit overweight and she had a little bit of arthritis especially in her knees but she went to class to teach me that lesson and also make sure that I didn't sneak out of class and she was



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down there with the white belts when I was an orange belt or a purple belt and I saw her doing and I'm like damn, my mom's doing it. I have to be better than her and I did and she never let me quit and as a result, I have an entire life, an entire career that is largely centered on the martial arts and everything that it taught me and those things are not only physical skills but mental and spiritual as well.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

I think aspects of that story likely resonate with a number of the people listening. I think anybody who trained as a child wanted to quit at some point. I know I certainly did. I'm curious, how much of it as you got further in, the resistance to letting you quit, how much of that was simply trying to teach you the lesson of you're sticking something out and how much of it was, if any, I guess, your mother seeing that you had some skill and wanting you to develop that?

**TJ Storm:**

Very little was that I had skill. I had no skill. I was a string bean. I was always in the center back row in my class picture when I was the kid because I was the tallest kid almost always and I'm 6'2" now and I just happened to grow really fast so I'm not unusually tall adult but as a kid I grew really, really fast and I'm almost always the tallest person in most of the picture, almost every year every time so I was really, really clumsy. Worse, I was super hyperactive. I could not sit still. I couldn't sit in class. I'd be shaking my leg, I'd be bouncing around. I'd be drawing pictures in the corner of my book trying to make animated images move. I was always doing something and then, I'd be cracking jokes also because my mind would be racing, looking for something to do to keep me occupied, to keep me busy because I was so bored with the droning teacher talking about history or whatever it was the subject was and it drove my teachers insane, it distracted the students, it was horrible and I couldn't focus. Oh, what's new? Oh, what's that? Oh, there's a squirrel. Ah, butterflies! Then, I'd just be bouncing off the walls so I was not a natural talent in any way shape or form, not even a little bit. Now, the amazing thing is if you take unbridled energy and managed to put it in a container, it will eventually take the shape of the container which is kind of cool. All the energy allowed me to, oddly, when it was focused on...when our energy is focused on surviving, not getting kicked, not getting hit, not getting punched and sometimes doing something fun which is largely the martial arts. That's the base description when you're a kid. Survive and sometimes fun and that's what it was based on. I didn't want to get hit anymore, at least not in the place where I was last bruised. I didn't want to get kicked again because it knocks the wind out of you. Pain is a good teacher. You start learning the things that you're there for and if you listen, even a little bit, you don't have to listen to all of it. Even if you listen even a little bit, which is all I could do because my mind didn't work that way at the time, this is well before they gave anybody Ritalin. I was forced to focus. My teacher was Japanese and the original style that I studied was Shitō-ryū and it was hardcore so imagine a spastic little kid in a traditional karate class in Hawaii taught by an instructor who, Shizuo Kataka at that time, which was an amazing, amazing instructor, incredible martial artist but he didn't speak a lot of English, at least he didn't speak it to us. So it was no nonsense so that was the container that I was given and I put all that energy into the container without even knowing that because I didn't



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have a whole lot of choice which you probably don't as a kid so I did the thing that was in front of me whether I liked it or not, I was doing it and it shaped my way of thinking about discipline, about learning, about mastery and the skill, whether I knew it or not at the time, it shaped my future and that, I'm beyond thankful for. Primarily to my mom and to all the amazing instructors that I've had early in my lifetime.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Now, at what point did martial arts go from obligation to something that was a choice?

**TJ Storm:**

Around the time, I think I was a blue belt. I was getting older, maybe 11 or 12 or 13 and I'm starting to get into...what was right before high school?

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Middle school, junior high, depending on where you are.

**TJ Storm:**

Middle school, yeah. Middle school, junior high, I started to own these skills that, it was part of my day. It was now my day. It was not something my mom told me I had to do. It was simply oh you finish school, you have about a half an hour or an hour before you have to be in class and I was saying that to myself so I would either choose to go play basketball with my friends and then walk down to class or try to do some of my homework and then walk down the class but I scheduled it myself. I took ownership of it then I would catch the bus home and that's just how it was for me. I didn't think about it anymore. It was a mechanical part of my day. I did not love it like whoa, I get to go to karate. That was not the thought. It was you brush your teeth, you go to school, you go to karate and maybe you do your homework because that was more important than the boring, not moving idea of doing mental work for me and that's kind of the way it was so it was a mechanical part of my day that I absolutely did. It wasn't until later that I started taking pride in the movements themselves. After a while, I started to, because I would practice which is sadly, something I see it, many of my students don't do or many students and other schools don't do. They don't actually go home. They don't actually practice. I still had that kind of energy that just unbridled energy but now it was more focused so I focused it into practicing as I go home. I remember I would go to Chinatown, I think in Hawaii there's a street called Hotel Street and at the time, it was a seedier district but it also had all these small Chinese kind of shops like pawnshops. Did you ever see the movie Gremlins? There was a lot of shops like the shop they found the Gremlins in and those shops had comic books in them but they also had, behind the glass where the person sat, you paid for the comic books, that's where the martial arts weapons were. So, you had shurikens and nunchakus and all these stuff. I was mesmerized by the idea because I was still watching Black Belt Theater and I just love those things so I was like and let me get the shuriken and the lady will be like how



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old are you? I'm like 15. Not old enough! She knew! I was trying to lie through my teeth and she wouldn't give me a sharpened shuriken but she would give me the rubber one so I would buy those and eventually, I got my hand on a real shuriken and some nunchucks and I would take them home and I would practice nunchaku outside. I would practice my forms outside and pretty soon, the story of the martial arts, the romantic storytelling and the mythology of martial arts started to fill my mind and fuel my passion for training and my passion for practicing.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

I want to go back to that word you used that you took ownership of your martial arts, of your karate and I don't think that that word choice was accidental. It sounds like there's been a lot of contemplation at that time of your life and I'm just curious if you might unpack that a little bit more. It's not a word I've ever used anyone use to describe anything at that age.

**TJ Storm:**

I, like I said, I was, I probably, they didn't have this word at the time but what do you call it when you can't focus on a single thing? ADHD.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

ADHD, yeah, distracted.

**TJ Storm:**

Yes, they would have told me that I have that and they would have given me medication. I had no doubt about that but the martial arts gave me a place to put all that wild energy and at first, it was about survival and fun. Those 2 ideas make you focus. Whether you like it or not. If you're having fun at the thing, you'll do the thing because you like it and if you're trying to survive and not get hit or not die, you will focus. Those things will make you focus. Even if you have ADHD so at the time, the pain was real. If somebody tried to kick me, even if it was a sparring kick, I didn't know that there was softer version and a harder version of the kick. I just knew that getting kicked hurt, period, so that was survival to me at the time so those things made me focus but after a while, I started to choose if I wanted to get kicked or not get kicked. Sometimes, the person I was sparring with was good enough to kick me. That was a good lesson and that's how my instructors spoke. If I got hit, they would hmm, good lesson. I was like good lesson? He just kicked the shit out of me. That hurt! What do you mean good lesson? They didn't explain. They didn't say anything else, oh, good lesson. That was the full explanation like I did something bad, good lesson and I was like oh okay, if you say so but after a while, I took that, that became my thinking. He kicked me. Good lesson. Not owww, not ouch. Not oh man, you cheated. No, it was simply a good lesson. I will not let you do that again and if you do do it again, a better lesson. I have to improve. It changed the way that I thought. It was like I was a hunk of crumpled metal and they started to shape me into something that resembles a blade. It wasn't a functional blade yet, it was the beginning of what



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I might become someday and once you can see that, once you can see that you may someday become a sword, you may someday become a naginata blade, maybe if you keep on doing what you're doing and you dedicate yourself to it, maybe you'll become that thing. Maybe you can choose to never be hit and better, you can turn that attack into something else and turn them into a disadvantage for them and an advantage for you. once you can start to understand that, that is magic. That ability to use martial arts to master a thing well enough that when somebody uses just fury against you and you respond calmly and with great skill, that's really enticing and to be able to own that skill, I remember the first time. The thing that I see most when people start to realize that they're starting to understand the martial arts, the reflexes start to get sharper. Something falls off the table and you'll catch it. At the corner of your eye, your body reaches out, you catch the thing. That's the first thing most people notice and I noticed that when I was at...can I tell you this story?

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Absolutely, please! Stories are great!

**TJ Storm:**

I was at the mall called Ala Moana. It's a big mall in Hawaii where we would go hang out at the bus stop after school. So I went there, we're all hanging out and go for a run and I had to go to the mall. I had to go to the food court, I think, and the bus station was nowhere near the food court. Alright, you guys, I'll see you in a minute and I think a penny fell out of my pocket. I was vaguely aware that it fell out but it just fell out on the bench and my friend is just sitting there and I can hear them laughing because we were all talking about something and then all of a sudden, the laughter kind of stopped in that suspicious way. I was vaguely aware of that because we were all goofing around and we were laughing at each other or just talking silly things but I was vaguely aware of that and then I took steps because I was walking towards the food court and then there was like a penny fell out of my pocket, they stopped laughing. Now, and I reached back and one of them had thrown the penny at me after I took about 6 or 7 steps away. He threw it at my back. He was going to ding me with it and I did not turn my head, I just put my hand out and the penny went right into the center of my hand. I did not look at it and I heard them go whoa! Right at that moment, now this is the part that would tell me eventually I was going to become an actor. I held that stance with my arm outstretched behind me with my eyes on the opposite direction for about 3 seconds. I just held my hand out then I caught the penny. Now, on my face which they could not see, I was like whoa but when I turn my face around, I had this calm look on my face like the master of a kung fu movie. I just turn around like hmmm. The blood had drained from their faces and they're looking at me like I had walked off of a movie screen and I nodded once, I turned around and I walked back and I had the biggest grin on my face. They never saw that grin but I had the biggest grin on my face. I could hear them go, what, what, how did he do that? Timing gets hammered into you the way the physical body moves, the way it attacks. Those things start to make sense in a way that music makes sense to a composer and that kind of ownership, that moment, when a skill shines and burns bright in your soul and then puts you up centerstage like that, just for that part, just like the



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moment, you're like hmm, practice is good, pain is a good teacher. That was amazing and those moments, those kind of things make you take ownership. When you can see your skill develop and I mean, little things happen, little tussles in school where they're not tussles anymore, it's not even a real fight where somebody is trying to slap fight you or they kick you in a good-natured way because that what's boys do and bullying. Bullying is empty when you know the person trying to do the bullying, it's scary, sure. They might be bigger than you but yeah, so are a lot of people in my class and I spar with adults so eh. You said something about lunch or after school, I'm like, hmm, ok and when you have no reaction to that bullying, the bully saying the things, it really affects the bully. They're like did you hear what I said? After school, I'm going to kick your butt and I'm like hmm, ok, we will see. Now, you see a change in the bully and they're like why is he not reacting the way he's supposed to. He's supposed to be scared. This scares everybody else and you can see it and that's all learning. I hear, I know that there's a lot of bullying in the world. I do remember the bullying but I don't remember it being such a massive problem. I don't know if they didn't talk about it but it is something that happens with humans. It is a natural thing that humans had to test their limits. Some have to test their power, some have to be a test and I think that it gives you strength. It shapes part of your childhood, it shapes part of your adulthood. It shapes humans to have to endure those things. I think we need to give people the mechanism to cope with those things and I think martial arts is one of those potential mechanism. I don't think you're going to stop bullying but I do believe that we can help people understand that it is a natural part of our development and we have to deal with it. I don't think that we have the same tools that we have when we were younger because when we were younger, we learned to endure it so martial arts really, really helped me endure those things and to deal with them in a very positive way.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Yeah, the bullying subject, it keeps coming up and even when it's not being brought up directly, I'm seeing it. It doesn't take much time on social media to see people who are related or claim to be friends treating each other horribly and that online conversation turns to offline conversation and I watch it and it blows my mind. I was bullied. I think, as you indicated, most of us were bullied in some way but we learned what it felt like to receive it and a lot of us felt what it was like to dish it out and learned this is not a good thing on either end and now we have these new formats to spread it as adults with little to no consequence.

**TJ Storm:**

Yes, and it's an ugly time but we have to, I wish that we took mental health more seriously because that is partly what it's about of the victim, the person being bullied. They need to know what bullying is and how to deal with it and then we can have that conversation but I don't think we take health seriously enough. I don't think we take these situations seriously enough because we haven't, we evolved to deal with bullying. For the most part, there's always been this big, strong alpha kind of person saying I'll take your food if you don't do this or get out of my way and I'll do what I want. We've learned to deal with that. In one way or another, we've learned to deal with it but that was our evolution. I think cultural



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evolution does not and cannot be contained. It changes so fast and now that we have online sources, anybody can be a bully and they are and we haven't evolved to deal with these blindsiding bullies, all kinds of bullies. There's ones that are right, there's ones that are wrong but they're still bullies and we have to learn how to deal with it. We have to learn how to cope with it and we have to have conversations to help deal with that and help everybody.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

I agree. Martial arts has some tools that I think a lot more people will benefit from and that's part of why we do what we do is to hopefully spread martial arts and get more people involved there. Now, you brought up this incredibly dramatic moment that could very well come off-screen and I suspect changed your social standing with your friend group from there on.

**TJ Storm:**

Yes! I was now minutely cool.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Yeah!

**TJ Storm:**

A complete spazz!

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

I've had a couple moments like that too where I just tried to play it off as oh, absolutely. That's completely what I was trying to do and it was not the one in a million that actually worked out so we're just going to hold on to that. As an aside, it makes me wonder from my own experience of that story, how many of these wonderful legends that we've passed down were just like that? Were the great grandmaster on the top of the mountain is like I can't believe that worked?

**TJ Storm:**

YES! Yes, absolutely! I remember being in class like some of those little legends in kung fu movies, when they fight you always hear these and that's the sound of the weapons, their hands and feet snapping through the air and I remember doing the technique right once and my sensei at the time said, hmm, that hmm with a slight head nod, that was the biggest complement you got. That was it. Not good job, not atta boy, no. That was just the gold. You just got the gold ticket and I was like but I remember when I did it right, my gi made a snapping sound once. I had rotated my hand and stopped my arm at the right distance with a little bit of bend in the elbow and it came from my hip, everything worked and he went hmmm and at that moment, I just went it sounds just like in the kung fu movies. My gi snapped and made a snapping sound and now, I knew how to equate proper technique with a badass kung fu sound



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and that is the sound that I went to, I try to achieve that sound in every technique I did and it started to work actually. My gi would snap when I had a snap in my kick, when I had good torque in my fist and I started to realize ah, so this is how it's supposed to be and that is where the myth came from. Good technique creates a snapping sound in your clothes and maybe that's where the sound from the movies come from because you can't do that with everything but I sure tried. It was awesome! It was amazing.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

I guess, at some point, we got to talk about this acting thing. Was there a phase between what we've talked about, you as a child, as a youth, training, taking ownership of that training, developing, stopping pennies and getting on screen? Is there a block of time? We don't have to go linear but...

**TJ Storm:**

No, I literally became famous overnight, it was pretty sweet.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Ok.

**TJ Storm:**

No!

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

That was going to be disappointing to everyone who's listening and work hard but not made it yet but let's go there!

**TJ Storm:**

No, that wasn't even the plan. It was magic to watch those people. It was absolutely magic but I have to say, it was not the plan. I was still a nerd and a complete super spazz for the most part. I was nerdy as hell. Like I said, I grew fast which meant that my clothes tended to, my pants were always an inch or 2 inches higher than my shoes. They were called high waters back then. Oh, nice high waters because I would keep growing in my clothes and I would leave my socks exposed in my shoes and I was still such a nerd and I played Dungeons and Dragons. I was in the back of the class or at lunchtime playing with my friends Dungeons and Dragons using my imagination which was also super fueled by hyper energy and now, martial arts so we'd be playing all the time and there was nothing cool whatsoever about me. I was the tallest nerd and the most energetic nerd but nothing cool whatsoever. The dances started to come and girls started to matter to me. There was a girl named Chantelle when I was a kid. She was stunning to me. I think she was the chief or coach or the head cheerleader. She was the head cheerleader and I was just like wow, she is amazing. She is amazing. My mind locked on Chantelle and I wanted to ask her to the dance and I was super nervous and to be honest, I had absolutely zero chance but this is what you



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did; you ask the girl to the dance and in the movies, like 16 candles and all of those, eventually somehow worked out. No, life is not like the movies so it did not work out but just like in the martial arts, now I had a way. To deal with that failure. I thought to myself hmmm, she doesn't want to go with me. Hmmm, wonder what I can do to improve. Pain is a good teacher. I can do better and I wanted to be better. I wanted to be the kind of person that she said yes to so I started to change myself. I started to work on myself. I looked around and I was like hmm, I'm not cool. She went out with maybe the top football player. She went out with somebody much, much cooler than me to the dance and that stung. That was pain and the pain taught me maybe I could be cool, cooler like him. What makes people cool? It was maybe break dancing and to be an athlete. To be strong and athletically gifted and to be popular because you're a dancer so I did both things. In Hawaii, there are 2 cultural races. There are Samoans and Tongans, they are both much bigger than me so football in my estimation was not a good choice. I would die on the football field because they're big and powerful and hell no but I think basketball, they can't actually tackle you in basketball. They can check you but they can't tackle you so I was like I will try basketball so I started playing basketball and I took it just as seriously because martial arts had taught me how to train and the more you practice, the greater you get. Now, I was not the best by any leap of imagination but I got way, way better because we had a great coach. I think it was Coach Shering and then later, I had a Samoan coach named Mister [00:38:26] and both of these coaches were hardcore awesome coaches, old school. They yell at you ok, ladies, get on the court, let's get some laps in and they were super hardcore. They did not play and I loved it. it was like being in karate. There was nothing sweet about it. there was nothing soft about it. They would ground you into the dirt. Your endurance had to be strong, you had to pay attention, it was just like being in karate. Some of the guys were ready to throw up but at least, karate had forged me in my spirit and my discipline in a place where I could expect this and this was normal so I got better basketball and that was the work. That was the survival. The fun was dancing. I started to just stand in front of the reflection at the chapel and I would do one move that I knew that I could do. It was the wave. From your right hand, the wave would go all the way up your right arm, then your left arm and into your left and all the way back. I'd practice it over and over again. It was the only move I could do and then movies like breaking and beach street and all these movies started to come out and I was like whoa and started copying all of those and I became a really solid dancer and eventually, I got a group and we started dancing and eventually, we became one of the best dance groups in our neighborhood. We were called Fresh Force and we had the street enemy, what were they called? I can't remember their name but, in any case, we have battles on the street like you saw in the movies and it was a great time to be a kid. It was epic but I became a dancer. After all of that, I ended up becoming a professional dancer. I moved to Los Angeles, I kept on dancing. I did music videos. I did all kinds of fun stuff but dancing doesn't pay the bills and you don't feel, at the time, I didn't feel like it was appreciated. You're dancing for the singer. You're occasionally dancing for a fashion show or whatever it is but you're like this small part of the show that yes, you love doing the thing but it's not appreciated and I don't know how I felt about that and you don't get paid really well but you're tearing your body up and tearing it down and building it back up again and healing and all the stuff but I didn't feel like it was appreciated so I started to get burnt out on dancing. I loved it but I had done it every



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single day for hours a day and the love drove me but it wasn't as fun. I wasn't enjoying it plus I was further away from my friends. I moved from Hawaii to California, Los Angeles, so that part was gone too and I fell into a singing career. I was getting my haircut and the guy next to me was like hey, do you sing? I was like yeah, sure. I was lying. I can't sing to save my life but it sounded really cool. Who doesn't want a record contract? It sounded like well, let's see what you got? Well, can I bring my friends? My friend Vin, my cousin, and my other friend John, they can sing and so, we showed up and they sang and I choreographed because I danced and together we were a pretty good team. We did records. We got on the radio, it was great. We got completely screwed out of our contract and that was the end of the music business. Now, we had done concerts and stuff and that was in front of thousands of people and it was really, really cool but it was kind of a dirty business. It was just kind of before digital music so it was a good time to get out for us. We didn't know it but at the same time it was a painful lesson and pain is a good teacher. I was like well, if I'm going to get into a business and I'm going to get screwed, at least I want to see it coming. How about acting? How hard could that be? I went there. I started going to casting calls and I got some parts because I was pretty tall and I could do martial arts. I didn't really think about the martial arts as part of my business. It was just part of me. It was part of my being but I didn't think it was a marketable skill but I knew that they occasionally used it in movies so I said oh yeah and I could do martial arts and they're like wait, you could do martial arts? Yeah. I didn't really think it's a big thing but it was a big thing. This was during the days of Kickboxer and American Samurai. There were tons and tons of movies that needed martial arts. Every movie wanted a martial arts villain, a martial arts hero, a martial arts fight and because they had a lot of need and not a lot of money. They would be like you, you can act and you're big and you can choreograph because the dance helped me understand timing and what looks good, I can do all of those things so I got on the set and I started choreographing the fights; not really understanding how much more I needed to know but it's a good teaching to be on set and I started to do that and I started to see my mistakes once it was filmed and it was real film. It wasn't digital so it wasn't a quick turnaround but when the movie came around, I was like ew, this looks horrible. I see the idea was there but the cameras involved basically and I started to learn through that and fortunately, I got paid a little bit or nothing or the 1<sup>st</sup> ten years but I got to work on tons and tons of kickboxing movies and I learned. It's like being in a film school except for these people, it was survival for them and we tried to do the best thing we could every time and it was fun! Doing martial arts on film is amazing and occasionally, I would talk and then, after doing it for 10 years, I went to acting school. I went to an amazing Meisner School in Santa Monica and that's when I realized, oh my god, I cannot act. Not even a little. I am horrible. I've done so many movies, oh my god, I can't act! I just realized I've done all these movies and I knew nothing about acting and I acted in them. I did act in the movies but I was horrible and I did not understand why. Oddly, the martial arts is exactly opposite of what you need to act. I did not know that at all. Martial arts, somebody hits you and they could hit you square in the face but the martial arts teaches you to be stone. There is no reaction. There may be pain but you will deal with it but you will deal the person in front of you without reaction. You will give them nothing. Give the enemy nothing. Somebody hits you in the movie, give them everything. Show them your vulnerability, open your heart, let the tears come. Martial arts, they taught me there are no tears, there are not



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vulnerability. I will not fall. I will not stop. I will not be put down. Acting wanted to be open yourself up, show every single thing and I had trained to not do any of that so that was the new path. That was my new martial art. The art of being vulnerable, really, and listening. Those are the things I had to learn and I did. My acting skills are not as strong as my martial arts skills because I trained them a fraction of the time but they trained just as hard. They do not play. The school was just like my martial arts school which I absolutely loved. It was scary to watch them occasionally tear an actor apart for a, not practicing; b, not being dedicated; c, not taking it seriously but those are the same things that would tear apart a normal person in karate and karate and kung fu and those things taught me take it seriously, practice. This is real. Treat it as real and because I practiced, because I took it seriously, because I had a deep background in the martial arts, I started to excel in the acting. I started to learn. I started to not suck and eventually, not sucking became being ok. Being ok became being a solid actor and flash forward a little bit, I have a career. Again, thanks to the martial arts and thanks to very patient teachers, all martial arts teachers. All the martial arts between karate, taekwondo, kung fu, capoeira, all the martial arts, the Filipino martial arts that I got to train. Thank you to all of those amazing teachers that I had and thank you to my acting teachers because that, I imagine, will be far more painful to watch. They had to sit there and watch me fumble through trying to be drunk, trying to bring a tear to my eye, painfully, over a long month. That was painful to watch. I have never caused a teacher pain until that moment. That was the first time that my teachers probably felt pain is watch me try to act.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

What I find most interesting in the way you're talking about your acting is that up until this point, everything you've talked about, has been, I'm going to do this. I'm going to conquer this. I'm going to get through this. I will find a way, I will get around it or above it. Whatever has to happen. Was it really as abrupt a wall as you're talking about? Did you just said this isn't going to happen?

**TJ Storm:**

Imagine everything that you know, everything that you understand, the exact opposite of what you need at that given moment. Imagine trying to drive a car but for some reason, the reverse is where the first gear is and the first gear is exactly where the reverse is and now you have to navigate all of that on a freeway. You have to get up to speed, as fast as you can. You had to reverse everything. Everything that I had understood, everything that I knew; be strong, be stronger, push, begin here, end here, give this person space, don't press this person, don't press the attack, let the attack. All of those things I could not use in the same way here. Now, it was just no, no, no, Sit there. Just be and I said I will sit, I will be. He's like a statue and then when the actor tried to say something to me, it bounced off. They said uh, you're a jerk and I said hmm, so I'm a jerk. There's no reaction! She was like how does that make you feel? It was like, it does not. I am prepared for this and it was the worst. They're like no, no, no, she called you a jerk. How does it feel? It is true. I do not care. It is fine. I was so Zen and unfeeling about that moment. NO, no, no, no, inside it makes you feel a certain way like perhaps, perhaps but there was nothing there. I had no connection to my inside life. I had built the stone warrior around it to protect



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that thing inside of me and that's great for the world when it's a hostile world. It is not great when you need to let that child be affected on the inside to go back to that thing on the inside and that really threw me off balance. It took me awhile but the only thing that I had to realize was that huh, you want me to take my armor off? That's it? Nobody, they didn't know that that's what they're dealing with but it literally took me 2 and a half years to figure out and I remember the night that it happened. I have an amazing acting teacher. Her name was Annie Dremon, she was my teacher in Joanne Baron. She had me doing this, I think it was a from a movie called The Hustler, I think, and my partner was a woman, her name was Stacia. Stacia was saying something and all the lessons up until that 2 and a half year mark, all the lessons finally built up and when you forgot a line, you were supposed to repeat or somebody else forgot a line, you just repeat your last line. That way, you kind of drill it in and she was saying her lines to me and we'd done the lines and she said blah, blah, blah and I would say blah, blah, blah back because that was my line but this time, she was saying it and I had just figured out, oh, remove the armor and in the middle of the scene, for the very first time in a long time, her words affected me. They affected the child inside, the soul and I was like and I cared about her enough, my character cared enough about her character, I cared enough about her to let them affect me deeply and it was like a kick that takes your air away. Her words stabbed me and that pain went in and my teacher and my partner thought that I had forgotten my line because it stabbed me so she repeated and my teacher, she always had a pencil on her hand, she said repeat. She was telling me repeat your last line so your line can come to you. It's a little trick based on repetition. I didn't need to. I can feel the words coming but they were coming from a place of hurt. I was reacting from pain which is what I had avoided doing as a martial artist but that's what they wanted here in the acting and when that pain came, I released those words back and I saw the effect, not only on my partner, she actually stepped back because they were venomous. When I was coming back, I was fighting from pain. Everybody in class who's usually either on their phones or writing notes and their heads are down, they're bored out of their mind because they've seen this scene 10 times already, all of a sudden, all the heads in the room lifted and all the postures leaned forward. It's something that changed. In this moment, these words meant something that she did to me meant something, she meant something to me and in that moment, I started to take ownership of the new skill. I started to understand what it meant to act and then, I found the art, the martial art of the acting. I said ah, this is it. I said it afterwards because I was so in the moment but I could feel it. In that moment, I was like something's changing and it was weird. That night, when I walked out. I usually looked at the outer physical parts of people and now I can see the subtext in people's conversations as I walked down 3<sup>rd</sup> Street Promenade. I could see couples that were brand new and you could tell that they had that shiny new relationship plastic over there and they were all into each other. I could see couples that had been married for years and I can see that comfortableness with each other or a bare tolerance. I could start to see the stories in people because I was now looking at more than their outside physical being which is what I would often spar with when I was in martial arts. I could see the part that the actor speaks to. The emotional spirit, the core and that changed the way that I perceived the world and that was a great experience. It was a great time to grow. It was a wonderful lesson and it took a lot of pain for me. Unfortunately, the pain is in my teachers but it took a lot of pain to get to that point.



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**Jeremy Lesniak:**

What did that process do for your personal life?

**TJ Storm:**

It changed it. It helped me start to be able to communicate and you say a lot of people say communicate like oh, talk but that was half of it. I was very good at that first half, the talking part, but now, I could receive information. It was the yin and the yang and I was good at the yang. I could output words all the time. Here's my opinion, my opinion blah, blah, blah but I heard the physical vibrations of their voice hitting me but I did not take in what they were saying but as an actor, you do want to take it in and you want to let it affect you and for the first time, that started to happen and I became, I think I had become a better person, a better communicator but definitely a better person as a result and I think, again, the martial arts helped me understand, ah, this is the other side of that. This is the yin. I was missing this piece. This is important, this is part of being human. I'll train more in this and that's kind of what I started to understand and it made me a fuller person. To be able to understand people better, to really hear what they're saying and to feel their pain or share their joy, those things are important because sometimes people tell you your good news. Oh my god, we just had a child and I'd be like yay? That's biological, right? But now, from this point, from this part on, I'm like oh my god, that's amazing and I could feel their joy because I opened myself up to it and that wasn't natural for me. I trained that away to some extent and it was just a natural part of my being. I wasn't trying to be tough. It was just part of my training partially and now, that opened me up and I started to understand and I'm like wow, that is amazing and it so made me a better person overall.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

That's fascinating. There's a self-awareness in there that I rarely heard from anyone either on or off the show. That is pretty impressive so let's complete that circle. So, martial arts lead to armor, bring you to a place where you had that opportunity to learn the ability to shed that armor when appropriate which leads to further personal development and so, how does that tie back in? How has that affected your martial arts?

**TJ Storm:**

It affected in a lot of ways. I started to realize that there's a deeper yin to the martial arts. For instance, one of the schools that I trained in said to avoid a fight is the best. Now, when you're in between 15 and 30, you're kind of down for a fight. You're like fight? I trained for this. Yes, let's fight! I want to crush you and you're open to the idea of I will defeat you. that is what needs to happen but thankfully, I had a deeper understanding of the yin. First off, the good part of martial arts is it teaches you the cost of pain. Pain is a cost in itself. It hurts and pain usually shows up as injury, as bruises. They are good lessons but they hurt and it takes time to recover and that time is lost. You can't do all the movies, all the fun stuff that you want to be doing while your finger is broken, while your hamstring is pulled, while your



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shoulder is out of socket. You can't do all of those things so you start to take that more seriously. When you get hurt, you start to realize the emphatic cost of it. If I hurt this person, they're going to feel the same kind of pain I felt. I've had a collarbone hairline fracture. You would think that that would not ruin your entire livelihood as much as it does but you can't grab a cup off the top cupboard if you can't raise your hand above the pectoral muscle but the collarbone is attached to that so every time that happens, there's that pain so every single instance of injury, you start to respect and you respect it in yourself. I can't raise my arm above my chest without hurting and wanting to scream and you also respect that in others. If I hit him there, if I break him, if I commit to this combat, I am going to hurt this human beyond their ability to operate or worse, the ability to repair if it's a serious fight. I would very much not like to visit that kind of pain on another human. I don't want to open myself up and expose myself to the possibility of that kind of pain either but the acting made me think oh, can we not talk about this? Perhaps you're right or maybe I'll just eat my ego completely if it's a complete bully at the bar going hey, you're that martial arts guy, you're supposed to go to a fight. I would just like eat it and I'd be like you know what? That is the movies. You would kick my ass. You're tough, bro. Nope, I'm not fighting you. They're like yup. I don't have to fight. I might not look like not the toughest person in the room for about 3 seconds but it's all good. There's no pain in that day. Nobody has to feel any pain. We don't have to prove anything. I don't have to be tough. I don't have to get injured, he doesn't have to get injured. Life is better with just a little bit of yin added to the yang. When you can live in that balance and find that way out, that's a better place and I wouldn't have done that in my 20s. I'd be like perhaps I am, perhaps I am tough enough. No, I don't need to do that. It's not necessary so I'm really grateful to, and as a person overall, rarely does one need the full level of skills to fight but when you need them, you need them and that's great. they're in my back pocket. They live in my bones but I've trained for this but the other 98% of my life, I need the soft skills and that has helped me in the other side as well. Now, the martial arts permeate the other part of it. The other 98% has the understructure of the martial arts. I understand the world through the martial arts because that is where a great deal of my training came from. My grit comes from martial arts, my discipline, my focus, all of that comes from the martial arts and what I understand and my parents but the inside of it has helped me immensely and many, like I said, a better person and helped me in my relationships and my imitations overall. It's an excellent thing.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Now, let's turn our eyes to the future. We talked a lot about where you're at, where you've been more specifically but what's coming?

**TJ Storm:**

I don't know, man! There's so much! In 2019, I got to be the predator, I was Colossus in Deadpool. I was Godzilla, king of the monsters, literally. I played those characters in those movies. Darth Vader, I played Darth Vader in Star Wars Jedi: Fallen Order and Darth Vader Immortal and...dude. How do you top that?

**Jeremy Lesniak:**



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Not bad for the kid who said I don't want to play the piano anymore, Ma.

**TJ Storm:**

That's awesome! That's amazing! We're already working on stuff. We're already shooting some stuff now. More video games, more films, both live action and performance capture, motion capture. I run a school called the Mind's Eye Tribe and you can find this on [mindseyetribe.com](http://mindseyetribe.com). We're an action actors academy so if you want to do the kind of stuff that I do, whether it's fight in movies or use swords or lightsabers or use tactical weaponry and firearm and learn how to make it look cool for film or you just want to act and move like a creature, we teach all of that and we teach it primarily for motion capture, for performance capture, we teach it also for film because the skills cross over to everything. We teach it with a base of martial arts in mind because we understand, if you don't practice, I can show you all kinds of stuff. You'll remember about 3% of it and it will fade pretty quickly after you leave class but if you keep on training with us, well, you're going to get strong. You're going to get really, really good and that's kind of what we do so if you have people, please send them over to the mind's eye tribe action actors academy and we'll help them do that but that's kind of what we're doing. We're sharing those skills, the skills that my senseis, the philosophies and the grit that my senseis gave me, we're trying to share those with the new generation of performers who want to tell these stories of heroes and villains, the stuff that kept my imagination alive and gave fire to my training when I was a kid because a lot of those long training hours were nothing in comparison to what I imagined the guy in the 36 Chambers, they put concrete blocks on his feet and he had to jump out of a pit. If he could do that, I can practice for an hour and a half so those kind of things gave fire to my training when I was a kid. I was like I can do it! If he can do that, I can do that and I literally walked around for 3 months with 5 pound weights on each ankle to get stronger so that my kicks will be faster so that I could jump higher in basketball. Those are the things that those stories instilled in me. The ability to not give up, to you can beat the bad guy eventually. You can overcome the obstacles. Those stories spoke to my soul and my senseis fed my mind and my body the information it needed and they kept my spirit steady so all of those things combined really, really helped me get to where I am.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

This has been a lot of fun. Thanks for coming on.

**TJ Storm:**

It's been a blast. Thank you for having me. What number episode is this for you guys?

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

You're going to be...470, I think?

**TJ Storm:**



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What?! Congratulations, man! 470 people speaking about--

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Well, to be fair, we do one a week and the other episode each week is not an interview.

**TJ Storm:**

But still! That! THAT! Is the martial art! That's it! You keep on doing it. You do not quit. You do not falter. You commit to twice a week and that is absolutely amazing.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Yeah, we're coming up on 5 years.

**TJ Storm:**

Yes! That's 100 a year almost, man. Congratulations. That is really, really amazing and thank you for having this resource. I can't imagine having an opportunity to hear so many other people's experiences. You're a literal audio library of knowledge and wisdom for martial artists. I think this is invaluable and thank you for doing this. It's an absolute wonderful thing to have this resource available to a young martial artist or an old martial artist. It doesn't matter. To have this wisdom and this knowledge of...you have some amazing people who have trained in various, various facets and you guys also have some really, really great knowledge to talk about and I think those things are invaluable so thank you for doing all of that work.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Yeah, thanks for being a part of it and one more thing as we head out. I love doing this part too. You've shared some absolutely wonderful things but if you were kind of distil it down into some final words for everyone, what would that be?

**TJ Storm:**

Joseph Campbell wrote a book called Hero with a Thousand Faces and what he did is he went around the world and he listened to everybody's stories and in all of those stories, he found that we all, more or less, tell the same stories especially the hero stories. We tell the same stories around the world. The hero comes from a normal world, he realizes that there is a bigger world outside the door. He decides not to go but his people need him so he has to go and he goes out and he takes, or she takes, the hero's journey but that's what he was known for, Joseph Campbell, but what he said was follow your bliss. Follow that thing that fires up your soul. For me, it was martial arts and performing and that is where I am today. I am a martial artist. I get to perform, I get to act, I get to do action acting. I love it. It makes me so happy and then, I get to enjoy it onscreen with people at the movie theater. They're screaming. They don't necessarily know that I'm sitting next to them but they're cheering and they're doing all of



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that and I'm smiling because it worked. It did the thing and that is the end of the circle. It begins with the training. It ends with affecting the people and hopefully, getting to do it again someday. Follow your bliss and in the words of Joseph Campbell, follow your bliss. I think that is the most important thing. Second, have a mom that won't let you quit. That helps a lot. A mom, a partner, a friend, somebody to hold you accountable. That will help a lot but follow your bliss and don't quit.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

I don't think anyone would disagree that Sensei Storm is passionate about his work and his training and I always find it interesting how people start so similarly with their martial arts and then spider off to do such amazing and different things. Thank you for coming on this show, Sir, and I hope to talk to you again soon. If you want more, head over to [whistlekickmartialartsradio.com](http://whistlekickmartialartsradio.com). There, you can find videos, links, social media, pictures and more. Not just for this episode but for every one we've ever made. If you're up for supporting us and the work we do, you have a number of options. You can make a purchase at [whistlekick.com](http://whistlekick.com) and if you do, don't forget the code PODCAST15, saves you 15%. You can also share an episode, leave a review, tell a friend or contribute to our Patreon, [patreon.com/whistlekick](http://patreon.com/whistlekick). We'd love to hear your guest suggestions so don't be afraid to reach out. Our social media accounts get a lot of activity. You can find us all over the place, @whistlekick. My personal email, [jeremy@whistlekick.com](mailto:jeremy@whistlekick.com). Until next time, train hard, smile and have a great day!