



Episode 542 – Miss Valery Brosseau | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com



Jeremy Lesniak:

What's going on, everybody? Welcome. This is whistlekick Martial Arts Radio Episode 542 with today's guest, Miss Valery Brosseau. I'm Jeremy Lesniak. I'm your host, I'm the show founder, I'm the whistlekick founder. I'm, I've done a bunch of other things, but they're not really relevant. But what is whistlekick? Well, we do stuff for traditional martial arts. And it really is that broad. If you want to see all the things that we're involved in the projects, the products, the shows, go to whistlekick.com, that's where you'll find our store. And if you make a purchase, you support us. And you can also save 15% using the code, `podcast15`. You've got some other ways you can help us out too, because as you might imagine, this stuff costs money. Well, here comes the list, you can leave a review, you can follow us on social media, you can tell someone about what we do. Or you can support the Patreon, P-A-T-R-E-O-N.com. Patreon is a platform where we post exclusive content. And those of you who are willing to chip in get access to it, it is as simple as that. So if you like what we do, and you say, you know, Jeremy, I wish there was more. And I wish I could give you a couple bucks for it. Well, here's your opportunity, Patreon. You know, we don't charge for this show. Every single episode we've ever done is available at whistlekickmartialartsradio.com. They should all be available in your podcast player as well. Why do we make this show? We make this show to connect, educate and entertain traditional martial artists around the world. And today's guest is an international guest not terribly far away, but far enough and over a border. We have Miss Valery Brosseau, hailing from Canada from Ontario. And our discussion today starts out fairly normal, fairly typical of the subject matter that we tackle here on martial arts radio, but then it shifts. And I knew that shift was coming, you might not have seen it. If it wasn't for this intro.



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We go deep. We talked about some really personal stuff. And I want to thank her. I want to thank Miss Brosseau for her trust in letting this conversation unfold as it did. Instead of saying more, I'll just let you listen. Miss Brosseau, welcome to whistlekick Martial Arts Radio.

Valery Brosseau:

Thank you so much. I'm really excited to be here. This should be fun.

Jeremy Lesniak:

It will be fun. Well, if I do my job right, it's fun. Or maybe if it's not fun, I'll just I can blame you. I don't know. I don't know how we's supposed to look at that. If it doesn't go well. Is it my fault? Is it the guests fault?

Valery Brosseau:

Let's share the blame.

Jeremy Lesniak:

That's fair. That's fair, very diplomatic of you. I appreciate that. You know, we were we were chatting before we got rolling, listeners, that you you have a distinction that that we've only had, I want to say two or three people on in years that you have in common with them. Any idea what that is?

Valery Brosseau:

Hmm.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yes. It's not quite a hard and fast rule. But it's one that we don't break very often. And it's around rank.

Valery Brosseau:

Oh, yes, of course.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah. And it's and the reason that we do that is because in the early days, I tried to have some people on who I thought would have really good stories. And I knew they had really good stories. But they hadn't spent the time in front of a class. So they weren't comfortable talking. But you come equipped with something else that has you ready to go.

Valery Brosseau:

Yes, I do. That's actually what I do for a living. I'm a public speaker. So, it's a great combination. I'm happy to share my experiences, despite the fact that it's not quite at the black belt.

Jeremy Lesniak:



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You'll get there, you'll get there.

Valery Brosseau:

Engagement yeah.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah, yeah. Yeah. It's, it's such an interesting thing because any of the rules that we have by nature, I'm someone who pushes back on rules, and I don't like boundaries and everything. But yet all the rules that we have regarding the show would come from me. You know, so I had to set these rules that I don't even like, I don't like the rules that I've set out. But I need some kind of parameters to help figure some things out. And once in a while, we'll we'll identify someone who you know what, they break that rule, but they make up for it in this way. And that's, that's why you're here today. No pressure.

Valery Brosseau:

Yeah, well, thank you for giving, giving me that state of attitude.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Of course. And, and I don't want to rush there. There are some things that I'm really excited to talk to you about. But we've got to go back. We've got to lay the foundation. We've got to talk about martial arts, and how martial arts found you or you found it. Where did the two of you connect, you and martial arts?

Valery Brosseau:

We go way back. We definitely go way back. It all began with a karate class actually. And I was around I want to say 11 or 12 years old. And my brothers, I have twin brothers, they're three years younger, and they had been enrolled in karate classes. And I was the kid who wanted to do everything with their siblings. You know, of course, I don't really put much weight on gender roles. But at the time, my parents had sort of an idea of what the boys should be doing and what the girls should be doing. But I wanted to do what my brothers were doing, I wanted to get into that karate class, and do do what they're doing train like they were. And so I started doing karate classes when I was quite young. I did that for several years, I believe it was about about seven years, I was 17, when I earned my black belt, in Shito-Ryu Karate. And then as I grew older, and sort of evolved in my sparring and grew into my strength and my awareness of what my body was capable of, I sought out martial arts that were a little bit more full contact, a little bit more maybe practical to real life situations. And that's how I ended up in Muay Thai. So I was training in Muay Thai for several years at a gym, that was an MMA gym in Montreal, actually GSP has trained there, which is pretty cool.

Jeremy Lesniak:



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Oh cool.

Valery Brosseau:

And, and throughout the Muay Thai classes, I sort of made friends with the guys in the Jiu Jitsu class, and they would grab me after class and you know, sort of toss me around like a rag doll. And I realized I had absolutely no ground game, until they did that I had no idea what ground game even was. And so I eventually said, you know what, I got to get into these classes, 'coz I gotta I gotta be able to stand up to these guys. I mean, it was just friendly, you know friendly, play fighting, but I wanted to be able to hold my own. So I started the Jiu Jitsu classes. And I absolutely fell in love, I loved the athleticism of it, the mental aspect, the strategy, and I really saw the practical application as well. So it was something that I was really drawn to once, once those guys sort of introduced me to it. I kept up with Muay Thai for some time. And then I actually had plans to go into MMA and I had an amateur fight lined up. And I started training, I did more wrestling at that point to get that going as well. Worked on my fitness in general cardio, all of that. And unfortunately, I tore my shoulder in a training session. And so I backed out of the fight. And I sort of reflected a bit at that point. And I thought it would be an amazing challenge to step up to, however, due to injuries and just how, how it is a very difficult sport on your body. And I had such a love for Jiu Jitsu that I decided to just focus on competing in, in that sport. So that's how I sort of migrated to being mainly a Jiu Jitsu person. But it all started back in the day with that with that first karate class and just falling in love with the discipline, the body awareness, the confidence that it gave me and, and a physical outlet as well.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Hmm. Interesting. You know, as you're talking about Jiu Jitsu, you're talking about the, the strategy. And I've talked to a number of people who describe it as this kind of this real-time puzzle. You know, you've got your body in somebody else's body. And you know, of course, things can unfold very quickly. But quite often, it's at a more moderate pace. I think any combat sport is that real-time puzzle, there are openings, there are places you might want to go, maybe don't want to go. But it seems like it's really front and center in Jiu Jitsu, more so than other arts are puzzled. And this is a very long winded way to get to the question. Have you always been that sort of analytical, puzzle-solving sort of person?

Valery Brosseau:

I have actually, it's interesting, because I've never actually thought of making that connection between that part of my personality and why I love the art so much. But I was the kid who loves school, read a lot. I have a degree in Archaeology and I have a love for History. So that analytical sort of seeing how things unfold based on cause and effect and a little bit of psychology as well how people work. And I find that that fits into Jiu Jitsu as well. And so that analytical side of me definitely appreciates that about Jiu Jitsu and the fact that you have to think about, alright, so if I use this technique, this move that's gonna prompt them to do this, which will then give me an opening to do this. And it's being a couple steps ahead. Which is, which is really interesting and that's always been something that that I've been drawn to for sure. Yeah, that's an interesting question. I've never quite thought of it that way.



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Jeremy Lesniak:

That I told you, before we got started, you know, listeners, as you might imagine, there's kind of a pre-show chat that I go through every with everyone. And one of the things that I told you was one of the hallmarks of this show is you know, you having the space to talk and tangents and everything. Apparently, one of the things I'm known for is asking really weird questions that nobody else has asked for. So I, you know, I take some pride in that.

Valery Brosseau:

I like that.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Connecting dots, yeah. Now how about the transition from Karate to Muay Thai to BJJ? Obviously, there are some things that you can look at and say, you know, that was really helpful. It helped my mindset, what about the opposite? Were there were there any habits that you carried forward from your time in Karate that were less than positive?

Valery Brosseau:

Absolutely, things that I wouldn't call them negative, just not quite appropriate for the new art that I was stepping into. So I know that I struggled a lot from Karate to Muay Thai with my, my stance and my my guard with the way my hands were up for, for striking in an art that's more I would say more realistic. Karate is I did compete in that for some time and a lot of point sparring. And it's a it's a different mindset and a different way of using your body. So when I transitioned to Muay Thai, I really had to learn to, one of the things I had to learn was to really take a punch, which I'm sure will wake you up in the morning. That's for sure. So karate was a little bit less full-contact and I really had to metaphorically beat out of me that that stance and that guard that I had from Karate and keep my hands closer, keep them further up, there is that sort of outwards, fist in front of you for karate type of stance, and, and a wider stance front and back as well. As well as other stances that fit into the cut, does that make sense for that, but are maybe not super practical for a live full contact, sparring sport. So that is something I had to adjust to and do a lot of drilling, a lot of shadowboxing to work on that. But it helped me transition my body into that awareness and that stance where I felt like I could defend myself better and had a an understanding of a forum that made more sense. I, I don't want to say on the streets, I'm not somebody who would ever resort to violence unless it was absolutely self-defense. But, and I and I would rarely want to go toe to toe with someone, if I were in that situation, I would probably try more controlling techniques from Jiu Jitsu, but I did feel that should I be in a position where someone is throwing a punch the Muay Thai stance and and way of doing things was a lot more realistic than than the way Karate was set up. But that being said, I like I said, I don't want to call it a negative because Karate did give me that initial awareness of my body spatial awareness. Awareness of what my strength was, how hard I could throw a punch, how much I could withstand when I was blocking a punch, that kind of thing. And balance, agility, all that stuff. That's all things that I carried forward, I just



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had to adjust to the new style and the new technique, which of course, after doing Karate for seven years was a bit of an adjustment in terms of that muscle memory for sure.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Hmm. We can imagine. Now that almost fight that you had, you injured your shoulder. Do you think if that fight had happened, it would have had much of a change on your life and what you're doing now?

Valery Brosseau:

I think it would have I I know, I mean, it's not to say that I'm not confident now. But it would have given me an understanding, of confidence, and of what I'm capable of, in terms of persevering through through pain, through hardship. And we can get a little bit later on into some of the hardships that have shaped me in other ways. But that would have been an interesting one for sure to have that experience. And it may have, I can't say for sure at this point. But it may have been a path that I would have continued on. And who knows how far would have gone. I definitely am somebody who has that that perseverance and that commitment to doing what I do 100%. So it's something that if I had gotten in there, and it really lit a fire under me, and I felt it in my soul that that was something I really loved. I would have pushed forward with it. And again, who knows how far how far would I have gone with that?

Jeremy Lesniak:

What other things have you pushed for in your life like that?

Valery Brosseau:

That's an interesting question. And you said you encourage tangents.

Jeremy Lesniak:

I do, let's take one.

Valery Brosseau:

The side sounds good. I can relate my martial arts journey and what I pushed through for in terms of tournaments and challenging myself in situations that make me maybe uncomfortable or feel vulnerable or feel weak. I find that there's a great parallel between that and the mental health journey that I've taken. And it's a topic that some people shy away from and I did for quite some time, but I have learned that there's, there's power in sharing that. And it's a great way to connect with people and make them feel less alone and, and have this understanding that we, we all go through things. So I definitely had to push through in terms of that mental health journey, I am diagnosed with two different disorders and it has been a heck of an experience for sure. Something that you have to learn to manage and find the strength to, to overcome. And it's not like a broken leg, it's not something that you heal, and then it's done with, it's something that you manage for your entire life. And that doesn't mean that there isn't hope that it doesn't get better, it just means that it's always something you have to be accountable for.



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And I really like to say that mental illness is not your fault, and not something to be blamed for. However, it is your responsibility to heal and to manage the symptoms that you have that make your life a little bit more challenging. So being in martial arts and having to push forward in a position for example, where, you know, I'm inside control, I feel like I can't breathe, I feel like I want to top purely from the pressure because it's making me panic, and it's bringing up my anxiety and I, I feel like I just can't make it but having to push through that and think, you know, I'd give it a few minutes, if I keep working the techniques that I know I can get out of this position. And then drawing that parallel to having that psychological pain that's extremely distressing and thinking, I push forward, there will be hope I just have to push through, I have to reach out for help when I need it, I have to use the tools and the strategies that I'm learning to manage the things that are causing me that psychological distress. So I do find quite a bit of a parallel there and both have sort of helped the other.

Jeremy Lesniak:

But that's a pretty solid one to one, we don't usually get analogies that are that blatantly related. Did you go into, did you to knowing that you could approach it in that way? Or was that something that, you know, you're you're, you're under someone you're you know, they have you inside control, and you just kind of oh, this is very much like the way I have to face some of these other challenges in my life.

Valery Brosseau:

That's definitely something that kind of that connection kind of manifested, as I learned about myself, as I learned about the ways you can overcome a challenge. And as I as I saw that parallel more and more, it became a lot more powerful and helpful in in sort of managing both, like I said, they do influence one another. So it's not something I had in mind when I started Jiu Jitsu. I was, I was young, I'm 32 now. I was 21 or 22. And I just, you know, thought I could be the baddest chick around and be the toughest. And I wanted to get into all these martial arts. And I wanted it I wanted to do it all. But the more that I grew in the sport and the art, and the more that I realized what I was bringing to it, as well as what it was pulling out of me and what it was teaching me, I began to see that that parallel and the sort of crux of my mental health crisis happened a few years into my Jiu Jitsu path. And it sort of became apparent that I could use Jiu Jitsu as a tool to see what I'm capable of doing and managing my mental health as well as just managing mental health within a Jiu Jitsu setting. It can be very difficult to compete when you are prone to anxiety, when you have things that you struggle with. I there's an article on my blog, actually, I did some research, some interviews and polls with quite a few competitors, about competing with a mental illness and how they manage it, whether it's something they bring up with professional help, if that's something that they have in their life, the best tools they have for managing that. Interestingly enough, the tools that came up the most were breathing and music, which are extremely powerful things for managing your mental health and even just for managing the regular stress of being a competitor. So it's interesting to see that connection between the two, it's sort of like competing with a mental illness is like competing, as somebody who's perhaps a little bit more psychologically healthy, but sort of cranked up to the next level. So I definitely learned a lot as I took that, that journey through



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martial arts and eventually realize the connection that you're mentioning. It wasn't something that I knew from the beginning was going to be helping me with with what I was experiencing in terms of mental health.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Why was it important for you to be tough?

Valery Brosseau:

That's an interesting question. That's um...

Jeremy Lesniak:

The way the way and here's why I asked that the way you said it, you didn't just say, you know, I wanted to hold my own with the people around me or I wanted to, you know, quite often we have women on who will make a statement somewhere around. I wanted to prove to the guys I wanted to show them that, you know, I could do what they could do. But you said I will wanted to be the toughest chick around.

Valery Brosseau:

Yeah.

Jeremy Lesniak:

There's some history in that statement.

Valery Brosseau:

Definitely, it's a bit of a vulnerable question. I'm not gonna lie, and I'm happy to answer it, it just really makes me dig deep and reach into things that, that sort of influence the core of who I am, if you will. And it's something that came up. First of all, as a as a child, we didn't. And by we, I mean, my family and I, and probably friends as well, we didn't really realize at that time, that I was growing up developing a mental illness. But we just knew that I that I struggled that I was a kid who was sometimes sad for no reason. I was a kid who had trouble embracing sort of my individuality and my, the unique aspects of who I was. And so that was at times, painful. And I was bullied quite a bit I, I actually skipped two grades, which, when you think about it now in terms of socially being adjusted, and being socialized properly, as a child is just not not healthy for a kid. And eventually, I went back one grade by doing grade eight, once in French, once in English to perfect my English because I learned English when I was 10. And so that brought me back a bit in the right age group. But it was still really difficult being that that youngest kid, who was a little bit weird, and what she liked doing, and there was a lot of bullying. There was a student once in my grade seven and eight split class who began a petition that none of the kids in the class should be friends with me, and pretty much everyone signed it, which, for seventh graders pretty devastating. So I guess I sort of felt like I had something to prove partially to the world and partially to myself. And I grew up in a house where standards were pretty high in terms of toughness. I mean, it



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doesn't mean that I wasn't nurtured as a kid, but definitely a passion for toughness and mental toughness, and getting through things and persevering. And I grew up thinking that that was sort of one of the main traits I should be displaying. And it is an important trait for sure. But vulnerability is also super powerful, which I've learned as I've gotten older and gone through my mental health journey. But at that time, when I was younger, in my early 20s, in my late teens, it seemed like quite the priority for me and martial arts seemed like a great way to get there. I put a lot of weight on on mental and physical toughness, and I yeah, definitely a bit of a feeling of having something to prove.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Do you still have that feeling?

Valery Brosseau:

I'm learning to work through it to sort of transition it into a feeling of wanting to be the best I can be without unhealthy pressure or without that idea that physical toughness or absolute mental toughness is the only way to prove my worth. I'm trying to sort of temper that feeling and make it a little healthier in the way that it pushes me rather than than the way I sort of experienced it in my early 20s.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Here's a question coming out of my own life and I'll expand in a moment if if we get there. Have you ever sabotage something that was going well, because you are so comfortable playing the role of the underdog?

Valery Brosseau:

Oh, that is a good question.

Jeremy Lesniak:

I have.

Valery Brosseau:

Yeah, it's it's interesting. I'd love to hear a little bit about your experience but I if I answer first I I do feel like that MMA fight. I mean, shoulder's healed. I could have I could have lined one up once I had healed. I that was one thing where it I don't want to say it was an easy out because I'm I'm not are like to think I'm not somebody who would do something like that. But there was a bit of a bit of a feeling of well, if I leave the possibility open it's sort of like Schrodinger's Cat. I've both won and lost that fight because it never happened.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah. I get it, I get it. I've been pretty public over the last couple years and not even couple years as I've come to grips with, you know, some of the things that I face around anxiety and listeners, if you want to hear more about my thoughts on that. We did that on episode 455. You know, I was pretty real about



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that. Because, yeah, a lot of what you're saying is, is resonating for me, and I suspect for a lot of other people.

Valery Brosseau:

Yeah, it's definitely an experience that is that is common in a way. Everybody experiences it differently, but it's kind of a human journey to find your place and those things you feel. You have to prove, transition them to a healthier way of viewing that and of letting it push you.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Absolutely. Absolutely. I want to I want to kind of unpack this just a little bit more, because I think if we spent a little bit more time here, as we transition to talk about moving forward and what you're doing now, I think it's gonna be more impactful for people. So I want to I want to slide back, I want to go back to at some point childhood, I don't I don't know when that is you'll decide that.

Valery Brosseau:

Okay.

Jeremy Lesniak:

When did you? Do you have any recollection of a moment when you realized, hey, some of this stuff going on for me isn't going on for everybody else?

Valery Brosseau:

That is a good question, again, because it really gets me to dig a little deeper and remember what my experience was as a kid of having mental health struggles, but not knowing that they were there. And it's I think, I always kind of, I always kind of knew I was different in terms of what I was drawn to, what my interests were. And I started realizing, as I went through middle, and yeah, maybe middle school, that I, what it was, for me really was this feeling of, you know, if I try harder, I could be better, I could be different, I could essentially be normal. And that idea that there is a normal is what, what is actually harmful. And I saw other kids sort of living without crumbling at every onset of emotion. And I thought, I must be doing something wrong. There was never a thought of there is something that I deserved support with here, it was just, I'm not trying hard enough, I'm doing something wrong, I need to be better. And that was something that led me to being undiagnosed and untreated for so many years, because it wasn't something that I brought up in terms of here, I think I need support with this here, I think I'm struggling with something that maybe isn't quite normal for me to, or usual for me to feel this way. And I remember when I was about 10 years old, that was an we're gonna get a little heavy here if that's okay.

Jeremy Lesniak:

That's all right.

Valery Brosseau:



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Um, when I was 10, was the first time that I mentioned, wanting to die. And I had mentioned to a friend, just a passing thought of wanting to kill myself because of the pain that I was in. And her mother overheard and showed that with my mother, which is the the responsible thing to do. And my mom approached me about speaking to someone, finding a professional to connect with, and I was 10, I was terrified. I didn't think I could open up to a stranger. But what I was feeling I wasn't even sure what I was feeling. I just knew that it was painful. And my mom, of course, is this is no fault of her own. She's, you know, parents do the best that they can. And mental illness is something that everyone needs some training and some guidance. And so she was just ill equipped to really push further, she thought it would be more harmful to push for me to open up to a stranger rather than just offer me all the support and the love that she could and, and go from there. So it's not something of course, I don't blame her for that. It's just looking back now having seen a professional, we would have had a diagnosis earlier. And a diagnosis is an interesting thing. Because many people feel that it's a label and something negative, something to be judged for. And they're a little fearful of having a diagnosis slapped on them and sort of having that follow them the rest of their lives. But for me, it gave me some hope. Because for me what it meant was okay, what I'm experiencing, there's a name for that. It's something that other people are experiencing as well. And the fact that there's a name for it means that somebody has taken the time to do the research, to find treatment for it. And for me a diagnosis was a roadmap to how to manage it. So I have really an interesting relationship with my diagnosis because I don't feel that they are a negative label. I feel that they give me the understanding that I am dealing with something that that is known that happens to other people and that there is management for the symptoms that I feel. So I am acutely aware as an adult of the differences between someone who's a little bit mentally healthier and someone like me who has a diagnosed disorder. But I'm also aware of the fact that there are other people diagnosed with the same thing and despite the fact that we're all unique individuals and treatment will vary, there is sort of a protocol for, for dealing and managing with those disorders. So, as a child, there wasn't that understanding and that awareness, it was just the sort of drowning in a sea of all these feelings and thinking, okay, well, everybody must experience these things, I'm just looking at them, and they're handling it way better than I am. So I need to try harder, I need to be better. I need to just deal with it somehow. And it's a very sort of rub some dirt in that kind of approach, which is not not helpful. You need to acknowledge and address what's going on to be able to heal from it. So it's something that as a child, I, I wasn't in that place yet. But it's also interesting, because um, so the disorders that I have, I have borderline personality disorder, and I have bipolar disorder as well. And both of those are not easily diagnosed in childhood. Most professionals will wait until in the late teens or early adulthood to really narrow in on a diagnosis because the symptoms can be changing and evolving. And things that we go through as we grow up, just natural feelings and stressors will be similar to some of those symptoms. So they don't want to have a misdiagnosis, especially since a lot of people do see stigma and having that label. And it does kind of follow you unfortunately. So we don't want to just slap that diagnosis without really being sure. So in childhood, a lot of disorders, there's a hesitancy to diagnose those right away. But we would at least have had an idea if of how to handle it, if I perhaps



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didn't have that innate belief that it was simply a flying character rather than, than a psychological condition.

Jeremy Lesniak:

I appreciate you sharing that. It didn't sound like you held anything back. So thank you, thank you for the trust. With that. Now, let's let's start to roll forward again. And you know, eventually you end up with these diagnoses, and some self-awareness around what's going on, and you start to build some strategies on how to manage or cope or, or whatever word you might insert here. Where does martial arts start to fit in to that toolkit?

Valery Brosseau:

It's something that is definitely a large part of that toolkit. It is, so many things rolled into one. It's a physical outlet, it's an emotional outlet, it's a team and a family. It's something that allows me to feel worth within myself, something that allows me to see my body for what it can accomplish rather than what it looks like. So many things when it comes to martial arts being a part of that process and that journey. And really, I didn't quite realize that was karate because I was too young. But it did give me friends with a common interest where I wasn't judged and I fit in and it gave me a sense of agency in my in my own body and in my own life by being able to be 13 and spar with a large grown man. And of course, you know, he's not going full force, but I can still hold my own in terms of the technique and that that's such a confidence builder. And then after the the sparring match, just having that camaraderie in that respect, and having that as well was hugely important. So I did start with Karate, I think I just wasn't as aware of it. But when I really got into Jiu Jitsu, like I mentioned earlier, I started seeing those parallels. And it's something that helped me sort of use situations within Jiu Jitsu as a metaphor for other things that I dealt with. And also as kind of a litmus test for some of the tools and strategies that I was learning. I remember one time I was rolling, I think it might have been a grading, which is always intense, because there's so many people in the gym and everybody's, you know, trying to prove themselves and just show that they they know what they know. And they're adaptive what they do. So I was rolling with somebody who was he was quite a bit bigger than me. And I found myself on the bottom and I found myself panicking. And in that moment, I thought of the panic that I experienced sometimes in my life due to other stressors. I experienced panic attacks, which can be scary, difficult to deal with, but it's something that I've learned to work through with certain tools. And in that moment, I felt one coming on because of that Jiu Jitsu situation. And some of the reason that came up is because I if we take again a bit of a tangent and look at my my competition path. The mental aspect of it is the huge issue for me. I know the techniques that I do I do well. I have a specific game, it might not be super extensive, but sort of the package of techniques that I'm comfortable with I know very well. And in, in rolling just in, in class, it's something that I feel confident doing. But I get on the mat for competitions. And I lacked that confidence, I doubt myself. And in that moment, when this this heavier opponent was on top of me, I got that doubt, in my head that doubts started coming up of, you know, maybe you don't know what you know, maybe you're not as adept as you think maybe, maybe people think that this purple belt



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around your waist, it shouldn't be there, maybe you need to work harder, and you're not there yet. And that that self doubt is what fueled the panic. And a very good friend of mine, who is somebody that I really look up to in terms of Jiu Jitsu, and the way that he trains and the way that he rolls and his dedication to the sport, he was on the sidelines, and he looked at me, and he could see the panic coming on. And he said, you know, what about do that do that thing that you do. And I knew what he was talking about, he didn't really have to explain, he was referring to a grounding technique that was taught to me by another Jiu Jitsu practitioner, who's also a nurse. And she taught me how to do this exercise where you start from five and count down to one. And for each number, you pick one of the senses, and lists things. So five things that you can see, four things that you can touch, three things you can hear, and so on. And it just brings you back into the moment, into your body, into awareness of what's going on, and not that future, predictive anxiety that you're having. And it really helped me and I was able to get through the moment of oh my gosh, she's so heavy, I am not good at getting out of this particular position, I should tap, this is over. And just grounding myself with that technique brought me back to a moment of, okay, I need to withstand this for a moment, it's gonna be difficult, but I need to push through for just a moment, and then use the techniques that I'm confident I know to get out of it and regained control of the situation. So it's, um, it's something that I've a technique that I've used in other instances that have nothing to do with Jiu Jitsu, but sort of proving that it worked and testing it out in something as high stress as a sport that puts you in physically and mentally vulnerable situations, showed me that that tool was really powerful, and again, showed me that parallel between the path of learning through Jiu Jitsu and finding my confidence and my place in that art, and finding the tools to manage my mental health, just in life in general.

Jeremy Lesniak:

And then moving forward, or maybe it even started beforehand, you know, we have this, this path that you're on. And at some point, the path flipped from solely concerning yourself, to taking these things that you've learned this toolkit that you've developed a still are developing. And you started looking for ways that you could use it to help other people.

Valery Brosseau:

Absolutely.

Jeremy Lesniak:

When did that happen?

Valery Brosseau:

That was something that became very important to me. Let me see, it's 2000, almost 21. About eight years ago, I started volunteering at a crisis helpline. And I remember googling any sort of kids help phone crisis distress line, I wasn't really aware of what was available in the community. But I started googling anywhere that was taking volunteers because that was after going back to that that moment



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when I was 10, where I mentioned that I did have suicidal thoughts at that age. When I reached my early 20s, I had my first suicide attempt and surviving that made me think that I, I had to, there was a reason that I survived. And I needed to give positive meaning to what I had been through and find a purpose through that. So I chose to serve volunteering in mental health. And that being said, I excuse me, I speak a lot on the fact that recovery is not linear. And there will be steps forwards and backwards. And this might be kind of a roundabout way to get to answering your question, but it's not linear. It's not a straight line, there are stumbles and what matters is that you pick yourself up. It's not about having a perfect track record. It's about persevering when things get tough, and you maybe take a bit of a step backwards. So I had that suicide attempt, I was determined to make a change, make something positive out of those battles and help others and I started volunteering and several years into that, that tenure as a volunteer at that center. I had two more suicide attempts which were much more severe. And when I survived the third one, that's when I really wanted to push more for that helping of others and using that experience to affect some change and show people that they're that they're not alone. And I think it's because it got so bad, I was so consumed with the symptoms that I was experiencing, and in so much emotional and psychological distress that I mean, it's, it's something that I am cautious in the way that I phrase because it's not something of course, to be encouraged, it's definitely not the solution or the decision to make in those moments. However, when you're in that dark place, it almost feels like it's decided for you like there's so much pain that you can find no other escape. And so that's why those attempts were much more severe, I actually was in a coma for nearly a week. And when I woke up from that, that's when I really realized if it if it's gotten this bad. And if it was that severe, and I'm still around, despite the fact that they thought perhaps I wouldn't wake up, I did wake up and I'm here and I see family in the room and people who want me to be here for a long time. And that's when I decided to really push forward with that advocacy and that supporting others through my experiences. And I ended up getting involved. This is how it connects back to Jiu Jitsu. I ended up getting involved in Submit The Stigma, which became extremely important to me. Because in a sport where mental toughness is really pushed in something that to an extent is necessary for competing and for persevering in this in the sport, but we need to leave space for vulnerability as well. And that's what Submit The Stigma as a movement in a nonprofit, was advocating for and pushing for, and I really, that resonated with me a lot and with what I had been through to understand that it's okay to have those stumbles, it's okay to have those steps backwards, you just have to pick yourself back up. And it doesn't matter how many times you have to pick yourself back up. The fact that you can do that is what shows your strength and the fact that you can reach for help when you need it is a sign of strength as well. So being involved in Submit The Stigma, it really gave me a place where I could help not only with regards to mental health, but more specifically within a community that had become very important to me. So I was doing volunteer work and starting to build my business and mental health in terms of the general population. But being able to focus a bit of that solely on Jiu Jitsu was amazing to me, because I wanted to give back to that community that had given me so much.

Jeremy Lesniak:



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Good stuff. Now you've used the word vulnerable a couple times. And, of course, if we if we think solely about the subject you're talking about makes all kinds of sense. And yet, there's this interesting contrast with us being here on a martial arts podcast discussing martial arts and in some of these adjacent aspects of your life. What does vulnerability mean to you?

Valery Brosseau:

It's something that comes up in so many different situations, and something that is stigmatized a little bit, it's seen as as weakness, it's seen as something that shows that we can't handle what's thrown at us. However, for me, it's the complete opposite. What it means to me is being able to face those challenges head on by admitting and acknowledging, I'm not okay right now. And either I can pull from the resources that I have in terms of personality, traits, characteristics, things that I've learned, strength that I've built, and resilience I've built over the years. And that might be enough. And in admitting that I need those things. And I'm not just gonna shove the challenge down. And just, again, that sort of rub that dirt net attitude. But it also means being vulnerable to other people, it means being open to acknowledging to others that you need support. And that's something that I find both exist in Jiu Jitsu, it's just perhaps not something we sort of directly pinpoint. Because again, there's such a focus on that mental toughness, and especially with competitors and people who are more active on the competition scene. But acknowledging that we are having a struggle we are facing a challenge is hugely important to figuring out how to overcome it. And that can be vulnerability of realizing that we need our own health, and we have to pull from those things that we innately have within us to overcome things, for example, getting through that position where we feel physically vulnerable in a Jiu Jitsu match, because that physical vulnerability is there as well. I mean, we're in positions where we can get injured, we're trusting our training partners to know when enough is enough, we're trusting ourselves to tap when enough is enough, so physically vulnerable, for sure, but mentally and emotionally vulnerable as well. And there's that admitting that we have to push a little harder and sort of pull from those resources. And then there's admitting that we need the people around us. And that's why we fight one on one. But Jiu Jitsu is a a team sport. There are people there to support you, there are people there teaching you, there are people guiding you, there are people to offer you the help that you need when you need a bit more of a push or a reminder that you can overcome these things. So vulnerability to me is at its core is being open and acknowledging what we're feeling and trusting other people with that information. And that's where it goes both ways. If we are going to be open to being vulnerable, we have to be open to others being vulnerable as well and become a safe non judgmental space. So to me in Jiu Jitsu, that means, you know, I'm super anxious about this match. I've heard that this girl is really tough. I am nervous about letting my team down or fighting in front of a huge audience and not doing perhaps as well as I wish I could. And knowing that there will be a teammate there who will not tell you to just you know, buck up, you can do this, but explore a bit of what you're feeling and allow you a space to feel it. And that's how you overcome something you first have to feel it and sort of ride that wave for a little bit before jumping to a solution-based approach. And that's something that I advocate for and write quite a bit about and teach about in my business is that idea of toxic positivity, pushing for an immediate jump to it's gonna



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be okay, you're fine. Just push through it. We have to sit with the bad for a moment, before we can move forward to the solution and finding the good again. So meeting someone where they are emotionally, can be extremely validating and help somebody find the safe feeling to be vulnerable. And that's something that definitely relates to things I've experienced in jujitsu, and then in my personal life as well. So vulnerability is extremely powerful. And I think it's necessary to relationships in general, whether that's a leadership relationship even, which seems counterintuitive, because we think of a leader as that ultimate sort of guideposts for what we should be, how we should be handling things, and somebody who's eternally strong and can push through, but a leader showing their vulnerability as well and putting trust in the people they're leading to be that safe space for them, sets an example for that, that discourse in that exchange. And that's something that I've appreciated of black belts I've trained under who are able to say, even the simplest things such as you know, I get nervous before a match to in a tournament, let's talk about it a little bit, you know, and I see that you lack that confidence, and that's what's killing you in your in your matches, let's talk about that a little bit, and how you can build that confidence more. So vulnerability all around extremely important to relationships to important to pushing through things and, and working through them more rather than pushing. And it's something that we need to understand is not a weakness, and it's actually it creates strength, and it fosters resilience.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Hmm, I completely agree. Someone that I respect very greatly, is fond of saying there's strength in vulnerability. Which has taken me a long time to unpack and I don't even think I fully have it yet, you know, conceptually, but I've got enough of it to understand the wisdom.

Valery Brosseau:

Yeah.

Jeremy Lesniak:

I'm working on myself. And I love the point that you brought up the idea that, you know, these these high ranking martial artists, people, we look up to being vulnerable, being open with the challenges that they face it, they get nervous before a match, things like that. So those of you out there who teach, who own schools, you don't have to have this rigid barrier between your students and yourself. In fact, the more I think that you break them down, I'm curious what what you think about this, the more those barriers are broken down, the easier it is for your students to imagine. attaining what you have someday, the more realistic it becomes.

Valery Brosseau:

I think that's very true. And seeing a high ranking martial artists that we look up to and who leads us in a team as something other than the movable force that never cracks and never struggles with anything. That's, that's not a healthy approach to leadership. And it does break down that barrier and create a



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sense of, you know, this person is admirable in many ways, but they are human. And I can reach that level, and I can aspire to what they're able to share with their students. And when teaching has vulnerability attached to it, I find that it's so much more powerful and resonates more with people. It's definitely something that should be cultivated in in everyone. But in somebody who is looked up to it can be yeah, it can be extremely powerful.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Let's talk about your business. So we've kind of danced around it a bit. So now let's let's jump in headlong, what is it that you do?

Valery Brosseau:

So what I do is sort of two pronged. I am a public speaker and an advocate. So I offer I lead workshops, I speak at conferences, events, fundraisers, any event that has the need for that mental health discourse to be to be fostered and to be opened up. There's, for example, I have a client who is having a book launch and one of the characters in her book has a mental illness. And she wanted somebody who's well versed in that subject to come speak at the book launch to connect between the reality and the way that it was presented in the book. So that's just a bit of an example of the diversity of things that I do. So speaking engagements, I did a TEDx talk last November, which was an amazing experience. And that public speaking is something that really lights me up and that I love to be able to do to connect with a crowd and share that experience so that every person in that room feels like they're coming away from it feeling a little bit less alone and understanding a little bit better. And the other prong of it is support that I offer. So I do one on one support as a mental health. I would call it sort of a mentor or a coach. It's something similar to peer support, but I do have training and education behind me as well. It's just not therapy as I'm not a clinical psychologist, but I find that that peer aspect too, it really connects with people. So one on one support and groups as well that I lead where we look at concrete tools and strategies like that one, I mentioned that the the nurse that I knew had shown me, concrete things we can implement in our lives, to better our mental health and better manage what we struggle with, whether we have a mental illness, or we just have our regular management of mental health that we do in our daily life. So those are sort of the two sides of it. And I love both equally, they're both very different in the way that it that it helps people. But all of it just makes me feel so passionate and so grateful that I have the opportunity to use my experiences, to support others and to promote understanding and education and awareness when it comes to mental health.

Jeremy Lesniak:

We, we talked about how martial arts, you know, entered your toolkit became, I don't want to say this. We've talked about how martial arts has come into the other aspects of your life. How about the reverse? How about some of this, this work that you do some of these skills that you've developed outside of martial arts? How have you brought those back in? How is your martial arts different, because



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of those experiences versus someone who hasn't had those experiences?

Valery Brosseau:

It's definitely something that, as I mentioned before, goes both ways. And in terms of the mental health journey, impacting the martial arts journey, it put me in a position where I became very aware of my, let's call them limitations, things that I have to manage and that I have to work through. And it made me aware of where they come up in my training. And then in training or competition, which sort of has an added layer of stress, sort of testing the strategies and tools that I was learning that I still am learning for my mental health in general, testing them in a higher stress environment. To deal with things that come up for me in general, but are now I don't want to say aggravated by Jiu Jitsu, but sort of impacted by it and maybe heightened a little bit because of that added layer of stress to having a roll with a larger opponent or a competition in front of a huge audience, that kind of thing. And it's something that made me see how I could learn in those situations. And it made me understand that my mental health struggles will follow me in every arena of my life. And it's something that I have to continue managing. So when it came into Jiu Jitsu, it gave me an opportunity, like I said, to sort of test out those strategies and learn to use them kind of on the fly when I need them. And it made me aware that I had to keep tabs on the things that stressed me that caused me anxiety that make me doubt myself, which, in that microcosm of a sport, sort of gave me a microscope on what I was experiencing in my, um, in my life in general. So it definitely honed in and focused in on those things. For example, as I mentioned that those intrusive thoughts of you know, do they think I don't deserve my purple belt? Do I need to work much harder? Cuz I'm not at the level I should be at? Are people looking at me thinking, Wow, that's a horrible role. Just all of these doubts coming up. Specifically for Jiu Jitsu, and realizing that in my life, I have more general and broader doubts that come up. And there's, again, I keep using the word parallel, because that's absolutely what it is. And that, that parallel between the two, and working through those things in a Jiu Jitsu setting for the purpose of being more comfortable and more adept at the sport that I love gives me more, I should say, aptitude to use those skills in general in my life when we're talking about something more just regular life stressors and that kind of thing.

Jeremy Lesniak:

I get it. Cool. If people want to find you, websites, email, social, anything like that, what would you share with them?

Valery Brosseau:

So the website is just my name Valery Brosseau. It's Valerie with a Y and the last name is B-R-O-S-S-E-A-U. And that has information about my background in terms of training and education as well as my lived experience and then the things that I offer in terms of services. And that same handle is the Instagram as well, where I try to really offer content that helps people understand better, gives them tools they can apply within their life and is full of tidbits in terms of things that will help people understand a little bit better and feel a bit less alone. So the Instagram is a place where I really try to engage, I love getting comments and messages and really engaging with people on that on that platform. So that's one that I



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really like. And I have to as well encourage people to follow Submit The Stigma on Instagram and just be aware of that movement within Jiu Jitsu in general. It's such a powerful statement of making mental health something that is a priority when it comes to being an athlete in our sport, and being a practitioner of this art. And it's been something that has brought in a lot of prominent black belts who have shared their experiences with mental health concerns. And that just sort of opens the door for other people to share as well. And some of this thing was really about creating that safe space, the same way that I do within my own business. I think that's a really important one as well.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Great. And what's next for you? You know, if we've touched base in 6, 12 months, 5 years, you know, however far out you wanna look, what would you hope we would be talking about in an update?

Valery Brosseau:

I would hope that we'd be talking about a full on TED Talk, TEDx is independently organized. And that was what I was a part of, but a full TED Talk would be amazing. I'm working on a memoir, so I would love for that to be published. And I, I'm having this feeling that I wanna jump back into competition, so maybe some big competitions in terms of Jiu Jitsu and continuing to push through that, that self doubt and that anxiety to grow within that and find my place. And I've sort of come to an understanding that maybe I will not be the athlete who medals every time. And that's okay, as long as I am improving every time that I compete. And as long as I'm learning how to manage that anxiety that comes with competition, and then I'm being better than than what I was the day before. So it's I think having that sort of renewed understanding that my value is not based on the medal around my neck or my place on the podium. It's about the effort that I'm putting in. And what I'm learning from it gives me a sense that I that I perhaps do want to compete again. So we will see when I'm training can pick up sort of full force again, we'll see where I end up with that.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Good luck. Good luck. Let me know we'll we'll post updates if you send them in.

Valery Brosseau:

Sounds great.

Jeremy Lesniak:

And then the last thing, as we head out, this is your chance to close out the show. So what parting words or wisdom or advice or I don't know, funny quip would you want to leave the audience with today?

Valery Brosseau:

I think that what I would want people to take away and I hope that it was something they could relate to and was engaging. But if there was a takeaway, it would be both related to mental health and to Jiu Jitsu. And that is again that that idea, that progress, and moving forward is not going to be linear. And



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having steps backwards or plateaus, is normal, and is nothing to be ashamed of. And it's just about picking ourselves back up again. So losing a competition, feeling like we're not where we want to be in terms of how we're progressing with our technique. It's just about having that belief in ourselves that we can push through and we can, we can move forward. And it's the same with mental health, we may have steps backwards, but it's just about it sounds quite trite, but it's about never giving up. And reaching out for help when we need it and getting the support that we need. And just carrying on regardless which I actually have a tattoo that says that it is matching with Erin Herle, who's the founder of Submit The Stigma and that's something we both very much believe in, carry on regardless and find the resources that you need to do that, whether that's support from other people or things within yourself, but carrying on would be the last tidbit I'd like to leave people with.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Now, to be fair, I did tell you in the intro that this episode was gonna get kind of heavy. And you know, we've had other heavy episodes, we've had subject matter that goes deep. And this won't be the last episode where we do that. I think it's critical that we talk about all aspects of health, including mental health, and the benefits that martial arts can have in maintaining and improving mental health. Maybe not for you, for people around you. Maybe for your children, maybe for your students, maybe for your instructors, or maybe for you. I hope you do check out Miss Brosseau's TEDx talk. It's great stuff, follow her on social media, check out these resources. Again, you may not need them but someone around you might. Go to whistlekickmartialartsradio.com, check out Episode 542. You got the show notes. We've got every other episode over there too. We got transcripts, we got links, you name it, we got it. And if you want to support it, share this episode with somebody that you think might appreciate it or you can make a purchase and of course we've got the Patreon. You see somebody out there wearing some whistlekick stuff, make sure you say hello and if you've got whistlekick stuff, make sure you're wearing it. If you've got guest suggestions I want to hear from Jeremy@whistlekick.com. Until next time, train hard, smile, and have a great day.