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Jeremy Lesniak:

How's it going? You're listening to whistlekick Martial Arts Radio, episode 524 with our guest Hanshi Allen Libby. I'm Jeremy Lesniak, host for the show, founder here at whistlekick, where everything we do is in support of the traditional martial arts. If you want to know more about what we do, visit whistlekick.com, that's our online home. It's also the easiest place to find our products, including apparel, equipment, training programs, and a lot more. If you do go over there, make sure you use the code PODCAST15 to save 15%, helps let us know that this show leads to sales. Everything for the show we keep that in a separate place whistlekickmartialartsradio.com. We bring you the show twice a week. And the goal of the show and whistlekick overall well, it's all under the heading of connecting, educating, and inspiring traditional martial artists throughout the world. That means something to you if you want to support that work. You can do quite a few things. You can make a purchase, share an episode, leave us a review, follow us on social media, tell a friend pick up a book on Amazon, or support the Patreon. If you think the new shows we're releasing are worth 63 cents each Not to mention all the back episodes you get access to, consider supporting us at the \$5 a month tier, visit patreon.com/whistlekick and sign up. And if you do, we're gonna give you more content.

Today's guest is a thoughtful male, a man who started training as a kid at a time when very few people trained his kids. That experience clearly shaped his martial arts philosophy, his training, and as far as I can tell his life. I hope you enjoy this episode as much as I enjoyed it. Here we go. Hanshi Libby, welcome to whistlekick Martial Arts Radio.



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Alan Libby:

Thank you very much. Excited to be in here.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah. Hey, it's you know, it's not most of us don't get interviewed day to day right. I mean, we have people ask questions of us, but usually it's some kind of official thing right. You know, you go to get your license renewed and they ask you all kinds of questions. It's not usually fun and very rarely is it about martial arts.

Alan Libby:

Exactly.

Jeremy Lesniak:

People can interview me about martial arts all day long. I mean, that's fun. And we built the whole show around that there. There are people listening all over the world who like hearing people answer questions about martial arts.

Alan Libby:

I, like the martial arts. I like to talk about martial arts. It's been a part of my life. Forever.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Forever, ever. Like, how old were you when you got started?

Alan Libby:

In the 60s. I was about seven years old.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Wow. That's, that's really young for that era.

Alan Libby:

Yeah, yeah.

Jeremy Lesniak:

How did that happen? That's there's got to be a story there.

Alan Libby:



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Well there's there's quite a story that I grant, I used to get out of stay in Rochester, with my grandparents in the summer. And my grandfather used to go down the Hanson Street, down to the local bar. And lo and behold, there was a martial art studio upstairs. So he would stay downstairs and I'd go up to this. That's how that's how I got into.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Wow and you said Rochester, which Rochester? It seems like every state has one.

Alan Libby:

Rochester. New Hampshire.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Oh okay. Wow. So not, not too far, not too far from from where I am and where I grew up.

Alan Libby:

But same here it's about 32 miles from, from where I live.

Jeremy Lesniak:

And what was it like training in the 60s which for maybe some of the younger listeners, they may not know. But oftentimes people refer to the late 50s in the 60s era of martial arts in the United States as the Blood & Guts era. When it was, you know, the pride seemed to be that instructors would would beat on students so much that they didn't want to come back that there was a point of pride and in training them so hard that they didn't want to do it, which we forget the counter productivity of that and how silly it is. How, how did a young child uhm navigate that?

Alan Libby:

The first time I went in there because grandpa took me up there and he he knew the instructor there and first time I'm in there I was scared because it was mainly all adults. And uh so I set out a watch quite a bit and finally, you know, as time went on, keep going in I decided I'm not just gonna sit here and wait. I want to get into this. And as being a kid, I was kinda like I don't know, it's kind of like pushed aside at first. But then the adults would finally got me into, into their classes, you know? And it was it was it went went all right, it went all right. I kind of like had to prove myself that I was going to take a punch. I was gonna, you know, be able to take a slap bow.

Jeremy Lesniak:

You said mostly adults, you so you weren't the only child in there?

Alan Libby:



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There was another boy that was in there with me. And his name was Roger. And but that was, we was the only two.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Ahead of the times now. How long did that last? What What were those early years like? I mean, take us take us forward a little bit.

Alan Libby:

The more I went into the studio, all right, the more I went in, and I got used to it more and more. And everyone was getting used to myself, of course. It actually got easier the more I went in there. Things were tough. I mean, there was no, there was no, there was no the baby setting. And, you had to do what you were supposed to do. And so it did get easier. Uhm aspiring aspect of it was, it was a little brutal. But it did get easier. It get easier every time. We trained. And we was expected to train and we was expected to punch and was expected to blah. We expected to follow along and keep up with everybody else.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Anybody who's taught children knows that there are kind of two groups of kids who step into a class, you've got the kids who were there more or less as daycare. They go maybe they have fun while they're there. Maybe they try, but it's something that they do. And then you've got other kids who go home and they're practicing. And they're kicking the dog. And they're breaking lamps, and their parents are telling them "Hey, stop doing jump kicks off the couch". Which one were you?

Alan Libby:

I was a kid that was breaking lamps. My grandmother had this beautiful shower rod. And it was it was a glass shower rod. Well actually it wasn't shower, it was a towel holder, you know, by the shower. And I used to practice with that a lot. It was it was about three feet long. And I used to practice with that quite a bit and till one day, I broke it.

Jeremy Lesniak:

You got in trouble then you?

Alan Libby:

Oh, yeah.

Jeremy Lesniak:

That was that was bad.



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Alan Libby:

Yeah, yeah. Yeah. So you know, I was very, I was an active kid. It was an act. And the more I got into it, the more I liked it. I liked what it did for your body. I liked what it did for your mind.

Jeremy Lesniak:

What else were you doing that was active? You know, as you as you got older and maybe school sports opened up, was there anything in there?

Alan Libby:

Martial arts, was it. Martial arts, I really, I didn't feel like in other sports that it just didn't click with me. While the martial art did click, everything about it click. Other sports I tried but it just, it wasn't enough wasn't, it didn't seem to be challenging.

Jeremy Lesniak:

And martial arts remain challenging? Obviously.

Alan Libby:

Yes, and it's still challenging to this day.

Jeremy Lesniak:

And say so you started at seven, you know what, let's say, let's say early teens, 13 14. What was going on for you then? What was what was your training looking like?

Alan Libby:

The more I trained, the more harder I wanted to train. You know, the more I wanted, there was something else out there. You know, so I kept looking kept looking for it. I kind of would jump to studio to studio. And in in that time, that was not a good thing to do. Masters and instructors, they did not like that one bit. But I just was still looking for that challenge. So I didn't really know yet that. You know, I thought the challenge was in the arts, but it's not the challenges and within yourself.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Where did you settle? Did you did you end up settling in a particular school or, or style?

Alan Libby:

Yes, Yes, I did. I did Taekwondo at first. And Taekwondo, it just it wasn't enough. You know, we we weren't really supposed to use a hands back then it was all feet. And so I settled into Kempo that's



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where I found that we could use our whole body. That that to me was just amazing. That sounded open up a close door.

Jeremy Lesniak:

What was that transition like from Taekwondo into Kempo?

Alan Libby:

Totally different. It's like, it was like a football player to a swimmer.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Was it challenging?

Alan Libby:

Yes. Yeah, very challenging, very challenging. I got to use the whole body. And I had to, I had to figure out how to use my whole body. It was really it was on the mind. It was challenging on the mind also.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Tell me more what you mean about that?

Alan Libby:

Well, with using the whole body, of course, now your minds kicking in play. You had to become one, your body had become one with your mind and your mind. Your mind tells your body what to do, of course, that's your command center. So now you're in a second well, yes, you can do is jump up, step up, spinning kick, but your whole body's got to connect with that. Your minds got to connect with the first for you to be able to do it.

Jeremy Lesniak:

And Kempo is that where you remained?

Alan Libby:

Yes. Yep, to this day, Kempo.

Jeremy Lesniak:

All right. And what was it about? Maybe the instructor, or the way it was presented that, and maybe maybe you kind of answered this, but I kind of want to go deeper. You talked about look, what I was hearing was you were looking for more that there was something, there was something that was missing in those other schools. And, you know, so you, you said in Kempo, that you had to use everything. But if as someone who we already saw is predisposed to looking for more and more



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challenge, what was it about Kempo at you know, early teens up till however old you are now, that's kept you there. That's...

Alan Libby:

The instructors.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Okay. Tell me more.

Alan Libby:

Very non non nonsense people, very non nonsense. I mean, you they had us a set of sequences, you did, or they they asked you to do and they expected them to be done and you couldn't move any further until those with that, so that you know, to their standards. So they they put that challenge out coz its yourself, yourself how to defeat that challenge. No matter how many times you practice it over and over, they didn't move forward until you had that down for their standards.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Was that frustrating?

Alan Libby:

Yes. It's like, yeah, very frustrating. You know, you, you do your techniques, you do them over and over and you're thinking I got this, you know what, and and they come in and they just show you one little hand twist or one little move that you didn't do or you neglected to do and it was like, back to beginning again. So in the end in the end, you know, when you finally got that you finally, put a smile across your face. Yes. Okay, I understand what he meant.

Jeremy Lesniak:

And let's fast forward a little bit more, let's say, you know, out of high school, mid mid 20s what's going on for you then?

Alan Libby:

In my 20s it was great. Plus, I felt invincible, of course. As any 20 year old would and I just, and I started getting into the tournament scene more and more and the tournaments were, well then, they were they were brutal. I mean, they go out there was no gloves. There was no pads. It was there was your hands, you know, your bare hands and your bare feet and you know, they of course it got bloodied up a little bit but you know it, it was again, it was self self-satisfying. You know, you know, of course you got punched, you got kicked, but you brushed it off, man you kept on going.



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Jeremy Lesniak:

How far did you travel competing?

Alan Libby:

Oh, we went. One story to Connecticut one time to this tournament. We went in and this tournament was very, it was a very big tournament and the instructor had us go in and he says, "Listen, when you go out on that floor, don't walk out on that floor unless you intend to win. All right, but not win for us. Win for yourself." All right, so I always carried I always remembered that, win for yourself. So we got out of the tournament, we we we brought our trophies out we're proud of them. And he says, "Line 'em up here." Okay. He opened his trunk, took a golf club and hit the trophies broken. So now bring them back in.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Wow.

Alan Libby:

Yeah. So it was it was it coz he was challenging you every minute. You know what I mean? So that was that was a big challenge even more, bring them back.

Jeremy Lesniak:

How? How did you react to that?

Alan Libby:

I did not want to do that. I would...

Jeremy Lesniak:

Man I...

Alan Libby:

That was my trophy.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah.

Alan Libby:

But, you know, the trophy aspect of it. That was a trophy. In the end, you know, you knew you knew what you did, you knew you want it. So that was have a hard time.



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Jeremy Lesniak:

Sounds like this instructor had some be some interesting teaching methods that maybe wouldn't be appropriate in today's world.

Alan Libby:

Oh, no, it's not today's world. And then, you know, the hardness of the martial arts. You know, who was to say what was appropriate? What not gonna mean because there was many incidents, you know, that might have happened was like that. I'm sure it's happened to other people.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Certainly.

Alan Libby:

Totally different time, totally different.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Now at some point in there you started teaching.

Alan Libby:

Yes.

Jeremy Lesniak:

How? How did that happen?

Alan Libby:

I'd go to the classes and I'm just feeling good about the arts and looking around and seeing what it did for other people and people that was under rank below me. And I kept thinking about you know, the factors. You know these these folks, they may want more. They may want more just like I did. So I went to the the head instructor and I asked permission to teach because back then you didn't just go grab a belt, start teaching, you ask. And it was kind of heart-wrenching because he said you haven't deserved it yet. You haven't earned that right? Yes, sir. Finally, maybe a year or so after he said, "You're gonna go out teach on your own". So I started doing that. But I never really opened a dojo then I teach out, you know, in a park or I teach, you know, on a lawn or whatever. And that was just satisfying for me.

Jeremy Lesniak:

What do you think changed in that year, between not being ready and being ready?

Alan Libby:



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The want to, the want, the want to share with the other folks, want to share with other people, you know, making sure that I was ready myself exactly, you know, making sure that what I was showing other people was right for their selves, not just for the arts, but right for their selves.

Jeremy Lesniak:

It's a lot of responsibility as an instructor.

Alan Libby:

Yes.

Jeremy Lesniak:

And anyone who hasn't spent time as an instructor doesn't fully understand what that means.

Alan Libby:

Correct.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Well, what was it like when you started? What was that? You know, the first the first few people you worked with or or a few you'd call them classes, your sounds like you're kind of downplaying the formality when you started, but I'm curious how that felt.

Alan Libby:

It was a scary feeling, coz you really weren't sure if you was teaching the right thing for them, you know, learning it yourself, you know, you, you learnt it, and took it into your mind and body. It was right for you, but everybody's different, you know, they may not be able to do some of the things that you're trying to teach them. So, therefore, you had to adapt a little bit in order for them to do that. You know, so that was that was scary, you know, you didn't want to be really hard on them, but you wanted to be hard enough so they understood what they were doing. So it was it was scary.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Do you remember when that went away?

Alan Libby:

I still have it.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Really?



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Alan Libby:

Yes, still have it to this day.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Why?

Alan Libby:

Because everybody's different. Everybody needs different things. Not everybody needs physical aspects, you know, not everybody needs the mental aspect, you know, the spiritual aspect of karate also. Uhm you know, somebody that comes into dojo today, they may come in for a whole different reason than physical, they may just need to socialize, you know, they may need to get over a stump of being able to be in a class or in a room full of people. So, it's, it's still different to this day, it's still it's still challenging to this day because people walking in the door, they're not gonna tell you what they need right off quick, they don't even know you. So you have to get over that thing of getting to know them and what their needs are. You of course you don't want to teach, teach them the wrong the wrong thing to do.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Sure. It sounds like you take it really seriously.

Alan Libby:

Yeah, I do. I do. I do. And it's been a lot of fun. It's been. It's been a lot of fun and a lot of growing up and being able to help people. I still do, I still think it seriously.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Most of the time, in my experience when someone goes off on their own, to do anything, you know, run a business, teach martial arts, pursue a hobby, they've got their own ideas of things they want to do differently, probably, in their mind better. So when you started teaching, do you remember any of those ideas that you had say, Oh, I'm going to do this this way. I'm going to teach that that way. Because this will be better.

Alan Libby:

Yeah, I didn't want I didn't want the brutality to be in there. Because it just as time elevate it you know, as time went on the brutality kind of started fading out of the way, you know people in want to do this for different reasons. So I didn't want to have people feel walking in the door. I want them to walk in the door because hey, I think I'd like to try that.

Jeremy Lesniak:



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And so how did that how did that manifest what did you was it just in sparring? Was it in the way you were in the class?

Alan Libby:

The whole dojo setting, whole dojo setting. I didn't want to be too relax. But I didn't want to be overly hard either. I didn't want people to feel like coz I was young too, but I didn't want people to feel like the first time I walked in and go, "Oh my God".

Jeremy Lesniak:

How old were you when you started teaching?

Alan Libby:

I think my first classmates I started teaching I was 19.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Oh wow. That is young. Was that ever an issue?

Alan Libby:

Yes, that was a big issue. Being that young and, and some folks coming in. They kind of look at you funny like you're gonna teach me to defend myself. You don't know you in their face, they looked at you funny. Yep, very true. But I tell us, if you if you want to learn Kempo and you want to come in and do this, I will teach you I will give you the best that I can. When I finally opened my own dojo, it was I was 28. I finally opened my own dojo, my own building, and it was behind my house. I built it behind my house, down in the woods and you walk down through this ramp way down into the woods and and the building was probably, gush wells by 18 building and there wasn't no padded floors there wasn't a padded walls it was just it was plywood and you know, just boards. And we ended up you know, having quite a few students out of that and then this dojo way off in the woods no one ever heard of it, you know and but people would come people would come it's like that old thing build it, they will come.

Jeremy Lesniak:

That time that still kind of on the on the tail end of martial arts schools not having signs and you got to know somebody who knows about it and maybe its even invite only, you know, added to the mystique.

Alan Libby:

Correct. Because that's basically what a school was over there. It was invite only because I really didn't, I didn't I just don't want anybody and everyone to go through. And one thing it was at my house so you know, that caused that you know, created a problem. But, um, but it worked out all right. It worked out all right. That building was there for years and years and years. Even when the even when I sold the



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house and even when the building years later, the building that actually collapsed in snow weight. The only wall that was left in the buildings one that had a patch on, Kwoon Karate Academy. That was the only wall that was still standing.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Most. Maybe not even almost but symbolic.

Alan Libby:

Yes.

Jeremy Lesniak:

There's something there, yeah.

Alan Libby:

And that the dojo was in [23:36]. It was over on a paved road way off in the woods.

Jeremy Lesniak:

So where did you teach out of next?

Alan Libby:

After that I went to where we moved to Ossipee and we found a place down in Alton, and we taught out of Alton for a long time. And that was a two-story dojo, it was two floors. That was a wonderful, wonderful old building. It was it was it was an old grange hall and the grange hall had a rounded ceiling. So that kind of it kind of made everything even more mystique because the rounded ceiling and thank God we because we had plenty of room for us to do staff work. Three sexual staff work finally. The dojo and top to borough was uhm the walls are only eight feet high. So when you spin the staff of stuff you had to be in a real low stance. Oh, by the way...

Jeremy Lesniak:

I know the pains of doing doing weapons work with low ceilings and I've known plenty of people who've broken overhead lights working bow in the living room.

Alan Libby:

Yeah. Yeah. Yes. Yes. So finally the, the 15 foot ceiling to the top. Yeah, that was a blessing. We stayed there for a long time, it was in a [25:00 - 25:01]. We had 12 schools.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Wow. Okay.



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Alan Libby:

And uh...

Jeremy Lesniak:

That's a lot.

Alan Libby:

Yeah it and the headaches came with 12 schools. You know, you you had to make sure that your instructors are all update on everyone and yourself had to be up and date on your instructors and all the people in all those dojos. You know its and the times were just right in that era for to have dojos like that because the martial arts was kind of at a hype.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Was this mid mid 80s?

Alan Libby:

Uhm a little bit, a little bit towards the 90s.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Okay.

Alan Libby:

It was the 90s and finally in the 95, 96 the martial arts started to fade off fade away. So we had to combine some of the studios and that was okay. It was okay too, made it more personal.

Jeremy Lesniak:

We've got quite a few school owners listening and I'm wondering if you might indulge me and talk about how you went from school you built, dojo you built in the woods, to it two-floor school to twelve. How do you go from from, from one space to twelve? That's, very few martial arts schools are ever wanting to get to twelve, most don't make it to two. So how how did that happen?

Alan Libby:

Lot of headache.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Was it intentional? Did you did you wake up one day and say, I want to expand.

Alan Libby:



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I did wake up, I want to expand, but I, my thought was, I want more people to be able to do this to do the things I really, really like to do, and and have the people experience that. So to experience that a lot of people, you know, they didn't want to drive or they couldn't drive or their families didn't want to drive so we'd bring the studio to different places, different towns. And it took a lot but but in the end, I believe it was worth it.

Jeremy Lesniak:

What kind of spaces were you teaching out of?

Alan Libby:

I would rent a space like a one space we rented down in Wakefield, New Hampshire, it was it was an old, like in a grain mill. And we've we fixed up a part of it. It was it was it was probably small. It was probably 20 by 30 space floor, space on the floor. And, you know, coz you had your office space and the bathroom space, but it all worked. Those those were the spaces, they weren't like your space. They were a little back corner, some little buildings. And we'd go in and work on them and get em so that we could do our classes.

Jeremy Lesniak:

May I ask how many students you went you had at the peak with those 12 schools?

Alan Libby:

Oh my goodness. That's a good question. I never really counted students. You know, I will never really counted students we had. Probably then with all all the studios probably then five or six hundred?

Jeremy Lesniak:

Wow. Was this your full time job?

Alan Libby:

No.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Oh, okay. So on top of this, you were doing something else like what else were you doing?

Alan Libby:

On top of that, I work for the state of New Hampshire.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Okay.



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Alan Libby:

During the day, studios at night, but I had some real good people help me, you know, into studios and real good, competent instructors just like just like now. The instructors, we all had the same goal. It wasn't look at a student for the rent of the lights. So look at the student for the student, for the people.

Jeremy Lesniak:

I would imagine, over these years, this many programs, this many students, this many instructors teaching under you've gotten pretty good at teaching teachers, which is a subject that creates quite a bit of discussion in the martial arts, because let's face it, most of us start teaching with very little instruction on how to be a teacher. Right? Wake up and say, I know this stuff, I enjoy this stuff. I want to share this stuff. And we figure out the rest the hard way, but I'm gonna guess that you set your instructors up for a bit more success and go figure it out on your own.

Alan Libby:

I had one instructor or a [29:41 - 29:42] and he was very, very good on explaining things on. You could do it this way. But don't be surprised if it fails, because he's done it before that way. He's done the same things, you know, and he would tell me he wouldn't let me just fail. He would tell me that certain things are gonna work and certain things aren't gonna work. And sometimes you got to find out yourself, but just keep building it, keep building it. And he helped a lot. He helped a lot in that. We went on Grandmaster and I on during the years, we we went on and we had we had a good relationship. But there was a time when we went different paths, different ways. And then at one of the studios one time I had this gentleman walked in the door, and I was I was teaching the class I looked over and it look kind of familiar to me, but I just I couldn't pick it up. I couldn't get it until we kneel down upon his belt. And I went, Oh, I could. No, because back then the respect was very, very big and another martial arts instructor walk in the door. You stopped the whole class. You told everyone please face the door. Well that night I hadn't, I didn't do that. You know. But after he kneel down and put on his belt, I knew it was him. And then from that time on, we was reunite united again, that made me feel real good.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Martial Arts instructors often have stories like that where somebody splits off. There's a there's a division.

Alan Libby:

Yes.

Jeremy Lesniak:

And it happens so often that I've I've wondered, is it is it kind of part of the growth? Is it inevitable? And I'm curious what you think.



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Alan Libby:

I think it is part of the growth. I think it is and you know, way back in that deep mines, where we're in the studios, and we're training and, but we're also training our mind is, maybe it's time to leave the nest, you know, maybe it's time to get out there with some ideas on your own. You know, and and maybe it's time, you know, to leave that pack. And more than often, you know, you're out there teaching in your schools, and something happens. And you look back on "Ah, only Grandmaster was here to see that or only Grandmaster could see that that thing happened", you know? And you're right. You're right. It does it does happen and it happens a lot. I think it happens more so nowadays than past past few years.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Why do you think that is?

Alan Libby:

I think everybody I think not everybody I think because a lot of folks is is are quick to, I'm opening the dojo and I'm gonna make tons of money. Well, that doesn't happen. You spend more money and you make it. Yeah it's a monetary thing I think.

Jeremy Lesniak:

As I've said often, opening a martial arts school is a great way to work really, really hard and make a little bit of money.

Alan Libby:

Yes, sir. Yes, sir. Yes. I was I'm on the dojo one time and he had Brown was with me and there was a dime on the floor. I reached down and pick up that dumpster, Hey, we made some money today. But the experience is the best experience you have with the students.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Sure.

Alan Libby:

If someone was to ask me who my favorite instructor was, all instructors I might have had or all the people might have worked with, I would dare say my students, the students, they're the best instructors.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Tell me more. Tell me more what you mean by that.

Alan Libby:



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When you're out there and you have so you have a room full of students. And you're showing them maybe a particular kick. All right and you show the students that kick, that kick has to be right. Because they're looking at you for guidance. If you show them that kick only half heartedly, that's what they're gonna do, because they're looking at you for that guidance. So it has to be, it has to be right. It doesn't have to be perfect, but it has to be right. Or even in techniques, the same thing. We show the technique half-heartedly when you expect them to do it, they're gonna do it half heartedly. But if you do your technique, good, and you feel good with that they're gonna do the same.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Be exhausting holding yourself to that standard.

Alan Libby:

Yeah. Yes. Not that every student has to be a perfect. But in order for the techniques that you show, in order for it to work, you know it's going to be done right.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Sure. Now, let's say we found a time machine and we could roll back to right around that time at 19 when you started teaching, and you could sit down with yourself, maybe have a cup of coffee or something stronger and offer advice. What would you tell yourself?

Alan Libby:

Wait, wait...

Jeremy Lesniak:

That is not at all what I expected. Okay, why?

Alan Libby:

To train more to train my mind, body, and spirit more in the arts. To go out and find more out about the arts, the arts so big no matter what's Kempo, Aikido, or Jiu Jitsu, whatever it's so big. Like that there is endless amounts of techniques, you know, and to find the right ones for you. The styles that I studied, I didn't use you know, every technique that I've learned. I put together a group of techniques that worked for me and that I thought would work for other people, so I think I would have waited a little. Could have taken the responsibility on studio studio. Because you were in the studio at, say five at night. Sometimes you didn't leave till twelve thirty, one o'clock in the morning.

Jeremy Lesniak:



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One of the subjects that's often discussed is the role of a martial arts instructor. Very few people say it's, it's just about teaching martial arts, you know, everybody tends to go off in different directions with it. What's your definition, what is a martial arts instructor in your mind?

Alan Libby:

To be able to wear many, many different hats. You know, to be able to wear that hat of when you see a student over there, and they're in tears. And and you don't know why those tears are coming down. But to be that person to come over and say, we'll step out of the classroom and let's talk you know, because we don't know what they're going through. We don't what all these people are going through. You know, every person you have 12, 15 people in a class, each one of them going through a different emotion. We was always taught, when you walk in the door, you leave your emotions outside. Well, that that really never can happen. You can you can leave your emotions outside to get into the martial arts class, but it's still in your mind. It's still there. So, role model, role models to help help people not only to like, I guess a life coach, I guess a good word to be like them.

Jeremy Lesniak:

That's a word I often use too. You don't even name names. But I'd like you to think about some of the students that you've had and maybe think of one in particular that you were really able to fill that role. Maybe somebody came in under conditions of adversity and you were to help foster you know, you you helped with their growth for some period of time maybe maybe talk about the changes that you saw.

Alan Libby:

Yeah, yeah, there was there was this this one boy that was very rarely challenging and get back in a lot of trouble. And I just felt I felt drawn to the kid, felt really drawn. And it got so that I, first of all, he came to the house into the dojo. And every day was a challenge for him to be there. He'll, it'll he wore a long trench coat. And I even in the summer, I'm like, dude, take off your coat. He would stand there and he just wants the classes because his parents made him. And finally I got him out here on the floor. And he he started to move you know, he started to move good you know, he was a big boy. And but he still had these challenges, he he couldn't overcome. So I got so I made sure he went to school. I got so I'd go visit the school, see listening in his classes and I used to go down to the office first and principals and stuff they used to let me make go up and see these in his classes. And sometimes it was sometimes it wasn't. And he finally you know, after a while, he ended up living with us ended up living at the house and, and he ended up being my foster kid. So I get that was a real rewarding time. Real rewarding time.

Jeremy Lesniak:

You've spoken pretty positively about everything, everyone I mean that I'm trying to roll back through and think if you presented anything in a negative light and I don't, I don't think you have. Is that typical of your personality? Are you a positive person?



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Alan Libby:

I think I am I think I am I'm sure I have my days are negative but I like to stay positive I like to smile. I like I like to smile I like I like to see other people smile. And if if we're teaching classes and we're smiling we're positive upfront the people that's in front of us are gonna be positive too.

Jeremy Lesniak:

My number one rule but I don't have a martial arts school of my own but when I travel and I teach my number one rule is I got to make sure they're having fun.

Alan Libby:

Yes.

Jeremy Lesniak:

If they're not having fun, I can't teach them anything. If they're having fun I might be able to teach them something.

Alan Libby:

True, so true. My younger years no fun, was working hard, and hit that back wiring, breaking bricks, and boards and then at some people well, this hurts. Get over it. After a while you know, you come to look at that that guy's bleeding. You weren't fun by hand because his handle band is duck because he broke his finger or something. So I guess over the years I have mellowed. I guess I.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Here's a question for you. If you could train with anybody that you haven't, any martial artist living or dead. We haven't asked this question a while. Who would that be?

Alan Libby:

Grandmaster William Cheung.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Why? Why him?

Alan Libby:

Tough. Tough. You know the stories I've heard in the old videos I've seen and very tough man. Tough man. It was one, went to a seminar one time. He was there. He did. He said, I'm can show one technique. And the guide through the punch, he blocked it went down and hit the guy and the top of his foot just folded right to the ground. You know it for a punch to the top of the foot, you know, through the



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shoe. Yeah, tough tough. One of the mental aspect, I'd like to know what they were thinking. You know, I like to know what brought them to where they are what brought, you know.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Uhhh. Is history important to you?

Alan Libby:

Yes. Very, very important. Very, lots of masters before us and before them, we wouldn't be sitting here right now.

Jeremy Lesniak:

True. Depending on the art, it seems that different martial arts tend to have more institutionalized value on history and Kempo seems to be one of those that does. I've known a number of Kempo instructors and they seem to be the most some of the most passionate that I know, in terms of knowing history and reading history and sharing the stories, you know, stories that, you know, ultimately became the inspiration for doing this podcast.

Alan Libby:

I think coz Kempo, Kempo is big it really is big. It's, it's, it's from a big vast amount of other styles also. It's not just its soul style. And I think that's why. And, of course, the old, the old, I'd say the old days, the old so, the old time masters, you know, you know, they got together and I'm sure some of their meetings was not pleasant, but they still work through it. They still got through it.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Talk more about that. We're in a time today where people don't seem to know how to get along and find compromise. So what do you think it was about them back then that they were able to do that?

Alan Libby:

I think back then the martial arts was a very physical physical art. And yes, you can have a student come in and be physical with that student. Gently, that student they pop they didn't probably didn't fight back. But were they when they all groups got together, they fought back. So we had to make sure that technique was on by you know, either side and didn't didn't work. Otherwise, it wasn't no sense of human teaching. Because it was physicality. Whereas today, we have to be mentally or, more more today than ever.

Jeremy Lesniak:

What do you teach your students on day one?



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Alan Libby:

To respect each other, to talk to each other. When they come in is usually a time when we show them what we want them to do when we first thing when they come into the door, we'll go out and talk to them, we'll have them come to the edge of the workout flow and bow to the [45:44]. And we tell them you bow to the [45:47] for respect the masses before them the masses before then the masses before us. So it's respect from day one. And a lot of times, we all put our belts on together. There's no one in this studio. We don't put it on separately, everybody kneels down and puts a belt on safe back. And I so I think that that creates that camaraderie of no matter whether you're a first rank, or you're you're black rank, or you whatever rank you are. It's that camaraderie, we're all one. So that I guess I would say, to be all one. There was a time when in the studios, we all lined up were in front ready position. And I would tell the students, I want you to turn to the person beside you and say good evening. And they would, you know, and they did. Just, it just felt so good. It just felt they brought energy into the room. And from that energy that brought into the room, if somebody hadn't be leaning on the wall, and I always tell them don't lean on the wall takes energy on the walls because they are filling this room full of energy. They're filling it full with the punches, the kicks, the tears, with with their thoughts, they're filling this room for that. So we all respect each other in here. It creates a group that's respect. And when they walk out there, no matter what group they're in, they're gonna probably do the same, they're gonna, they're gonna find a way to have a respectfulness out there. The class have done that for me. It makes me look at things so different, so different, even in a time of despair that we're in.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Let's imagine that 5, 10 years from now we get together we we have another conversation. And I asked you, you know, I probably start that conversation off by saying, "Hey, what's been happening since the last time we talked 5, 10 years ago?" What would you hope you would say?

Alan Libby:

I would hope that I could say that people are helping each other more now. Even than they were 5 or 10 years ago, I would hope that we could be more united than we are now. Years ago I started this program called "United We Stand" coz back at some point in times, you know, the dojos always didn't get along. You know, there was like even in in the 60s and I was a kid and into the 70s it was actually dojo wars where, where people just been going along and if you went to this space, or say a student left, the dojo went, not the dojo that didn't end too good for that person. So I decided we we gonna get along. We may just sync all united we stand where we could come together and work together and work on this same roof and don't worry about who's the best style or who's the best kicker or who's the best one. Just Just be there for each other, be there to learn. So I guess united, unity. I guess unity.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Is there something we can do as martial artists to help bring that to fruition?



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Alan Libby:

Yes, I do believe there is. I think everybody is so busy you know, in the martial arts schools you know, you have to cover your overhead everybody's so busy doing that. You know, if we could go out and work out in the fields like we used to, we could go out work out on the grass where you like we used to, and not worry about all the bills, and the lights, the phone, you know, we could go out do a lot of that stuff. I think we would see a lot of martial arts. I think we need to prosper more. You know, a lot of unity. We would go down to after mass for instance to the second round folks and work with them down in the fields and that was the best time. That was the best time so oh even go to sandwich into a keto or wherever, wherever we want and, you know, work together not worry about so much of the materialistic things I guess.

Jeremy Lesniak:

I think when you peel the stuff away, all we're really left with are our memories, stories, feelings.

Alan Libby:

Right.

Jeremy Lesniak:

And it seems like the more stuff we have, the less space there is to create those.

Alan Libby:

Correct. I studied with a Grandmaster Charles [51:07] and I studied with him and they weren't really, there was no rank really. We had rope. It give us a piece of rope. And we'll use that and as you progress with your techniques and give another piece of rope a different color. You know what I mean, I look back on it now, those are the best days, man. So we're really we don't worry about piece of cloth. Oh, you set rope, you use that rope in your technique, use that rope. Whatever you did, you use that rope to view as being, you know, tested on your material, use that rope across a river. But I see, I see belts nowadays when it's a belt man, it's a piece of cloth. So I guess even today, we do have belts, but we use those belts as tools. We use them as tools.

Jeremy Lesniak:

What do you mean by that?

Alan Libby:

For techniques, using these techniques. If we have a task here, I'll have all the students take off the belts, and I'll have some will lay on the floor. And I'll say I want you to move this person from this space. I want you to move 20 feet up there. without dropping but use your belt to do it and then figure it out and use it as a, what do they call them, a gurney? They call it isn't, it use it as that. We wouldn't worry so



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much about a belt, you know and worried about how we can use the tools we have around us. I just go off on a tangent there.

Jeremy Lesniak:

You did. And that's I told you that's that's the hallmark of this show. So we love. Tangents are great. If people want to know more about you, you know maybe your school, social media, website you got anything like that you can you can share that they could check out?

Alan Libby:

Yeah, I'm not very big about talking about myself. You know, I'm not about to talk about yachts, you know and what's on people but yeah, we have we have the Facebook, Kwoon Karate Academy of Self Defense, we're on Facebook. And I guess if people come into the studio, we trained together I guess it all it all slips out during that time, you know?

Jeremy Lesniak:

Now we've got thousands of people all over the world all different styles, different ages. listening to this at some point into the future, but to them it'll be right now. And given all the things we've talked about, we've talked about a lot of different stuff today. What, what final advice might you give them if you know if we had to wrap this up into this nice neat little nugget, you know, before we send them off into the credits, as if this was a TV show? You know what, what would those parting words you might give them be?

Alan Libby:

Don't be afraid to ask questions in the arts. Don't be afraid to ask, don't be afraid to ask your instructor. If he doesn't want you to know, he will, he won't tell you or else he will say he wants you to find out yourself. So but yeah don't be afraid because I was afraid to ask questions. You know, I was afraid to ask it'll be in a kid in the office when I first started. It was intimidating it's this big guy standing up there, you know, and it's intimidating. But ask questions and know your history. I know your history because your history without that history, we wouldn't be it.

Jeremy Lesniak:

I always enjoy talking with people who started training at that interesting 50, 60s that Blood & Guts era that time when martial arts was something that so few people did. What I have thrived back then training, I don't know. I do know that I have tremendous respect for those who started then and stuck with it. Like Hanshi Libby. I also really appreciate your time, Sir. Thank you for coming on. Thank you for sharing your insights, your wonderful stories. Hope to talk to you and meet you in person sometime soon. Want more go to whistlekickmartialartsradio.com, see the show notes, sign up for the newsletter, find the photos, the videos, the links, all the things from this and all the other episodes. Every episode



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