

Featured Dojo-cho, September 2001



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Division 2

In 1972 I was living in Boise, Idaho where the winters don't much favor motorcycle riding. So several members of our local Harley* club decided to get together to lift weights at a local YMCA. For variety, Brian Thorne, a friend of mine and also a member of the club, offered to teach us some basic self-defense. I was immediately fascinated by the practice and when I asked about further study, Brian introduced me to a friend of his, "Smokey" Beaman, who had an Aikido club in Boise. I became his student, studying with him for 6 years, until I moved to Portland, Oregon in 1979. Both Brian and "Smokey" had studied with Robert Taylor Sensei, who had brought Aikido to Idaho in the early 1960s. "Smokey" introduced me to Taylor Sensei, and I also practiced with him at his dojo in Caldwell, Idaho - about 30 miles away.

At an Aikido seminar sometime before moving to Portland, either Robert or "Smokey" had introduced me to Calvin Tabata Sensei (Ki Society). So, when I later moved to Portland, I joined Tabata Sensei's dojo, where I studied and trained for the next 10 years.

In 1990, I left the Ki Society and began a period of independent training and teaching. I started teaching Aikido classes at a local community school and travelled to Aikido seminars around the country. I also began taking Iaido instruction from Robert Stroud Sensei and was awarded my shodan in August, 2000.

During this period of searching I met Michael Friedl and immediately recognized him as a kindred spirit. It was through Michael that I was introduced to Frank Doran Sensei at an Aikido seminar in Ashland, Oregon in 1991. I knew right away that this was the teacher I had been looking for and I have been his student since that time.

Meanwhile the community school classes evolved, and in July of 1994 I opened the Aikido Northwest dojo. We presently have an enrollment of approximately 35 adults and 100 children and offer classes 6 days a week.

My most Memorable Aikido Experience

It was during one of my first San Rafael Summer Camps that I observed that whenever guest instructor Hiroshi Ikeda Sensei (7th Dan, Boulder Aikikai) would train in one of the other instructor's classes, he would train (quite vigorously!) with the same person for the entire hour. So, I made up my mind that if the opportunity came I would 'go for it', in the sense that I wanted to push myself, really test my limits. When my chance did come, I did not verbally express my intention to Ikeda Sensei, we simply trained. Vigorously! And well before the hour was up, my body started to rebel - my gut was churning; my thighs burned; all my muscles were starting to shake. My mind began questioning whether or not I could actually do it. Still, my spirit kept me training, even as I felt I was losing it physically. I could sense that Ikeda Sensei was aware of my trauma. But at the point when my expectations were that he would, from compassion, say something to me and / or perhaps back off on the intensity - instead he started throwing me **HARDER!**

I could hear his breathing - as if telling me to focus on my own breath. I felt he understood my original intent and by his actions he was aligning his energy with that intent - and led me to successfully completing the hour of training. It was a profound experience. I later realized that his gift of compassion was the energy, the *ki*, that he had shared with me.

* Note: Fife Sensei's current 'ride' is a [2000 XL 1200C](#)