

Path to the “Wood Shed”
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The first time I saw Aikido being practiced many years ago, I was deeply involved in competitive Judo. I found myself intrigued with the flow and movement of the techniques. I observed elements of this art that displayed similar characteristics to things I knew in Judo but they appeared much more dynamic in their nature. I had no idea at the time that some years later, Aikido would become the foundation for which I would build myself around.

In life, opportunities and circumstances arise all the time that can affect the path our lives will move or when a fork in that path will appear. This will often cause one to either reflect on the current path or if a change of path is required.

My opportunity arose from the desire to share a common activity with my young son. I had left Judo a few years earlier but had not left behind my Martial spirit. My son had done some Judo and liked it but found the competitive nature not to his liking. I remembered seeing the Aikido practice years earlier and did some research on it. I thought, “This is exactly what we are looking for” and found a place for my son and I to train. Over the next few years, I watched my son grow and enjoyed the time we had on the mats together. But, as young teenagers can do, my son’s interests changed and Aikido was no longer a priority on the list of things to do. For me however, I had found a place where when I was training, my mind, body and spirit could come together. I chose to carry on and see where this path would lead me.

In 1998, the circumstances of my job were such that I was required to spend a long period of time away from home in Salt Lake City, Utah. On my first visit there, I found the Utah Aikikai dojo. Over the next year or so I would train there extensively. It was also in that time that I first attended a Doran Sensei seminar. I came away from that seminar realizing that while you should train hard, you should always have a smile on your face and in your heart. By the end of my time there, my Aikido had grown in many ways. I was also left with the distinct impression that when you are at or outside the dojo with your fellow Aikidoists, you should have a sense of

“being with family”. These “impressions” and realizations are core values in my training today.

It would be some years later when circumstances would push me away from where I had trained for many years and shortly thereafter, opportunity would offer me another path to follow.

It was a cold morning in March 2003 when I entered the warehouse store where my friend sold wood. He directed me upstairs to a loft where I stood looking at the 9 tatami mats spread out on the floor. The room was both frigid and damp but it was a place I could train in the way I desired. I started training there with one of my oldest training partners the next day. Shortly after, several other old friends who were also looking for a path to call their own started training in the “wood shed” as it would come to be known. The mat space would grow to 25 during the next years as did our numbers. The summers were extremely hot in this space and the winters extremely cold. With only one furnace to heat the entire warehouse space, we would often see our breath well into the class. With hard, cold mats, everyone made sure that their rolling and breakfall skills were up to par. Yet through all of this, everyone was happy in their training. Smiles filled their faces and their hearts. The little group became tight on and off the mats. Yes!! We became like a family. What had started as just a place to train had become a tight knit Aikido Club. Northern Alberta Aikido was born there and now has an annual Christmas party, golf tournament and in true Canadian fashion, “A hockey Day in Canada Road Hockey Game”. We have since moved on from the “wood shed” but we all smile when talk about our time there. I believe all of us learned how to become a “living” example of Aikido during that period of time.

I do not know if or when I will encounter another fork in my path but as with my previous encounters I will embrace it and learn the lessons offered to me.