

Featured Senior Instructor, September 2008



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Division 1

My connection to the orient and Japanese culture seems to go back to childhood. One of my uncles was employed as a ship's officer by a steamship line; his sailing route always seemed to be San Francisco/Honolulu/Yokohama. I always seemed to have had those "BACKWARDS" comic books around as a kid, ate maki nori and seaweed candies, and even had a Japanese pen-pal for a while around age ten or eleven. I have a vague memory of having a book or a magazine that described Aikido and O'Sensei. Between 1977 and 1986 I resided on Miles Ave. off 51st St. in the lower Rockridge district of Oakland. Once at a neighborhood party I was introduced to Bruce Klickstein. I remember walking past both of the old Oakland Dojo's on Piedmont Avenue and on College Avenue as well as the current Broadway/51st Dojo at different times and actually stopping to watch the night classes on several occasions, thinking that it would be interesting to try sometime. This was all prior to 1981.

Some time in the fall winter of 1982, a university friend who was third generation Japanese-American was interested in possibly starting Aikido classes and asked me to come along to view several Aikido demonstrations. My friend started classes with Hendricks Sensei at the Hayward YMCA in the spring of 1983 and continued on to Aikido of San Leandro when that dojo was started. I started classes in the San Leandro

Dojo just after it opened in the fall/winter of 1983 with Pat Hendricks Sensei as my first teacher and I have managed to remain with her at ASL ever since.

Aikido is actually my second martial career. I started western fencing as an intercollegiate sport while at university, and as cross training I studied Kendo for about 2 years. I had been actively participating in competitive fencing for 15 years when I began Aikido training part time around age 33. At that time I was completely involved in competitive amateur fencing and had arranged my schedule around the U.S. National Team competitive tournament schedule. To support myself I was teaching Fencing at local private schools and coaching the U.C. Berkeley Fencing Club. For actual money, I was also building and setting-up Trade Show exhibits. The Trade Show work also gave me great flexibility in scheduling my time into large blocks as well as national travel opportunities. The result was I was home for one or two months and then gone for two or three month on the road. While on the road I soon started visiting every local Aikido dojo that my schedule would allow. I was able to train in several different dojos in New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, San Diego and other cities. I have fond memories of being introduced to Yamada Sensei by Dick Cavett after class in N.Y., being taken to lunch by Furuda Sensei after class in Los Angeles, and the smile on Bernice Tom Sensei's face in San Diego after she heard I was Pat Hendricks's student.

In 1988 when Pat Hendricks Sensei once again traveled to Iwama and stayed as long-term uchideshi with Saito Sensei she left the dojo in the care of Tom Gambell Sensei. I tested for Shodan in May 1988, and was on hand to welcome Hendricks Sensei back to San Leandro in 1990. I was fortunate to be invited by Hendricks Sensei to be included as a member of Saito Sensei's 1990 U.S. East Coast Seminar tour. I also receive my 2nd level weapons certification scroll that year. In 1991 I was promoted to Nidan, and in 1992 I was able to travel to Japan and stay in Iwama as uchideshi to Saito Sensei. My stay in Iwama was a real eye opener and I am still receiving Saito Sensei's teachings and learning new things today based on the experiences received there. In 1993 I received my 3rd level weapons certification directly from Saito Sensei during his West Coast Seminars.

Currently I am striving to maintain my 3-day a week minimum training schedule, a habit I developed in fencing years ago. I have sincerely taken to heart Saito Sensei's admonition to pass on to my juniors what I have learned from my seniors. I am happy to help everyone in the Dojo prepare for their next test or demonstration and I am often asked to teach classes in other area Dojos. I seem to have become the senior student at ASL by default, I've just out-lived everyone else. But I sincerely wish to

thank my former sempai: Ken B., Arlene K., Pat I., Noreen S., and Fred H., as well as all the other current students and former members of ASL who have helped forge, grind, and polish, and who now help keep me on this simple path.

My most Memorable Aikido Experience

After a couple of decades training everyone has lots of stories, this is the one I find most interesting because it happened but can't really be explained.

During the winter of 1992 I was in Iwama as uchideshi with Saito Sensei. During one cold evening sotodeshi class I ended up training in a three-some with Patrick Cassidy and Miles Kessler near the Shomen along the left sidewall. The dojo was quite crowded that night, Sensei had told us to train in groups, so whenever it was my turn "out" to make space on the mat I would kind of fit myself half way into the one open sliding panel of the doorway along the front section of that wall. About the third time standing in that spot I noticed a sudden feeling of dry heat on the base of my neck under my gi collar. When it was my turn "in" and went back to training I had the usual and expected (February in Iwama) cold and sweaty neck, but when I stood in the doorway again I suddenly got that hot dry feeling on the back of the neck. This happened a couple more times until finally I peeked in that open door and down the narrow hallway. There wasn't much of anything to see: sliding glass doors to the exterior, the big pink phone on a small table and a single small wattage light bulb on a wire from the ceiling, which that was 15 feet away and at a 90 degree angle from the door. Didn't make much sense, so finally I just tried to not stand in the doorway for the remainder of class. After class I asked around about what that doorway was used for and if anyone had had a similar experience. I believe it was Patrick Cassidy who told me that that doorway was the route O'Sensei had used to enter the dojo from his house. The consensus on the best explanation was that O'Sensei probably heard us training, came in to see the class and was looking through the back of my neck to see into his dojo. To this day I don't really know and don't quite believe it but I have never had another experience quite like that.

Since we were all sleeping on the mat, later that night I moved my futon and bedding to be near (respectfully near) that door. I figured if O'Sensei decided to come back into the dojo for more training, I wanted to be the first to know, but of course nothing else happened.

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