

Featured Dojo-cho, September 2003



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Division 2

I've had a strong interest in Eastern philosophies and martial arts since I was young. While attending Claremont Men's College in Southern California, I had the opportunity in 1969-1971 to study Shotokan Karate with a classmate. (Aikido Today Magazine and Musubi Dojo had not yet surfaced in Claremont and Aikido was not yet available in the area...too bad!) At the same time, I was volunteering at the Claremont Colleges religious center, as a Draft Counselor. I was also trying to define, for myself, my values on violence, pacifism, war, and conflict, in general. In discussions with friends I was told about a "non-violent martial art," called Aikido. In the summer of 1972, I found a copy of Westbrook and Ratti's Aikido and the Dynamic Sphere in the Alhambra Public Library and read it cover to cover. (Thank you to Francis Takahashi Sensei, who had donated the volume to the library.) I was completely taken with the ethics, philosophy, and what appeared to be the beauty of this martial art. I believed then, and continue to believe, that Aikido is a physical manifestation of a life philosophy, to which I aspire...that it allows one to discover universal truths through physical movement and practice. You can't hide from yourself within the practice of Aikido or within the practice of Zazen. I continue to practice and my personal koan is: how insufferable would I be without Aikido? ☺ Unfortunately, I was unable to find an Aikido dojo within reasonable traveling distance of where I was living at that time.

In 1977, I had recently moved to Sierra Madre, California -- a foothill community directly North of Pasadena. I met a co-worker, Robin Cooper [Sensei, of Aikido of Madison, WI], who mentioned having attended an Aikido class the night before at Los Angeles Aiki Kai. I immediately began grilling her about the availability of Aikido and found out that I now lived within easy commuting distance of Pasadena Aiki Kai. My first class in Aikido was June 8, 1977 (a friend's birthdate, so easy to remember). My first teacher was Gene Anderson Sensei (now retired in Hawaii, I believe) and my sempai was Dan Nicodemo, who is now Dojo-Cho at Pasadena Aiki Kai. With the enthusiasm of youth and relatively few responsibilities, I would train at Pasadena Aiki Kai three times a week and try to also train at Alhambra Aiki Kai with Takahashi Sensei twice a week.

In 1979, I had moved to Long Beach and Frank McGouirk Sensei had just left Los Angeles Aiki Kai to start Aikido-Ai Southern California. The first classes were held in a Los Angeles County Parks Department building in Cerritos, where we beginning students learned to ignore onlookers' comments about the "strange" things we were doing. McGouirk Sensei, even in this makeshift setting, would have Terry Dobson Sensei and Frank Doran Sensei visit as guest instructors.

In 1980, I moved to Eugene, Oregon and, in November 1981, assisted Glenn Bluestone Sensei (former student of Mitsugi Saotome Sensei) start Aikido Northwest. In 1987, while still in Eugene, I became a student of Tom Read Sensei of Northcoast Aikido in Arcata, California, with whom I remained until August 2002. Although I had known Frank Doran Sensei, since I first met him at the Aiki Summer Retreat in San Rafael in 1978, I did not formally become his student until September 2002.

Since 1987 I assisted with teaching responsibilities at the University of Oregon Aikido Club, started by my Aiki brother, Daryl Berlie Sensei. In 2001, a group of us, again led by Berlie Sensei, associated with Alan Best Sensei of Best Martial Arts Institute (BMAI) in Eugene. In July 2002, I assumed Dojo-Cho responsibilities for Aikido of Eugene, with classes held at BMAI. Presently, we offer only adult classes, with 20-25 members. We meet three times a week, Tuesday and Thursday evenings from 7:00 to 8:30 PM, and Saturday mornings from 9:00 to 10:30 AM. Come visit us!

My most Memorable Aikido Experience

My most memorable Aikido experience involved getting ready for my Nidan examination in January 1989. I experienced a "perfect" randori. In practice at the UofO Aikido Club, several days before my exam, I

was nage and three of my fellow students attacked me in a 3-on-1 randori. I immediately moved into what is best described as a "transcendental" space. I experienced time subjectively slowing down for me and I KNEW exactly where to move to throw each uke. As they were attacking me at full-speed, it appeared to me that they were moving in slow motion and I would calmly and quietly move to the exact position where I needed to be to effortlessly throw each of them. There was no "thought" involved, as there usually is in a randori; there was no "strategy/tactics" type thinking at all. Instead, I just moved to where I needed to be. I had the distinct impression that I needed to protect my ukes because it would be so easy to injure them in this space. When the randori was stopped, all three of my ukes were winded from their all-out attack; but I hadn't broken a sweat, wasn't breathing hard, and I don't even think my heart rate had gone up. [Of course, I was unable to recreate this performance on my Nidan exam...oh well, that's another story!] I've often thought back to that experience and realized that, if that was the space within which O-Sensei operated, OF COURSE he was undefeatable. There are no openings in that space and there are no wrong moves. Although I've never FULLY experienced being in that space since -- except for the occasional "perfect" throw -- I know that it's possible....so I keep on training.