



Episode 510 — Ms. Shirley Meier | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com



Jeremy Lesniak:

What's up, everybody? Welcome! This is whistlekick martial arts radio episode 510 with today's guest, Miss Shirley Meier. I'm Jeremy Lesniak, I'm your host here for the show. I'm the founder of whistlekick where everything we do is in support of the traditional martial arts. If you want to know more about what that means, go to whistlekick.com, that's where you'll find out everything that we're doing and one of the things you'll find over there is our store and if you use the code PODCAST15, you can save 15% off every single thing that we sell. Martial arts radio, this show, gets its own website at whistlekickmartialartsradio.com. We release 2 brand new episodes every week and the goal of this show is to connect educate and entertain the traditional martial artist throughout the world. If you want to show your appreciation for what we do, you can do a number of things. You can make a purchase, share an episode, pick up one of our books, leave a review somewhere or support us on Patreon, Patreon.com/whistlekick. That's the place to go. If you support us for as little as \$2 a month, you're going to get access to more content and depending on the tier that you support us with, you'll get more stuff. The more you contribute, the more we're going to give you. Seems like a pretty good tradeoff, doesn't it? Check it out, Patreon.com/whistlekick. Today's guest has connections to past guests and she's an author, she's a martial artist, she's an instructor, she's a student and we have some great conversation. We go all over the place on this one, as you might expect, kind of a hallmark here on this show and that's a good thing because it gives us the opportunity to talk about things that you might not



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expect us to talk about. I had a great time talking with her and I hope you have as great of a time listening so here we go. Miss Meier, welcome to whistlekick martial arts radio.

Shirley Meier:

Hi! How are you doing?

Jeremy Lesniak:

I'm great, how are you?

Shirley Meier:

Pretty good actually, aside from some allostatic pressure from the coronavirus here. You notice everyone on the planet seems to be, if they are self-isolating, seems to be having mental issues and reactions that's from the fight or flight pressure.

Jeremy Lesniak:

It's funny you bring that up and I totally agree. I was talking to a friend yesterday and this is a friend that I do some work for. I do some consulting work outside of whistlekick and we were hanging out. We were doing some stuff yesterday and as 2 o'clock rolls around and she comes into where I have my desk in her office and she's you know, I'm fried, I got to go home and I said you know, I feel I'm feeling the same thing. I've been at about 70 to 80% on good days.

Shirley Meier:

And it's really weird and most people don't realize that they are under that amount of pressure. I'm just staying home. No, you're not. This is an intense fight or flight kind of thing and if you're in training, you realize oh, the reason you feel so tired in your class is probably because you have been obsessing at the back of your head, I'm going to do it right next time. You're literally putting pressure on yourself when you're not in class which is kind of interesting.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Makes sense. It sounds like you've spent time thinking about these stuff.

Shirley Meier:

A little bit. I try to, the last class I had in martial arts was teaching grades 3 and 4. I was an itinerant karate teacher from Montessori school.

Jeremy Lesniak:

I bet there's not too many people who can put that in their resume. That's really cool.



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Shirley Meier:

I had a couple of little tricks. When you're trying to keep grade 3 boys and grade 4 girls and then you have the little ones who are oh, they're in grade 1. You're like oh, boy, ok, let's all play duck, duck, goose. Because the trick that I had was I would promise the boys one gross fact about karate at the end of an hour's good attention.

Jeremy Lesniak:

And did that work? That's a different motivator than I've heard of before but it makes sense.

Shirley Meier:

The thing is they loved it and they gave me careful attention because they wanted to see what next gross thing I would come up with. The problem is they went home and told their parents and their parents were grossed out so they didn't like it.

Jeremy Lesniak:

The parents weren't your audience. That's tough.

Shirley Meier:

Oh, I got told for that class. Oh, what is this rodeo you've got going on? Just teach them push-ups, just teach them sit ups. Excuse me? That's not martial arts. That's calisthenics. The fellow who hired me did not understand what I was really doing. He was upset by the fact that I was teaching these little kids real self-defense. One of the gross facts is why the punch twists on contact and it's basically to break skin so the boys thought that was wonderful. Ew, ew, ew, they fled my class. They grabbed their bags and fled screaming ew, ew, ew and were back for next week so that was fine.

Jeremy Lesniak:

That's probably the only demographic where you can deem that response successful. I think any other age group, I think any other grouping of people, if they left your class running away screaming ew, they probably wouldn't come back.

Shirley Meier:

Yeah, but you see, this is the kids and they were bored by safe adults. It was one of my jobs as a martial arts instructor to be a more dangerous person than I am really but I had to appear in an entirely different way to get their attention to continue their interest in the martial arts. I used to do a class. Nothing focuses grades 3s, and 4s, and 5s even all the way up to early high school as much as when you walk into a classroom with a golf bag full of swords because, you see, I picked this up from my friend, TJ who did the talk, Teal James Glenn, he's a stunt sword master.



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Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah, he's been on the show.

Shirley Meier:

He spoke where I got my blackbelt so anyway, he used to do this wonderful segment about how Shakespeare had to get it right and when you walk into an English class of grade 5 and you have the sword bag and you basically talk about, you start by talking about the opening fight scene in Romeo and Juliet. Everyone thinks ew, Romeo and Juliet. Boys and girls, romance and blah. You start with the fight scene and all of a sudden you have everybody's attention and that's pretty much why Shakespeare wrote it that way because the swordfight was the medieval, early renaissance equivalent of a movie opening with a car chase.

Jeremy Lesniak:

That's fascinating! It's so easy to forget that Shakespeare wrote plays, not books. Most of us have consumed far more Shakespeare by reading it than by watching it which is unfortunate because it's a whole different experience but that makes so much sense. How many movies today open with a car chase to pull us in?

Shirley Meier:

You got to remember, the Globe Theater, was in a, a rough part of town and b, on one end of the street you have bear-baiting. Some guy setting dogs on bears. On the other end of the street, you had the sword master school and every Friday and every whenever, they did the prize fights which are when the journeymen fought the masters to get their mastery in sword and then, you have the poor Globe sitting in the middle, having to draw the audience somehow so, of course, you're going to start with the swordfight. The other interesting thing you've got to remember is that when Shakespeare was writing, a lot of guys in the pit, the pit where they pay the penny to stand under the stage to boo and throw peanuts? Those guys were mostly off the battlefields of France. They had just come through the hundred years war, the war of the roses, all of these stuff. If the playwright wrote it wrong, these guys were inclined to climb up on the stage and show these namby-pamby actors how it was really done so you had to get it right. In that sense, Shakespeare was a martial artist.

Jeremy Lesniak:

I think that's the first time I've ever heard that claim made but I don't know that I can easily refute it. It might not fit a lot of people's definition of martial arts but we're not as far off as I think I would have initially imagined. I like it.

Shirley Meier:



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He had to get it right. In that particular fight scene, it's very simple because Shakespeare wrote it around real sword terms. The real master of swords, when Mercutio and Romeo are insulting each other, they're insulting each other's sword fighting style and Shakespeare got it right. He had to, just to keep his poor actors safe and he was an occasional actor too so he didn't want to get confronted with some guy from the muddy fields of France with a real small sword in his hand and they did use real small swords, short swords, on stage. It wasn't false or fake usually because people were close enough on stage to tell if it was false. So, I contend that a lot of the actors and especially in some of the more raucous plays were not like sword master, stage combat masters today. I mean, they were just figuring out how to make it so that they could present this on stage realistically without killing each other.

Jeremy Lesniak:

I'm with you. Your explanations here seem a little bit more than coming from a cursory understanding of stage and stage combat.

Shirley Meier:

I did some stage combat with TJ. He flung me around. I was one of his stunt crew for a really awful movie that we did down in Baton Rouge. I have had friends, it's given me my only IMDB credit but it has given cause for my friends who watch bad movies to call me up and apologize for having watched it so I will not tell you what the movie name.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Oh, we're going to have a link to that because any time someone claims that the worst movie of all time exist and they were in it and you don't have to. We can make this as this sort of an Easter egg thing but that's...

Shirley Meier:

It's called Journey to Promethea and it was an open casting call for costumers like for anyone in the Renaissance Fair in Baton Rouge. That way they didn't have to hire anyone with costumes except for their main actors. The crowd scenes were all open call to the local SCA and Ren Fair crowd.

Jeremy Lesniak:

It has a score of 2.4 out of 10 on Rotten Tomatoes.

Shirley Meier:

You just looked it up, didn't you?

Jeremy Lesniak:



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Oh, sorry, on IMDB, of course! I've got my phone handy. You never know what kind of great stuff is going to come up when I have one of these conversations.

Shirley Meier:

It's as original as dirt and I'll have to say, we shot a mud fight, a sword fight in a bayou which is this huge mud fight and it never got on screen. It was never part of the movie which was too bad because that was a lot of fun. I got to run around in a very, very badly fitting set of armor with a pot helm coming down over my eyes because only one of these helms have a liner. Everyone else's stuff was bubble-wrapped underneath and I got to run around in this muddy, mucky bayou in my long riding boots because I wasn't going to have my feet cut to ribbons by the sandals they gave us. Sandals in the battlefield not unless you're Roman. Anyway, with a flaming torch and screaming, it was a lot of fun and I got to be one of the dead bodies on the field and none of this made it into this movie.

Jeremy Lesniak:

That's a shame!

Shirley Meier:

Yeah! I did get my animal handling for this because everyone was too scared to touch the chicken. This chicken must have been on, first of all, I'm standing next to the cameraman with this chicken dangling by its feet. When you do that to a chicken, they just kind of hang there. They go into it like a trance and I would have to flip it up, shake it, to wake it up and then hurl it in front of the camera to make it look like it was actually capable of outrunning our lead actor which was kind of funny.

Jeremy Lesniak:

I don't know if we've referenced chickens on this show. Here we are and we are past 500 episodes and anytime we talk about a new subject, it tends to spark my memory because I don't think we've ever talked about chickens and it sounds like this film was far more fun to shoot than to watch.

Shirley Meier:

It was hysterical. It was a blast. I was, at that time, my current training, I had gone from, I had been teaching women, children and differently abled people self-defense for years, up mostly north of Toronto in the Muskoka area for SAIL which was Sexual Assault Intervention for Living. My partner and I at that time, we were teaching up there and then, I had learned shiatsu which was the next step in my training. In our style, I've never formally gotten 2nd and 3rd Dan but in our style, 3rd Dan is when you learn a healing art and bring it back into the martial art so I picked shiatsu which is, so I was the shiatsu massage therapist on set. We had a little person playing the wizard and that poor guy needed so much massage it wasn't funny. He really tipped me well because I treated him like a grown man which he was



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instead of a child and a lot of massage therapists just tapped on him because they were afraid of hurting him but he was a grown man so he needed really deep tissue massage is what he needed.

Jeremy Lesniak:

We started kind of going into the martial arts stuff so let's go back to that. Let me ask you what I think is the first question I've really asked you yet today which is how did you get started in martial arts?

Shirley Meier:

I was working with another writer, my first collaborator. He and I worked in '84 is when we sold our first novel and Steve found a karate club and because we were sitting so much on our behinds writing, we started martial arts because a, I'd been the size and shape of the seat cushions if I didn't work out because I sat so much and b, if I was going to be writing about people pounding each other in the book, I had to know sort of what I was talking about so I started karate at York University and that was because Steve, it was Steve's old school and we could get in without, this is a very unusual karate club because none of the instructors ever accepted payment for teaching karate properly. Getting paid for self-defense is different but teaching people karate, I do for free like the other black belts in the style so that's where we started, that's where I started and it was an interesting journey through the various belts because it was in that school that I realized the majority of martial arts are set up to break down and rebuild the ego of your average teenage boy because I was the first woman to make it through to higher belts and get my black belt in this style so I was kind of a pioneer there. I taught my teachers quite a bit because your average karate class, first of all, you are more likely to go through a martial arts class if you go with someone else. If you pair up with somebody and you're less likely to drop out of the class if you go with someone else and secondly, 90% of the dropouts, and they were boys, they dropped out when they hit our senior green or early brown belt because that's the point where we stopped being the ego-driven, let me ram my forehead into this brick wall kind of thing which is what green belt training really is. As a brown belt in our style, you stop for a minute and you look around and you say there's got to be a door here somewhere. It's where you go from strength to soft. How to do soft strikes, how to support, how to get out of the way of an attack rather than trying to stand toe to toe with somebody and beat them over the head with a concrete block which is really the start of most martial arts because it's an easy way to connect with how to do it, right?

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah, I'm with you.

Shirley Meier:

You see, if I were teaching, it's funny. The women, once they hit brown belt, the women perked up and said oh, I know this. I recognize this because the girls are taught to give way and the boys are taught to be extremely aggressive so if the women get through the really aggressive stuff and they learn how to



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let their inner mad woman out under control then the minute they step into brown belt, it's sort of like oh, thank god. I know this, I understand this and I haven't yet really figured out how I would turn traditional martial arts training on its head for the women but I think it would be a really effective class for women, kids and differently abled people if they started them with brown belt and then train them on the other direction if you know what I mean.

Jeremy Lesniak:

You're speaking more to starting people with a less of a concrete block approach.

Shirley Meier:

Exactly but strength, for most people in our society, strength is what they are most used to using. It's not judo, it's godo and as I've been getting older, I've been finding, thank God, I learned years ago how to block with 2 fingers because bone bruises on my forearms are not something I want to look for which the difference in blocking, with timing as opposed to brute force, right? This actually leads me straight into the martial art that I'm in now which is actually horseback riding and I'm having words with my teacher's horse, Chloe, lovely Morgan horse, beautiful. She does not like the thwip of arrows going past her ears. She might be a better cavalry horse than mounted archery horse but we'll see. Right now, I am focused really hard on the horse back riding comes first, the archery comes later because you have to have a really solid connection with your horse before you do crazy shit on their backs. Excuse my language but yeah, so the people I ride with, Peter, he is training with cavalry sword. My buddy, Bruce, he is training with lance. He is training with the same targets that, what was it, Teddy Roosevelt developed because most lancer targets before this were just hung from branches or hung from rafters and Roosevelt basically said no, if you hit the guy with a lance, he's not going to fly up and away from you. He's going to fall down and the horse gets used to this and the first time you had a target on the ground, it falls down, the horse freaks out so he came up with a modern target which is your basic box with a weight on the bottom, tied with a hay bale so if your lance hits the burlap bag stuffed with hay, it gets hit and falls back and the weight pulls it upright again so you can go around and do it again so that is what Bruce is doing and I am making hay bales.

Jeremy Lesniak:

We've had a number of folks on the show who are training in some manner of historical European martial art. Some HEMA stuff, some long swords. I don't know if we've ever had anybody on, I feel like we've had one person on the show who's done some Zen archery stuff. This is another first. The first time I heard someone talking about a lance, especially a mounted lance in the context of martial arts so before we go there because I think this is, and this question is going to sound judgmental and it is absolutely not, anybody who knows my history knows I don't mean it this way, what is your definition of martial arts, if I may?

Shirley Meier:



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Yeah, sure. It's an excellent question. Anything martial which is human on human conflict and the art part is training to do maximum damage if you want or minimum damage if you want. It's training for control in human on human conflict, I think.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Absolutely. Everyone defines it differently and I very rarely ask that question. In fact, I may have never asked anyone that question outside of we've done some kind of debate roundtable sort of show as when we talked about that subject but I ask now because it sounds like it's going to give us some insight into you and how you moved from what sounded to be a traditional Asian martial art to something like this that's not very common.

Shirley Meier:

It is not very common. I'm training with people who are, they were actually in the Governor General's horse guard so they were doing, first of all, they do the ceremonial stuff with the full Victorian uniform. The red coats and the brass hats, shall we say, the lancers and they also did World War I cavalry recreations and my teacher also, she hosts and teaches the 19th Ragoons, the Light Ragoons and Toronto Police Forces train out at her place so it's more about horse and let about eastern or western. Let's just put it this way. Bruce with the lance could just as easily recreate Alexander the Great's [00:30:03] or companions as he could recreate Victorian lancers in the British army. Form follows function, basically, and if I'm using an archery, if I'm using a kid's light compound bow to practice with because I promised my teacher, I wouldn't pull my war bow out because it's a 42-pound bear and if I miss, I didn't want to shoot out her arena windows but I'm looking at traditionally, ancient Sarmuschan Mongol horse nomad combat. This led from heck of a lot of research I did for a book a couple years, like 10 years ago and when I was a kid, I used to faff around with horses and ponies on a string kind of thing and my buddy Bruce, who I got to know about, maybe about 10 years ago, he has his own horse, Oakley, and like I said was doing the World War I recreations in the Horse guard. As a quick aside, Bruce was part of the escort to bring earth from Vimy Ridge back to cenotaph here in Barry which is north of Toronto for the 100th anniversary so he and his horse were in full World War I kit when they escorted the grave soil from Vimy and brought it back home so if I go along this route, we're starting to talk about the difference between warriors and soldiers.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yes, let's do that!

Shirley Meier:

Because I was married to a gentleman who used to fix buffs. For the first Gulf War, he was on Guam and the U.S. military or air force basically taught him the difference between being a soldier and being a warrior because that person now has been fighting in the SCA doing medieval recreation for years and



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the difference between a soldier, a soldier just does what they're told, trusting the chain of command. A warrior makes their own decisions. Is this cause worth fighting over? Is this worth going to hell for? Because in my definition, we're talking human on human conflict and that goes straight into what I teach, self-defense, if someone is willing to fight you, they are in hell. If someone is in a mental state where they are willing to fight another human being, I consider them being in hell and my duty as a martial artist is to get them out of hell as fast as possible and if that requires some physical pain, ok, I can do it but it's I am fighting with compassion as opposed to easier emotions like rage. It's out of oh god, I'm so sorry for you. Let me get you out of there. You don't want to fight. You really don't want to fight. A soldier can easily fight with all of the concrete block emotions; the rage, the anxiety, the fear, all of that stuff, that's all green belt stuff. When you get to training warriors, they have to learn to weigh the risks of are you willing to go to the risks when you are fighting? Are you willing to put yourself through that or are you able to fight out of compassion and other emotions instead of you bastard, bam! One is simple, one is very complex and human beings, human beings can easily be locked into the easy stuff.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Easy is easy. It doesn't require that much effort.

Shirley Meier:

Yeah! Get mad, there. Problem solved. Now, the interesting thing having learned shiatsu which is pressure point massage, taking it back into the martial art means that, to be honest, if I use the points I learned to heal with, I worked in northern spas for quite a few years and I caught a couple of interesting things. A woman who was on the verge of liver failure and my teacher and I managed to catch it and arrest the disintegration of her life, basically but if I took some of those spots, those things like oh gee, you're hurting here constantly. If I actually hit with intent on one of those points, I'm getting close to some pretty dangerous acupuncture and I'm using my thumbs instead of...it's all a matter of focus and intent, you see. Most of the easy emotions, you can fling your fist out and you're using the entire surface of the 2 knuckles in that to spread your intent to the other person. If I can take my intent which is to stop you from being where you are, mentally, emotionally, however, if I as an instructor or as somebody who has gotten into an unfortunate situation because they're with somebody willing to fight, if I hit with intent to stop them, then I am doing so out of greatest compassion. God, I'm so sorry I have to hurt you but you'll feel better afterwards. That kind of thing.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Where does this come from for you? Because this is not...we have heard from hundreds of people. We've talked to people who are all over the spectrum on how they feel about the need to defend themselves and the appropriate level of force and the emotion that goes with it during that moment.



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We heard from plenty of people who will advocate for minimum use of force to extract themselves from the situation.

Shirley Meier:

And run. That's the simplest thing.

Jeremy Lesniak:

But nobody, very few people are talking about having compassion for their attacker. This reminds me, and my experience with Buddhism is very limited, but this sounds almost like a Buddhist philosophy.

Shirley Meier:

It sort of is. It's something that I developed pretty much on my own as far as I can tell. If you're playing, if you're doing tai chi and you're doing soft hands and light, my shiatsu instructor who is in it for the healing, is definitely, it's really funny. Bald, little Buddhist guy who if he grins at you, you're going to fall down. You're going to fall down. I was studying with a gentleman who learned capoeira and I had learned a very straight line, very hardline karate style and whenever sensei would pull us out of the class and he'd say, ok, what I'm trying to show you is this and he'd get us to throw our best punches and kicks at him just standing there, very much like the aikido master who learns how not to be moved. If he intends not to be moved, he will not be moved, and here we are, karate student, throwing her best punch, capoeira student throwing his best flying kick and both of us bounce because my sensei's instruction is we bounce off his intent. He moved like an inch and a half kind of thing but it was like trying to punch a spinning rubber ball. There was nothing for us to grab onto. No negative emotion, no anger, no rage, no involvement. We were not able to catch him in our fight, our intent to fight. He showed us that if you can take your ego out of it and it's not about winning a fight, it's not about ego and all of that stuff, tangles you in your attacker's problems. If you can detach yourself from the whole thing, then they're less likely to be able to hurt you at all. If they're an idiot who raises bruises on you, fine but they're not somebody who damaged you spiritually and that's why it's all intention focused. You can literally take as long as you're detached from the situation, you don't have to get personally into yourself. You don't have to absorb it and take the beating, the emotional beating of it which actually, I find far more destructive. I'm teaching these little boys in grade 3 and grade 4. First of all, if I hear you taking anything I'm teaching out of my class and out on the playground, you're out of my class because little boys on playgrounds, little girls on playgrounds, they fight with ego and they're fighting to win and they're fighting to be top dog, boss, whatever. They're fighting because they don't want to feel diminished and in a lot of cases, a lot of attackers fight because they don't want to feel diminished or disrespected. They feel made lesser and I am not inclined to get into many fights because I don't tend to want to put people down. If you're playing the way most human beings are taught currently on this planet, you're talking about hierarchical struggle. You're talking about a dominance thing and I'm sorry, I'm not into dominance games. You want to feel great, I'll lift you up. Great, I'll praise you. I'm not here



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to run you down. It's not my job and as a martial arts instructor, it's my job to teach people to not let themselves get beat up emotionally as well as physically and the interesting thing, that's what the horse is teaching. If you go in to try and ride a horse with bad intent, you'll get dumped on your ass so fast, you might get bit and you might get kicked. You have to actually be on your horse's side, on the person's side. Just be with them and then, if things really go south and they don't want to be with you anymore then you have the capacity to step back and say this is not my problem and no matter how hard you try, you can't make it my problem. I will not hurt for you.

Jeremy Lesniak:

This is fascinating and I hope you'll continue. I know I've been pretty quiet because you're kind of blowing my mind with some of these stuff.

Shirley Meier:

Oh, ok, cool!

Jeremy Lesniak:

That's my favorite thing about this show is I get to talk to so many people from so many perspectives and just kind of mentally train in a sense.

Shirley Meier:

Yeah, you see because, like I keep saying, it's your intent and it's your focus. You're focused pretty hard on me, I can kind of tell that. It's interesting. Dealing with animals and kids, you have to know how to stay on their side. You don't want to freak them out, you don't want to scare them, that's the last thing you want to do. You want to have them take the martial arts, the self-defense, all of these seriously. Don't fool around with it, don't joke with it. It's not a joke. It's not a game. That said, let's go have some fun and I watch and their job is to actually move me. I say yeah, pull me across the room then I stand there and they are having a blast trying to make me move and I show them the difference between just standing there, standing there in stance, standing there with intent and then, I say, ok, I am going to walk across the room. I pull the belt over my shoulder and I take a step. Squealing little kids, they are falling on their behinds and trying hard to pull and I take another step and I said ok, hang on, I turn around and I say are you ready? And I let go and everybody falls all over the mats just trying to teach them how powerful they can be if they choose to do things properly. They can swing their arms around all over the place they want but they won't have any effect. It's a game like that or a game like duck, duck, goose teaches safe competition and it starts to teach focus so let's go have fun. Let's play tag, only every time you are tagged, you have to go down and do me 5 pushups instead of freezing or going home. Do 5 pushups. That kind of thing. One of the best games for the kids is when I have my friends in and we would do, bunch of brown belts and a bunch of black belts and we all did dodge ball. You'd start with all the white belts and all the kids in there and all the brown belts and black belts with dodge balls



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and every time you get hit, you had to drop and do pushups and the idea is to clear the circle and then, we swap places. The black belts and the brown belts go in the center and everybody else gets the ball. With the white belts, you only make them do 10 pushups or 20 pushups, with the black belts and brown belts, they should know better. They get to do 50 pushups if they get hit but it's such a blast watching the white belts, yellow belts, green belts and the kids and all, just the idea that they can hit their teachers and they're supposed to is like all of a sudden, game on. It provides an incredible amount of focus because I'm going to get him, I'm going to get him! It's an easy way to teach that concept.

Jeremy Lesniak:

I want to talk about your writing because we've talked a little bit about it but I've got a feeling that the expression, the art side of the martial art that's surfacing for you now, I don't think that suddenly popped up when you started training. If I heard the timetable right, you didn't say when you were working on that novel but it sounded like you were an adult.

Shirley Meier:

I've been working as a professional writer since the 80s.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Ok, so at least a little while. Writing precedes martial arts for you, is what I connected.

Shirley Meier:

Oh yeah, I tried to write my first book when I was like 9.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Maybe not that book but maybe. Where's that expression of the compassion, of heart, of self, of whatever you want to call it, it seems really solidly manifested in your own understanding of who you are and how that applies to your training and your instruction of martial arts. Where was that in your writing? How did that show up?

Shirley Meier:

Let me put it this way. The last book I had out last year is called Shadow of a Soul on Fire and only one person has figured out where I stole that from but what we have in this particular book is an evil, mad emperor wakes up in his own bed. He has been swapped in his sleep by the same guy from another world who happens to be the beloved, voted in leader of the Republic. So, we've got the emperor waking up in this totally strange bed. They're the same guy. They've been raised different and the people in my republic are no fools. They figure out pretty damn fast that this is not their guy even though he looks the same. Almost identical but not quite. They lock him in the basement because he's so nuts, he's threatening to kill them all. There's one guy willing to talk to him and that's the healer who



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is writing a book about nature versus nurture. How is this monster so different from our guy? They don't want to kill this guy because they're afraid that if they do, they'll never, it's the hope of getting their own beloved back, somehow. They don't know. It doesn't seem like a good idea to them to kill the emperor. The whole book is him fighting them to not heal because he has been turned into a monster by Dad and Dad's martial arts training was hellish to this guy so the whole damn book is everyone trying to undo or trying to save the monster. How are monsters created? How are people driven crazy and destructive, self-destructive, other-destructive, all of this, and it's not until about page 120, 130, somewhere around there that he actually grabs the bars of his cell and says to the healer, I don't want to heal. You want me to grow a conscience. If I grew a conscience, I have to kill myself and I don't want to die. The whole point of the book is him fighting with this idea of conscience and he's an evil warrior emperor and I've written two books in this world. One world is the war went one way and they are independent kingdoms voting people in and the other world, it's an oppressive evil empire and one acknowledges two gods and one, the empire acknowledges only god and calls all of the women witches but the 2 books written in there, the last one was Shadow of a Soul on Fire and I am actually developing martial arts style of my own that I started in that book and I'm calling it the Sword of Ink. Musashi, when he was the sword saint of Japan, right? He was one hell of an artist. Drawing sumi paintings, sumi ink drawings. He used to teach his students that if you could draw a perfect line, then you could draw your sword properly and I'm taking that idea and running with it. If you can handle the ink, you have enough control, you have enough calm to be a good martial artist. The first book I wrote in this series is in the empire and it deals with the evil emperor's alcoholic younger brother. The only surviving brother that he's got, that's supposedly a raging alcoholic. He's not but nobody knows that because it's the only reason he is the only surviving brother of the emperor. He's not seen as a threat politically because he's a floppy mouth drunk. That one was called Sparks in the Wind and that one's available from WordPress, actually and the Shadow of the Soul on Fire, dealing with the monster, is available, I believe, still on Amazon.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Oh cool. You preempted my next question which is where would we find those?

Shirley Meier:

Ok! Yeah, I've been working on that one. I should be editing, my first young adult novel right now. Because I write children fairly well, I'm told I do. I started with a 12-year old girl on a Greek island when Santorini blew up and the book is called Lay Me As Daughter and how they deal with magic is entirely different than we do and so, the martial arts there is manifest only by the fact that there's this kid that shows up in a floating blue lotus and he says call me Bodhi. Would you like a cup of tea? He's the latest Bodhisattva, you see and he's just following my character around, offering her tea when she gets too upset, that kind.

Jeremy Lesniak:



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I just want to point something out to the listeners and this might warrant rewinding a little bit or a second listen or just some consideration that, as you've spoken about your writing, you've spoken about that in a very similar, if not the same way that you've talked about your martial arts training and the way you've talked about martial arts. In fact, you've talked about it, almost everything we've talked about today has been with very similar energy and I want to make a speculative comment before you respond, if I may, and this has been coming up for me a lot which is kind of fun that I get the chance to bring it out here. This notion that in Chinese martial arts, when we talk about Kung Fu, that Kung Fu isn't a martial art. It is mastery of a practice and that's what you're reminding me.

Shirley Meier:

I mentioned too about judo as opposed to godo. It's all intertwined. My writing, my art, the martial arts, shiatsu, this is what Feng shui is. To be honest, it's a way of living and a way of looking at the world because as you learn HEMA, right now I'm with Bruce, he's teaching me long sword. I'm used to katana so I have to train a lot of muscle memory. I have a heavy bag in the backyard and he has a pell that he built out of old tires and we're going at it with waisters. It's a lot of fun but retraining muscle memory takes a lot of work. Writing and art and all of these stuff, all takes work. Work, time, effort but the thing that every single one of them all takes is attention and there we are back to intent. If I am writing, I am trying to tell you a story. Hey, look, see, see, see, look at over there. I follow my characters around and write down what stupid stuff they do. Look at this story, what if, uh, hey, if I drop paint on a canvas like this, what does it look like? If I poke you with the sharp end of this or the blunted end of this, did I get you? It's all intent. It's all focus, it's all attention. You can take the dullest of tasks, not that I tend to. I tend to pick tasks that are a little bit more interesting to me but you can still, if you can focus your attention, you can get what artists and all kinds of people, sports, they call the flow. Martial arts, writing, art, you're always going for the flow. The moment when you transcend yourself and if that's in a dojo, there's a reason, I think, people don't realize that they are changed when they step into a dojo. Whether they continue on that path or they go someplace else, it's the act of choosing that that changes you and gives you, at least, an inkling that there is a way of transcending yourself.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Well said.

Shirley Meier:

You see an awful lot of people who start martial arts, they start karate and then, it's like you're climbing a mountain. You find a really good path up the mountain, you go up there and you see this path over there and somebody else is doing something really cool but people don't realize that you can't just drop what you're doing and run over to that other path. What you have to do is go back down the mountain, find the start of that path and start up again so a lot of people in New Age and some yoga classes even, there's a lot of martial arts, first of all, they say my way or the high way which is incorrect and secondly,



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they say, don't pay attention to that guy behind the curtain and they try to teach you their path and you don't necessarily want to end up never having gotten up the top of the mountain because you kept running down and grabbing more shiny things into your magpie's nest of stuff. You're candling and oh, black hat Feng shui and hey, let's do this. Really, if you're going to learn martial arts of any kind, recognize that you are following a path up the mountain. Eventually, you're going to get to wherever and it won't be in an airconditioned SUV going straight along a highway like that. It's a very meandering walk and you'll find a heck of a lot of interesting stuff along the way if you take time to look at what you're walking.

Jeremy Lesniak:

You told us about the books. Where else can people find you online?

Shirley Meier:

I have a wiki page under my name and I do have a website but it is under construction. It looks awful. It's terrible. I don't recommend it at all.

Jeremy Lesniak:

We won't link to it then but when it's done, make sure to let us know and we will put it in the show notes. We can update those in the future.

Shirley Meier:

It's so much fun. As long as I'm out to have fun.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Isn't that the best reason?

Shirley Meier:

Yeah, because if I'm no longer having fun, why am I doing this? Sometimes it's even fun to get mad but because of my training, I know very well how to put that down. Funny story for you, way back at the beginning of the training. I was saying godo as opposed to judo. You know the basic difference there? Maybe you want to explain to your readers is between godo and judo?

Jeremy Lesniak:

I would rather you do because I'm not in a position to explain the concept.

Shirley Meier:

Judo is the way of softness. It's very soft and it is giving way. Godo is grab the guy by the lapels and drive him into the ground like a ten spike. It's the way of strength. One of my teachers, he was a young guy.



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When I first met him, he was just a guest teacher. He said he had the chance to go across Japan and he found a dojo so he could keep working out. He's a greenbelt at that point and dojos are like, in Japan, space is valuable so on the rooftop and you know the door down the bottom goes ting-a-ting-a-ting and you have to climb 87 flights of stairs to get up to the dojo and he and his bunch of fellow judoka at the time, they were learning judo, supposedly learning judo. They were practicing a foot sweep. Now, what they were doing is kicking this other guy in the ankle, lifting him off the ground and driving me into the mat like a ten spike and they were thinking they were doing it perfectly. This is a foot sweep. No. Anyway, they hear the door go ting-ting-ting and they're going back and forth across the dojo, having a great ole' time and then they hear tip-tip-click. Tip-tip-click. Somebody is climbing the stairs very oddly, they think. They see an elderly Japanese gentleman come up in a gi with his stick and he's so old, he's doing one step at a time and then, the cane so it's tip-tip-click and then he's very slowly coming up the last stairs. They can see his head kind of rising up over the floor as he climbs all the way up and he puts his stick in the corner and he bows in and then, he looks at what they're doing and he does the same motion but it's like he's doing flower arranging and they're laughing and they're greenbelts and they're all going harder and harder and they don't notice that this elderly gentleman has a white belt with 2 red stripes on it. I don't know anything but if there's somebody that old who has a white belt with red stripes, I'd pay very close attention to what that gentleman would tell me. He didn't speak a lot of English but after a lot of the guys going wah-bang, wah-bang, godo. He comes over and he talks to one of the kids and says no, no, no, no, no and he goes swoosh and everyone, the green belts were all laughing and the old man says, ok, punch. What? I don't want to punch him. I don't want to hurt him. This could have been a movie. Typical movie and no, no, the guy gestures and this green belt throws out half speed. Guy puts his hands on his hips and glares at him and then, he says no, no, punch full speed and ok, so he gives him his best front punch. Just straight going to drive him in the chest. The guy goes swoosh and the kid lands on his back. All he did was swoosh. He did the foot sweep properly. It was like a wind motion. Just swoosh, bang! Kid climbs to his feet, dusts himself off, bows to the master and they start walking by themselves back and forth across the dojo wings. Swish, swish, learning how to be soft because they saw the punch and the threat just waff-bang! It was a beautiful moment, he said. They learned an awful lot about the difference between judo and godo from one move. I thought that was funny as hell. Anyway, still here?

Jeremy Lesniak:

I'm here! I'm hanging on! This has been great and I appreciate you coming on. That's a phenomenal story to kind of end on there.

Shirley Meier:

Someday I'll have to tell you about one of my students who found out that she could use her electric wheelchair as an effective weapon.

Jeremy Lesniak:



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You can't leave us with a cliffhanger like that!

Shirley Meier:

Oh, sure I can! I got lots of them! Differently abled lady who had control like on one hand, one finger on one hand and she could drive an electric wheelchair and this lady is one strong-willed woman. She had been assaulted by an attendant who put the attendant sign up and no matter what noise she made, nobody checked so she arranged this self-defense class and we found out, I got a friend of mine actually to help me out because I'm not 6 foot 3. I'm 5 foot 4 but she found out that if she was willing to treat her wheelchair, her electric wheelchair like a weapon, she could tase anyone trying to hurt her around the dojo. She could literally gain control of the situation if she was willing to use her wheelchair as a weapon. I don't care how big you are. My assistant was saying I'm trying to get her out of the chair and she's driving at me with this thing and there's something that kicks in your hindbrain, I don't care how enraged you are, it says big thing about to hit you, run you over and you back up and the lady had her best afternoon laughing her ass off, chasing us around the dojo with her chair so she learned a little bit more freedom then.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Fantastic.

Shirley Meier:

Isn't that fun?

Jeremy Lesniak:

It is fun and it adds some levity to an experience that I think most people would look at and say there's nothing positive there. There's no advantage. There's nothing that can be done.

Shirley Meier:

She said like hell, I'm going to find someone that will teach me how to defend myself even if the only control I have is one hand. Did TJ not tell you his differently abled student story?

Jeremy Lesniak:

I don't think he did. I don't recall that.

Shirley Meier:

There was a time when people were actually assaulting handicapped people in New York. Cops have a name for it, I don't like it, they call it cripp-bashing because people who beat up other people are not looking for a fight. They're looking for a target so Steve had multiple sclerosis and walked with a couple of canes. He really only had one move if he was in his chair. It's a palm heel and the strike is



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straightforward. It's like a front punch but with a palm heel. That's all he could do, really. There's this guy who grabs the arms of his chair and he's screaming at him what he's going to do to him. Now, Steve at that point had, sorry, a student at that point had a, let's just say he had a lot of motivation. Everything he had went into the one strike, hit the guy in the middle of the sternum so hard that the guy somersaulted backwards, got up looked at this guy in a wheelchair thinking shit, if he could do that? And he ran. It was motivation and intent saved him and he's laughing because he couldn't do anything else but that guy didn't know it. That's self-defense, I'd say.

Jeremy Lesniak:

I would completely agree.

Shirley Meier:

It's one of my favorite stories just because I like collecting stories of people successfully defending themselves. They do end up in stories in books when I'm working on them too.

Jeremy Lesniak:

We've got a bit of a library here if you want a reference. Quite a few episodes I've had people talking about their own experiences and I appreciate you talking about yours today. This has been an absolutely wonderful conversation and one I'm glad we had. I appreciate you coming on.

Shirley Meier:

As

Jeremy Lesniak:

It's so nice to talk to you too and we've got one more thing before we send it out and into the outro that I will record later and that is how do you want to end this? Most guests have some kind of parting words or some final thoughts, something that it's really ran the gamut. It can be simple, it can be complex but how would you choose to end this?

Shirley Meier:

Have fun learning to do the good stuff and it's all the good stuff. Wonderful! I can let you know what's happening with Chloe, the horse and I. I am only now getting to the point where I can actually consider doing the archery with the riding.

Jeremy Lesniak:

As I told you in the intro, this one kind of wandered and I know on a lot of shows that wandering is seen as a bad thing. I don't think it's a bad thing. I appreciate the variety of the guests, the conversation, the stories that we bring you on this show and I think that it is pretty well exhibited in this episode so Miss



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Meier, thank you so much for your time. Your coming on this show, I really, really appreciate it and I enjoyed myself. I hope you did as well. If you want the show notes with photos and links and all that good stuff, go to whistlekickmartialartsradio.com. Every episode has a page of its own over there. Makes it easy to find what you're looking for. Don't forget that search function if you're looking for something in particular. With these many episodes, it's kind of hard to have a subject that we haven't talked about at some point. If all these things that we do warrant your support, there are a number of things you can do. You can visit the store at whistlekick.com and use the code `PODCAST15%` to get 15% off or leave a review, buy a book or a program, help out with the Patreon, Patreon.com/whistlekick, follow us on social media all over the place, anything that you do to help us is greatly appreciated and I truly, truly appreciate all of you who have done so many things to help up until now and those who help into the future. We couldn't do it without you and remember, if you see somebody out there wearing something with whistlekick on it, say hello, introduce yourself and maybe you'll make a new friend or training partner. If you have a guest suggestion, I want to hear about those. Email me, jeremy@whistlekick.com and that's it for today. Until next time, train hard, smile and have a great day!