

FOURTH IN A **SERIES:**  
**FORGED IN FIRE**

# THE GENTLE MASTER

JASON KNIGHT TAKES YOU BEHIND THE SCENES AND TO THE FOREFRONT OF HIS JOURNEY TO MASTERSMITH

STORY BY JOSHUA SWANAGON  
PHOTOS BY SHARPBYSOOP AND THE HISTORY CHANNEL

**H**is passion is evident with every word. To see Jason Knight on "Forged in Fire" you might get the impression that he's a mean hombre who strikes fear in the hearts of contestants. But when speaking with him, you'll discover a gentle soul with a soft-spoken demeanor.

Having won the "Forged in Fire" pilot episode (which never aired) and helping with the concept of the show, it is easy to see why Jason has what it takes to be so popular with fans and is a uniquely qualified judge: He has a particular insight into the show that is apparent whenever the camera is on him.

I recently had the opportunity to speak with Jason on the record.

## The Road to Perfection

**KI:** Having had a passion for forging from a young age, was it your two

Opposite: Jason Knight has made a name for himself by creating awesome kukri-style knives as well as appearing on "Forged in Fire." Photo credit: HISTORY

Below: Kukri-style knives, like those below, allow the wielder's power to transfer from his arm to the heavy portion of the blade. Photo credit: SharpByCoop

**"I WAS LESS CONCERNED ABOUT THE MASTERSMITH RANKING AND MORE CONCERNED ABOUT LEARNING TO MAKE BETTER KNIVES."**

weeks at the ABS class that inspired you to become a Mastersmith? Or were there other inspirations?

**JK:** I was less concerned about the Mastersmith ranking and more concerned about learning to make better knives. I don't even mark my knives with Mastersmith because it isn't about that for me.

**KI:** Although you had already been doing stock removal, and had built relationships with the likes of Daniel Winkler and George Herron, what was it about the ABS class that really hooked you for good in forging?

**JK:** I realized that by forging I could make any shape and dimension that I wanted, including integral, wide blades, curvy blades and anything I had seen in history. With stock removal, I was limited in what I could achieve.

**KI:** You have mentioned that your grandmother backed your desire to become a bladesmith, but did you have any detractors along the way?

**JK:** When I graduated high school in 1991, I wanted to be a blacksmith, and everybody laughed and thought it was the dumbest thing they had ever heard. Nobody is laughing now; they are having me make items for them. I was originally sculpting and doing freelance artwork but not making much money at it. I wanted to continue my art, so I took a job at a tire shop, and my grandmother asked if I wanted to do that or my artwork for the rest of my life. I answered, 'No, I want to be a blacksmith.' So, she helped me with that goal and gave me the support I needed for about three years as I learned blacksmithing.







**KI:** You have some of the most recognizable kukris in the world. What led you to that specific style? And did your passion for the kukri begin during your road to Mastersmith or after?

**JK:** I had been making kukris before I learned to forge and was still doing stock removal, because I always loved that style of knife. When I learned to forge, I started really developing the features that make my kukris so recognizable. I wanted a functional, modern kukri, and I wanted it to be badass. I wanted people to see it and die. Features like the shark fin, which almost gives it the look of an old-school '57 Chevy, and the wide fuller gave it a really aggressive look.

**KI:** What was the hardest part about achieving your goal of Mastersmith?

Custom knives allow the forger's personality and style to take center stage. Photo credit: SharpByCoop

**"I HAD BEEN MAKING KUKRIS BEFORE I LEARNED TO FORGE AND WAS STILL DOING STOCK REMOVAL, BECAUSE I ALWAYS LOVED THAT STYLE OF KNIFE."**

**JK:** I really wasn't concerned about achieving it, but Jimmy Crowell kept calling me every day and saying I needed to go for it. So, I finally decided to do it and just made what I make. I wasn't too concerned about the tests, because I don't take tests to fail them. It did make me smile when I ended up winning the B.R. Hughes Award.

**KI:** It must have been an honor receiving the B.R. Hughes Award for Best Knife by a Mastersmith Candidate in 2007. How did that impact your future work, if at all?

**JK:** No one told me to show up

at the banquet, but I showed up anyway [laughs]. However, after winning a bunch of different awards I found that I was becoming a little burdened by it all and was becoming someone I wasn't happy with. So, after some introspection and prayer I decided to throw them all away and move forward as a knife maker and help promote other knife makers. It was like a weight was lifted from my shoulders.

### "Forged in Fire"

**KI:** How did you get involved with "Forged in Fire"?

**JK:** They called me out of the blue

when it was just a production company and was not even "Forged in Fire." They wanted to do a show with two contestants competing against each other to make a sword.

I was excited about the idea of bringing this to light, because I am a big fan of the old swords from history, but there were no qualifiers to get to the sword-making round. I told them about a contest my wife and I formed years before called Battle of the Bladesmiths, with four contestants, limited time and unknown materials. I was one of the first competitors, along with Burt Foster, and I won.

So, then the first "Forged in Fire" was born, and I was one of the first contestants and winner of that first episode. Eventually, I was called to be a judge when J. Neilson was out due to an injury, and I was on the show for 24 episodes. They wanted me to stay on, but it just wasn't right for me.

**KI:** Your fullers are striking and very distinguishable. Do you struggle sometimes, while judging, when fullers are a requirement? Given that contestants only have three hours to finish.

**JK:** No, my view of judging was not to find fault, because I already knew that it wouldn't be their best work. I just looked for what I liked about the knife and spoke to that. They always tried to make me look mean, but I'm a gentle soul.

**KI:** What gets your attention the most when judging a blade on the show?

**JK:** The forging techniques. When I would watch someone move steel around, it told me a lot about the smith. I could tell when someone was the real deal.

**KI:** Being a past "Forged in Fire" champion, does it feel strange critiquing the work of the contestants, or do you feel it gives you a unique perspective?

**JK:** Not at all. I felt it made me the

most qualified to judge the work, because I helped invent the show, and I know what it takes to win it. The knife doesn't have to cut all day, it just has to survive the tests and have good aesthetics. I felt it gave me a good perspective.

**KI:** What has been your greatest challenge being a part of "Forged in Fire"?

**JK:** For me the biggest challenge was keeping the peace with the production crew and abiding by what they wanted to do, without compromising the integrity of the craft. I made sure to test whatever requirements and steels were asked of the contestants to ensure they would not be an impossibility.

**KI:** Do you have any advice for

"Forged in Fire" contestants scheduled to compete on the show?  
**JK:** Follow what I did [laughs]. Get plenty of exercise every day: run, lift weights, etc. When I was getting ready to go on the show, I took all kinds of weird materials and forged a blade in two hours, by hand, every day, just to make sure I was physically in shape and ready for whatever they threw at me. I also abandoned all the rules of forging and learned to be sly, a rogue. I was already a rogue; I just learned how to apply the rules of being a rogue to bladesmithing.

### Collaborations

**KI:** Can you describe to our readers what the "Be a Maker, not a Taker" program is all about?

**JK:** I'm tired of seeing the same

From one of the first contestants to becoming one of the judges, Jason has experienced both sides of "Forged in Fire." Photo credit: HISTORY







things all the time. The first half of the statement is the more important part of all of this. Essentially, it means make a difference; don't just wait for things to happen. Share who you are with the world. Try to do something to move the world forward. If you don't like the way something is, go change it.

**KI:** Since 2017, you have been collaborating and consulting with Winkler Knives, should we be watching for a full line of Knight Knives under the Winkler banner?

**JK:** Right now, they have three of my designs that have been pretty solid. Unfortunately, I am not involved in the inner workings of the company and cannot speak to what the future holds.

**KI:** The MK Ultra kukri folder is

an impressive design that gets it right where other kukri folders have failed. How did you and Doug [Marcaida] decide on this design for a collaboration?

**JK:** It was based on a fixed blade of the same size. Doug had mentioned making a 10-inch kukri for kali. But with its size it wasn't really portable, plus I wanted one I could carry. So, we based this one off the fixed-blade version. Doug is a great friend and helped feed the inspiration and the desire to make one for use in kali.

**KI:** At this past Blade Show I stopped by the Dark Timber Custom Knives booth and saw the kukri you and Peter Kohler collaborated on raffled off. Can you tell us more about this raffle?

**JK:** Since I moved, I haven't had a shop, and he recently moved to

From swords to knives and everything in between, forging weapons is a way of life for these men. Photo credit: HISTORY

a new one, so this one was just to help establish the shops. But over the years we have collaborated on knives for different charities, such as American Way, and helping people we know with personal life or health situations.

### Wrapping Up

**KI:** With your love for promoting the art of bladesmithing, do you teach classes at a specific location? Or do you travel for seminars?

**JK:** I do both. I will travel for seminars if you have the equipment needed for the seminar. I also host a Makers Forge Studio. It is three days and is open to any level, from novice to master.

**KI:** Do you host any private hammer-ins?

**JK:** I do host single-person hammer-ins, but I encourage people to come

### Be a Maker, not a Taker

You don't have to speak with Jason for long to realize that he has a heart for people, as evidenced in his "Be a Maker, not a Taker" program. The concept for his program is best exemplified in the quote on his home page, "The true heart of an artist, cares enough to share ..." Using merchandise, such as T-shirts, patches and stickers, and social media, Jason uses his Be a Maker, not a Taker program to spread a message of philanthropy and uniqueness. Although there is much that could be said about it, the message is fairly simple: Whatever profession you find yourself in, be original and add something to the world, and if you see a problem, be a solution, not a complainer.

with a buddy. That way they have more fun and can feed off each other. I'm not teaching anybody how to make a knife, I'm teaching 'why' to make a knife.

**KI:** Is there anything else you would like to say to your fans?

**JK:** I really appreciate everyone. If it wasn't for the people who cared about and supported me, I wouldn't be able to do what I do. I appreciate all of the support I have received over the years. I try to share the glory with everyone that backs me up.

*Knives Illustrated* would like to thank Jason Knight for taking time to share with us his passion and heart for such an important art form. It has been a pleasure getting to know more about you, Jason. Keep up the good fight. **KI**

### Contact

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