

Featured Dojocho, October 2016



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Division 2

My most memorable Aikido experience

I will never forget the very first class I attended in 1980. I found myself sitting seiza in a line of white gis as the teacher broke down the components of a technique - the footwork, the pelvic rotation, the ki extension through the arms. I had longed all my life for an avenue to artistic physical expression. As I sat there, I remember thinking to myself, "I'm really going to be guided and be given the tools to learn beautiful art."

Even now after over 36 years of practice, I continue to be spellbound by the beauty of Aikido movement. Pursuing the movement aesthetic of Aikido continues to serve as a portal for me to deeper principles of the art.

My training history

I trained for the first few years at a women's dojo. It was an extraordinary atmosphere for a beginning female student, where women were held to a high standard and were trusted to reach this level.

Then, since 1983, [Linda Holiday Sensei](#), chief instructor of [Aikido of Santa Cruz](#), has been my primary teacher. I value so many things about her approach to teaching Aikido - the way she leads us to discover the principles of Aikido within the physical techniques, her awareness of the need to support women in the art, and her community building, to name just a few.

[Mary Heiny Sensei](#) has also been an important teacher for me through the years. I find her dedication to the principles of Aikido electrifying and I have benefited enormously from her frequent reminders that Aikido is about self-correction, not for correcting others.

Over the years, I have also trained with [Motomichi Anno Sensei](#), both here in California and in Shingu, Japan. His instruction has been liberating for me - the way he uses a lot of space in his movement on the mat and his teachings on "natural movement."

Teaching

In 1988, I started teaching fellow employees of Kaiser Permanente evenings in the rehab gym. It was a way for me to continue the Kumano Juko based training from Santa Cruz here in San Francisco. When I asked my boss, the director of Physical Therapy, if I could use that room she said "absolutely not," but followed me down the hall asking questions about Aikido. She joined the class. When a new Physical Therapy director came in, she ended the program.

So I started my own dojo, [Heart of San Francisco Aikido](#), in 1995. I strive to incorporate many things I have learned about teaching from Holiday Sensei - I make an effort to communicate what TO do as opposed to what NOT to do, to study and refer to the words and intentions of the founder of Aikido, to hold a positive vision of my students' future potential, to present simple and non-technique exercises to convey the meanings embedded in techniques, and to work on community building within the dojo.

I was invited sight unseen to teach a weeklong Women's Aikido Camp in Germany in 2010 and then invited back to their 2013 camp. This then led to other opportunities to teach in Germany as well as in Finland. In 2012, twelve of the German Aikido women from the camp came as a group to San Francisco to train. I love the international relationships Aikido has brought me. It has also led me to recognize how we all practice Aikido with our own accents, often unknowingly.

Starting in 2015, I have co-taught the annual [Women's Seminar](#) around the time of International Women's Day with Holiday Sensei.

"Adapting" Aikido

Relatively early on in my training - ikkyu and shodan levels - I offered an Aikido class for visually impaired students at San Francisco State University, through the auspices of the PE department and the Disabled Students Union. Soon after, students with other disabilities started arriving too - people in wheelchairs, people with prosthetic limbs, hearing impaired students. In fact, as part of my nidan exam, I demonstrated Aikido seated in a wheelchair.

In recent years, I have been experimenting with alternative movements for people, often older Aikidoka, with temporary or permanent barriers to aspects of practice such as falling or rolling. In this, I draw on my background as a physical therapist, including my study of biomechanics. Another significant resource for me has also been Kinomichi, an art I encountered while teaching in Europe in 2013, and which has some delightful forms of standing ukemi. It was developed by Masamichi Noro, an early student of Osensei who was sent to Europe in 1961 to promote Aikido.

Kinomichi is made up of the vocabulary of movements that are familiar to Aikidoka - ikkyo, shihonage, kotegeishi, etc - and yet they are expressed in a different manner. The contact is often very light touch, the spiral is vividly expressed with the whole body and the movements are often dancelike. In addition to its ample use of standing ukemi, the astounding beauty of the movement is a powerful draw for me, once again. In my dojo, I teach a Kinomichi-based class one night a week and I also teach standing ukemi in all my Aikido classes to insure that everyone has the skills to include people with different abilities.

My focus on alternative movements is also fueled by my personal determination to continue training as I age. Creating different, more accessible movement forms requires me to reflect deeply on the essential aims of the art as taught to me by my teachers and sempai over the years. It is a challenging and creative process for me.