

Featured Dojo-cho, November 2004



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In 1980 when I was fifteen, I was suddenly afflicted with a tremendous desire to learn a martial art. I don't remember exactly what got me started on that track, but it was something I was determined to do. A friend of mine had been taking Tae Kwon Do so I went with him to observe a class. For some reason, watching lines of kids yell, punch, and kick didn't impress me as much as I had thought it would. Afterwards, I talked to the instructor and found out that he would not be accepting new students for 3 months. A little bit discouraged, I went home.

About two weeks later, I ran across an announcement for an Aikido class that was starting at the Los Alamos YMCA. I didn't really know anything about Aikido, but signed up anyway and in two weeks went to my first class. The sensei was Eric Gelfand, a student of the late Kanai Sensei in Boston, and from the moment I first saw him move, I knew this was the art for me. It was as if I had seen this way of moving before, even though I never had. I trained with Gelfand Sensei for about 4 years, until I went off to college. During college I didn't train but knew that I would go back to it after graduation. I remembered all the basic techniques and would inflict them on my friends whenever the opportunity presented itself. After I graduated, I got my first job in the Bay

Area. As soon as I was settled in, I found the closest Aikido dojo and called the phone number. The call was answered with a gravelly "Nadeau," I got directions to the Mountain View dojo, observed the next class, and signed up on the spot. Nadeau Sensei has been my teacher ever since.

In 1995 I moved back to New Mexico to start a software company with my brother Skyler. Leaving all the wonderful martial artists in the Bay Area was very, very difficult for me to do. Skyler had been training at Sandia Budokan in Albuquerque since 1989 so I started training there as well with Jim Cornfield Sensei. We also trained with each other in Los Alamos. In 2000 when Nadeau Sensei was in NM for a seminar, he said that he wanted me to start teaching. I was quite reluctant, so I didn't do anything about it. At the Aiki Retreat in San Rafael the next year, I got in some hot water with Nadeau Sensei over my lack of action and, in the end, had to just do it. Now things have come full circle. I am teaching at the Los Alamos YMCA where I started. We have a small group of 6-10 adults with classes three times a week. Several of us also make the 100-mile trip to Albuquerque once a week to train with Cornfield Sensei.

My most Memorable Aikido Experiences

The first was, of course, the revelatory moment when I first saw Eric Gelfand Sensei moving on the mat. Another was when I had been training with Nadeau Sensei for about 6 months. I had been intensely lifting weights for about 8 years and decided that I would do my best to stop his technique when he came around to personally show me. I knew from my previous training that I wouldn't be able to stop him, but I was pretty sure I could slow him down a fair amount. Not only did I not slow him down, he didn't even notice that I was trying. So much for my 200+ pounds of muscle!

Another very memorable moment was getting put through the wringer that is Ikeda Sensei. Craig Fife Sensei's spotlight seems to describe a very similar incident. It was one of those sweltering afternoons at the San Rafael Summer Retreat. I saw that Ikeda Sensei was preparing to train in the next class and he didn't seem to have a training partner. I had been running quite a bit recently and figured I could keep up with a good vigorous hour with Sensei, so I made my appointment. I started out putting as much energy into my attacks as I could muster. After 20 minutes, I couldn't get up off the mat without pushing on my thighs with my hands due to pure exhaustion. I truly hoped that I would either pass out or throw up, something to get myself out of there. I couldn't quit because I had asked for it. After another 5 minutes, Ikeda Sensei asked, "Are you OK?" All I could do was groan, "Tired." He simply replied, "I know" and proceeded to throw me even harder. I have no idea how I made it through the whole class. I was completely drenched with sweat, burned up, and wrung out. I think I saw one bead of sweat on Ikeda Sensei's forehead, which I consider a victory.