

Featured Dojo-cho, April 2001



Betsy Hill

Centerfield Aikido, Graton, California
Division 3

I began studying Aikido in 1969. I had been looking for a meditation teacher, and had been studying Ghandhi and the path of non-violence, when I came across an ad in the Palo Alto Times for a meditation group being formed by Robert Nadeau Sensei, who had recently returned to the U.S. from Japan. This group met in the mornings, several times a week, and included Aikido as part of the practice - as a means to experience energy through a moving meditation. My other teachers included Bob Frager Sensei, Bill Witt Sensei, and Frank Doran Sensei.

I remember in the early 70s participating in an Aikido demonstration at U.C. Santa Cruz with Nadeau Sensei to help promote an Aikido group being formed by Robert Frager Sensei. One interested observer I met at that demonstration was a young karate student named Jack Wada (now dojocho at Aikido of San Jose).

In 1977 I was invited by Robert Frager Sensei to teach Aikido at the Institute for Transpersonal Psychology (ITP). Aikido classes were a required part of the curriculum, emphasizing learning/experiencing "through the body." In 1982 I went to India to study with the spiritual teacher, Haidakhan Baba. I returned to California in 1983 and resumed teaching Aikido at ITP until 1984.

Centerfield Aikido was started in March of 1986 by Mary McLean and Sylvia Marie. I have been at Centerfield Aikido since 1993 and share the dojo leadership with Mary McLean and David Keip. Our current membership includes about 20 adults and 36 children. We offer 9 classes per week. The training emphasizes Aikido as a healing art, the cultivation of heaven/earth flow, and the sense of spiritual community. Centerfield Aikido (named after a song of the same name by John Fogerty) is located in Graton, California - about 10 miles west of Santa Rosa.

My most Memorable Aikido Experience

My most memorable Aikido experience occurred during my Shodan test. It was one of those marathon test days: I think there were 13 tests that day. I remember that when I got to my randori I was so exhausted that I had no physical energy left. As I was being closed in upon by 4 or 5 black belts I silently said to myself "take it O'Sensei." Then, just as I was about to be caught something broke loose inside of me - and the group surrounding me split. I was in a state of Universal Love from which I not only finished the randori, but which lasted for several weeks afterward.