

My journey through Aikido began when I was only 7 years old. I had just seen one of the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles movies, and I wanted to be able to do what they did, which at the time looked very impressive. I begged my parents to let me start martial arts, so I ended up starting Aikido. Little did I know that it would become such a huge part of my life. I've basically grown up in the dojo; I can watch the children's classes and remember playing every game that they play.

I started Aikido classes almost on a whim, I didn't have any particular affinity for Aikido, but the dojo was in my town. I have many memories of game days (which at the time I didn't know the games actually pertained to Aikido), learning high falls by swinging off of a jo onto a crash mat, never being able to quite do that Sankyo ura. The longer I trained, the more important Aikido became to me. The dojo had become a place where I could just forget whatever was happening off the mat, which was something I really needed even when I was very young. Movements began to be engrained in my muscle memory, and saying all the technique names didn't even feel like another language. Now, out of all of the kids that I started with and trained with, I'm the only one who is still here.

I can't really imagine what I would be like now if I hadn't started Aikido. It's become such a part of me that often times I forget that there are people that DON'T know this stuff. Little aspects of Aikido creep into my life. I won't know what day it is if I don't go to class, I find the sound of wood hitting wood to be extremely relaxing, I'd sit in seiza in gym class without even realizing it. But it wasn't until fairly recently that I even began to look beyond the techniques themselves, to actually process the principals behind the movements and try to understand them. Even more recently I've started to be able to see how Aikido could be used for spiritual growth. The way I see it, the more I learn, the more there is to know. With each idea or technique learned, a whole new set of ideas is revealed, which can often become overwhelming.

One thing that I find fascinating about Aikido is how it can be individualized and harmonious at the same time. No technique is quite the same each time you do it, and with each person it changes because you are now blending with a different energy, which requires adaptation. That is one of the things that I enjoy most about Aikido, the fact that it is ever-changing, which makes it impossible, in my opinion, to learn everything about one technique.

It's amazing how much energy can be channeled into a single movement in the form of ki. I've had many days where I've been able to take all of the stress, anger, anxiety, etc in my life, turn it around into ki, and channel it into my Aikido. This focusing and channeling is especially apparent in weapons practice. I've always felt most comfortable doing weapons practice. It helps make concepts like ki extension and blending seem more concrete, as if the bokken or the jo is a physical manifestation of your own ki. Training with weapons also helps to make the relationship between uke and nage feel more concrete.

As many people have said before I'm sure, a huge part of getting Aikido to work is the timing. I find that to be one of the hardest aspects to master, because it's also always changing, but I think there is a point in one's Aikido development when you can see the moment at which you need to blend, no matter what the speed of the other person is. I'm not quite there yet, but I'm on my way. There is also a point at which one becomes able to just look at any given part of a technique and see new things from that situation, to go from one technique to another, or to just think up new variations of things on the spot. Personally, for a long time I have looked at techniques and thought "I wonder what would happen if I did...THIS". It took me a long time to realize that there was actually an entire section of Aikido, henkawaza, which was devoted to things like this.

It's been almost 9 years since I first started Aikido, which for me is over 1/2 my life. I still look forward to going to class, and I still get excited to go to seminars and to learn new techniques. I still always want to become better at Aikido. I've been told that it takes a lot of dedication and discipline to do something this long at my age, I look at it this way; if I wasn't having fun, if I didn't love to do Aikido, then I wouldn't be here.