

Featured Dojo-cho, May 2011



Bruce Affsprung, 4th Dan

Aikido of Salem, Salem, Oregon

Division 1

I began training in 1991 in southern California while I was serving in the U.S. Coast Guard at Small Boat Station San Diego. After watching my first shodan test I knew that I wanted to learn to move with the kind of grace and poise that I saw demonstrated that night. I wanted to learn the mysteries of the seemingly effortless throws and techniques.

For the next two and a half years, I was deployed on a Coast Guard Cutter in Morro Bay California . When in port I trained at Aikido of San Louis Obispo. While underway on the cutter I trained wherever we tied up. We often pulled into Monterey where I enjoyed training at Aikido of Monterey. In 1994 I was transferred to the San Francisco Marine Safety Office where I immediately began training with Pat Hendricks Sensei at Aikido of San Leandro (ASL) in Iwama-style aikido. At ASL, I believe I received some of the best training to be found anywhere in the world. I trained at ASL until I retired from the Coast Guard in 2004 after twenty years of service. In 2005 I moved with my wife Daisy to Salem , Oregon and began Aikido of Salem. I still return to San Leandro regularly for Hendricks Sensei's instruction and have been an *uchi deshi* a number of times.

There are many people who have been important teachers to me on the aiki path. Tom Elliot

and Mary Tesoro of Aikido of San Louis Obispo were very compassionate teachers. They taught me to be more sensitive to others. Louis Jumonville Sensei was my sempai when I joined ASL. He taught me many things not the least of which was what it really meant to be a deshi---uchi or soto. I am still trying to live up to his example. Frank Doran has been a very important role model for me from very early in my training and continues to be so to this day.

At Aikido of Salem we train three evenings a week: Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday. Wednesday is usually devoted to a beginner's class that is offered through the Chemeketa Junior College continuing education program. We also meet in a local park for weapons training on Saturday mornings. Aikido of Salem has been around for more than five years now and has had a steady core of students from its inception. The last year has been difficult however because many of our students moved out of the area for work and school. We are in the process of rebuilding our numbers. We currently train at Judson Baptist church in the gymnasium. We do not have children's classes at this time but a mature child may train in the adult classes with their parent's permission.

My most Memorable Aikido Experience

I have so many good memories, but as time passes I feel increasingly nostalgic for the few weeks I spent training in Iwama Japan . It was the late 1990's. Saito Sensei had recovered from an illness and seemed to be well and in good spirits and he taught most of the classes. At the time there were about five uchi deshi, one young man from Portugal and the rest Japanese men and women so I felt fairly immersed in Japanese culture. The training was hard but very good and of course it was thrilling to have the opportunity to train in O'Sensei's personal dojo next to the little house he had lived in and across from the Aiki Shrine that he built. One evening before class I met Hitohiro Sensei. Watching him approach on the path to the dojo he looked to me like a samurai of old. On a couple of occasions I hiked to a temple on top of a nearby mountain that O'Sensei is said to have often visited and where he sometimes trained with his students. Many people have spent much more time in Iwama than I did, but my time there left a deep impression on me and I am thankful that I had the opportunity to experience Iwama while it was still under the care of Saito Sensei.