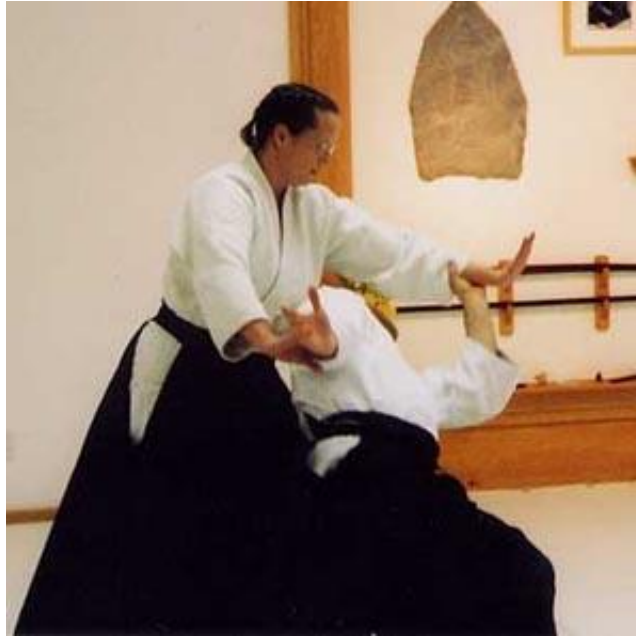


## Featured Dojo-cho, June 2002



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My dojo just celebrated it's 7 year anniversary. It is located in Sebastopol California. We offer adult classes 6 days per week and children's classes 4 days per week. I have been teaching Aikido for more than 20 years. I love teaching and feel honored to participate in and witness the ways in which Aikido influences people's lives.

### ***My most Memorable Aikido Experience***

My most memorable Aikido experience was also my first Aikido experience. I became enthralled with the hidden aspects of Aikido when I spent a day doing energy awareness and basic Aikido practices in one of my high school classes. I was a junior in high school.

The class was taught by Richard Moon and Paul Ehrlich both of whom were studying with Robert Nadeau Sensei at the Turk Street dojo. I knew at the time that I was looking for "something more" than life in my head. Doing Aikido for a day had given me a glimpse of the possibilities. I felt so strongly that Aikido held important answers for me, that I jumped at the chance to go on a six week trip with them to the Southwest.

The trip turned out to be life altering for me. In addition to lots of Aikido, we slept on the ground every night, held ceremonies in sacred Native American ruins, did misogi in rivers, sweat lodges, and on 12,000 foot peaks. We conducted healings, did energy work and learned about the

laying on of hands. We worked with the elements of fire, water, earth, air and space. We honored nature, the four directions and practiced connecting with the spirit world.

We worked and played as a (mostly) harmonious team enjoying and challenging each other in many ways. We practiced conflict resolution and engaged in leadership development skills. The only thing I really needed to do was breathe and be present with it all. Although it was all very rigorous, I was filled with joy and wonder!

By the end of the trip, I felt like a different person. I felt calm but elated. I was deeply connected to myself and others and I loved that feeling! I discovered that the antidote to life in my head was living in my body in a relaxed and centered way. They had introduced me to the possibility that we can feel and connect with the energies that flow through the universe. I was fascinated by the potential of living a life with my mind body and spirit united. I loved the feeling of blending and the idea that through blending and connection one could influence the outcome of a situation. This to me was remarkable!

While there were many things on that trip that touched me, one thing I will never forget..... Prior to going on an extended backpacking trip in New Mexico, a couple of us were invited to go and meet with a Hopi Medicine Man. During this visit he asked that we find and bring to him a special plant that he needed for his healing work. It could only be found on the mountain on which we would be backpacking.

He had saved a small piece of the plant to show us and with that in hand we set off to get him what he needed. We essentially had no idea what we were looking for or where we would find it. I was quite skeptical about our possibilities for success but was impressed that the people I was with were willing to take on the challenge of finding it.

I was part of a small group that went crawling through brush, walking through creeks and generally going where only sure footed animals could go. I was pretty sure that the only thing that would happen would be getting terribly lost! Then, in a moment, Stephen Samuels (one of the leaders of the group) said that he had found it. I was stunned!

When I asked him later how he knew where to go and what to look for, he talked about allowing himself to be guided by the plant to the plant. It was very important to him that he be able to bring back the medicine this Hopi Medicine Man needed. He said he did it by connecting to something much bigger than himself. He allowed himself to be guided by his intuition and his connection to that invisible force that moves us through life. This was and continues to be a very powerful lesson for me!

O'Sensei said that we must study the laws of nature, be in nature and allow it's movements and rhythms to influence us. In a small way, I experienced some of these lessons on this trip. That was 25 years ago. I have been training regularly since then. I still feel the same excitement and drive to deepen my understanding of what the magic of those early experiences promised.

I have been blessed with the support and incredible instruction from many teachers. My waza today is a compilation of this input. I am deeply grateful to Doran Sensei and Nadeau Sensei and all of the teachers who have encouraged me, thrown me around and shared their knowledge with me. I am also grateful to all of my training partners over the years. Thank you all for an incredible journey!