

Featured Dojo-cho, June 2011



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Rotorua Aikido Club, Rotorua, New Zealand
Division 3

I started aikido in 1976 at the Onehunga Dojo in Auckland aged 27.

My first teacher was Hugh Miller, shodan and photographer with the New Zealand Police. He was a clear, articulate teacher who loved Aikido, and taught us some interesting moves! He showed me how to hold Sankyo with my little hands, and I broke his little finger putting it on him!

Ron Russell came to New Zealand from Great Britain in 1978 and after travelling round the other dojos in Auckland, settled at our dojo. He was Nidan at that stage. He brought with him his wife who was a 1st Kyu.

Another student who featured very prominently in my aikido was Jack Nairn. He flew Spitfires in World war 2, was an Air Traffic Controller at Auckland airport, and started aikido when he was 52. He got his shodan at 58 and went on to assist at the Onehunga dojo for many years. I had enormous respect for this man, who was so committed to Aikido.

Ron Russell went on to become our Sensei and he changed the way we learned aikido. Under him we studied the Aikikai style, but with an English approach. His standard was very high, and we had to work hard to focus on the changes that needed to be made.

I got my shodan in 1982, and our family moved to Rotorua in 1984. We went to Auckland regularly to train with Sensei Ron, to attend gasshukus and gradings. Sensei Russell was Godan when he passed away suddenly on March 25th 1994, aged 62.

In September 1986 my husband Paul (at that time a 3rd Kyu) and I set up the Rotorua Aikido Club. I was the sensei and initially we trained above a gymnasium on a carpeted floor with three borrowed gym mats. It was challenging as a shodan never having taught before, to bow the class in on the first day and turn to bow to a large group of students, almost all of them who were Dan grades from other martial arts, there checking out the 'newbie'. I warmed the group up, taught the hand stretches, and then started the Ukemi. Once they started I realised that almost none of them, all those Dan grades, knew how to do even basic ukemi. I relaxed from then on and began to enjoy my first class. A young couple turned up to that first class, and one of those two is still doing aikido and is closely associated with Rotorua Aikido.

We realised quite quickly that we needed better mats and more space, and moved into a local primary school. We were privileged to be able to use the Jui Jitsu club mats for the first couple of years, until we could afford to purchase our own.

Once the club grew to the required level we registered it as an Incorporated Society, formally establishing it's operation as a non profit organisation. We moved twice more over time, and then in 2004 we purchased our own building, with financial support and encouragement from the community and the Rotorua City Council. We found a truck workshop in the industrial section of Rotorua that was in our price range.

It needed a huge amount of cleaning and scouring to get the oil and grease out of the walls and floor. We built a new wooden floor over the top of the concrete, built in a toilet and changing rooms, painted the walls, dug up the aggregate and planted a Japanese garden complete with goldfish, and it became OURS.

Over the years we have built up a great group of students, who are enthusiastic and committed to Aikido and who see Rotorua Aikido as we do, as a 'taonga'; a community treasure.

Students who have moved away from Rotorua have set up clubs in other areas of the country. A student of ours has a well-established club in Palmerston North with a strong group of about 25 members, training at all levels.

A new club has been set up in Wellington by a 2nd Kyu graded student, and he has a group of

around 15 committed members, who are supported by the Palmerston North Sensei, and by our Sensei in Rotorua.

Rotorua Aikido has 25 members coming regularly and 10 children.

It is currently open for training three times a week, Monday, Wednesday and Thursday, and there is a morning class on Sunday.

I received a community services award from the Rotorua City Council for services to the Aikido Community and the local community. I was successful in becoming a Judicial Justice of the Peace and a Marriage Celebrant in 2003.

I attained my Yondan in October 1996.

Currently I am living in Warkworth, north of Auckland, and Sensei Barry Paletaoga is Dojo Cho at Rotorua Aikido. I still have oversight on the gradings 2nd Kyu and above, and I support and encourage Barry and all the students when required.

I am attending the local Kyu Shin Do Aikido Club in Warkworth, training and assisting with teaching.

My most Memorable Aikido Experience

Many memorable events and incidents and occasions have occurred over the years; however one particular ongoing experience will remain with me forever.

In 1989 a young student of 10 arrived at our dojo to train. Soon after he arrived, I asked him what he would like to do with his life, and his words were 'to be a Chiropractor and to be a black belt in Aikido'.

This amazing young boy grew into a remarkable young man. He attained the goals he had set for himself way back in 1989, and became one of the great aikidoka of this country. He left our dojo and went to Auckland where he continued Aikido and was successful in attaining a degree in Chiropractic Medicine and his Yondan. Adam trained incessantly whenever and wherever he could all over the country and overseas. He epitomized our ideal of living Aikido in everyday life. He could remember events that I'd forgotten, could take ukemi splendidly, was always available at short notice to be my uke, and attended as many gasshukus, regardless of style, as

he could fit in to his busy schedule.

In early 2005 Adam told me about a lump he found in his groin and we discussed him seeing his doctor as soon as possible. It turned into this monster which eventually took his life, at 29 years.

His last few months were particularly poignant.

Adam would come to Rotorua following a particularly grueling chemotherapy session in Auckland, would rest for a couple of days and then he would be down at our dojo. He took full part in training with us, rolling, being uke, teaching the class. He was always available to treat our aches and pains, never once complaining about his own. He refused to let his life-threatening illness prevent him from practicing the arts that he loved whenever possible. He trained right up to the very last weeks of his life and we loved having him. He had the most positive attitude about aikido, and drew people to him. Students would come to his classes because the fire of aikido burned strongly in his eyes. He was admired and respected by all of the people he touched.

Adam was brave, courageous and single-minded in his love and devotion to Aikido, his family and Chiropractic medicine.

I admired this young man so much; he helped me to understand why I do aikido, to look at each session with fresh eyes, to keep my passion for the art alive, and to give as much energy as I can for as long as I can to Aikido.

So my most memorable experience in Aikido was somewhat longer than maybe some others have had, but it has really shaped the Aikido I practice and the manner in which I practice it.

Along the way I have attended some incredible seminars taught by distinguished Senseis, Shihan Nadeau being the most prominent of those in recent years.

It is my intention to continue to train, study and learn from Aikido, to be a serious and enthusiastic student for many years to come.

Rotorua Aikido welcomes students from all over the world to come and train with us. We can offer you some interesting sight-seeing while you are in Rotorua, at some incredible places. Contact details:

Website: www.aikirotorua.net.nz