

Featured Instructor, June 2004



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Division 3

I was born in 1961 in the Netherlands, Europe. From an early age I had a fascination for the martial arts and I used to study arts like Karate, Tai Ki Ken and Thai Boxing. Later on in life I developed an increasing interest in the internal martial arts. This led me to the study of Tai Chi Chuan and meditation. A major influence and inspiration came from an encounter with Peter Ralston, a world-class martial artist and founder of a body of work known as Cheng Hsin. This encounter led me to the path of Aikido in 1991.

I walked into a dojo in my hometown and decided to participate right away. That first night I knew I was hooked. The dojo was run by Jan Rusman Sensei, a sandan at the time and one of the first people in the Aikido scene in the Netherlands. In his days there were not a lot of Aikido instructors, so he followed seminars, taught by Aikikai Shihan, who had been send out by Hombu dojo and now ran dojos and taught Aikido in Europe. This tradition of going to seminars for instruction was very alive when I joined his dojo. Consequently I started going to seminars on a regular basis shortly after I joined. The main influence came from Nobuyoshi Tamura Shihan, Claude Pellerin Sensei, who is one of his students, from France and Seiichi Sugano Shihan, from Belgium.

After three years of Aikido, I met Lewis Bernaldo de Quiros Sensei. Lewis was a yondan and had just come from Iwama Japan with his wife, where they had been studying Aikido under Morihiro Saito Sensei. They opened a dojo in my hometown.

At this time I was studying with Bart Wilffert Sensei, who was a sandan and who traveled to Japan to train at Hombu dojo on a regular basis.

When I went over to Lewis's dojo, to check out the classes, I was struck by his presence. This man had a strength and aliveness about him that didn't seem just physical. I decided to join.

For a while I was training under these two teachers, which was fine, until it didn't work anymore. I felt I couldn't combine the two different approaches to the art. It was hard for me to choose, because both teachers had so much to offer.

I knew I had to make a decision and decided to travel to Japan and train in Iwama and at Hombu dojo, to support my decision. I was more confused after my return to the Netherlands.

Eventually I chose Lewis as my teacher and consider him as my main Aikido influence.

My time with Lewis was wonderful and I trained as much as I could. After about five years Lewis decided to close his dojo. I felt devastated and didn't want to go back to my old teachers.

I ended up renting a gymnasium and trained three times a week with some of Lewis's other students. I did this for about six months.

By then I was ready for a big change and decided to travel around the world for a year.

I started in Fresno as an uchi deshi under Patrick Cassidy Sensei.

Patrick and Lewis were friends, hence the reason for going there.

The innovative teachings of Cassidy Sensei opened up a whole new dimension of experience to my study of Aikido.

The next year I returned to Aikido of Fresno after traveling through Asia and Australia.

At Aikido of Fresno I met my wife Kelly, and wanted to stay in the US.

One day Patrick approached me with the news of him and his wife Dominique moving to Switzerland, Europe. He offered his dojo to me and I started running Aikido of Fresno on November 5th of 2001.

Kelly, who received her nidan in January, has been a tremendous support for me in running the Aikido of Fresno dojo.

Aikido of Fresno is a full time dojo, offering Aikido classes for adults and children. Our youth program consists of two classes a week for 5-9 year olds, the Aiki Kids and three classes a week for 10-14 year

olds, the Aiki Juniors. We offer 11 adults classes a week, of which 3 are weapons classes. We also offer an uchi deshi program, a Yoga program and meditation sessions.

We have about 40 adults and 20 children in the Aikido program and 40 adults in the Yoga program.

Two years ago I was accepted as a student of the Ridhwan Foundation, a school offering a spiritual teaching known as The Diamond Approach, the aim and orientation of which is the development of students toward spiritual maturity and completeness. The larger aim of this teaching, beyond the development of individual students, is to contribute to the development of humanity in the service of ultimate spiritual Truth.

My most Memorable Aikido Experience

I have many memorable experiences from encounters with my teachers and students.

Being touched by Patrick's trust when he handed over his dojo to me and the support I felt from my students during my sandan demonstration at our dojo's grand re-opening in January 2004, are just a few.

For me, the combination of Aikido and The Diamond Approach, is very powerful.

I'll share my latest discovery with you.

I attended an Aikido seminar taught by Larry Reynosa, Sensei.

One of the exercises we did was a tenkan practice against three attackers.

Under Reynosa Sensei's guidance, I prepared myself for the exercise. A quick "hajime" and in the next moment I found myself on my back. A backward roll got me back on my feet, just enough to be knocked off again.

This continued for about fifteen seconds. Getting up and instantly being forcefully knocked off my feet again.

I had never experienced an exercise with this kind of intensity.

After the seminar and on my way home, I realized how shocked and disoriented I felt.

Staying grounded in my immediate experience of disorientation, got me in touch with a feeling of anger. I was afraid to feel this anger and realized that the fear was for this rage deep inside me, beyond any sense of sanity. Recognizing the fear allowed me to get more in touch with my aggression. This led me to see what the anger was about. I

was angry because I felt that a part of me had been taken away a long time ago. A part that can be described as "Fundamental Strength and Trust".

I instantly realized my deeper motivation for practicing martial arts and Aikido after all these years. Many things fell into place and it left me with a deep sense of meaninglessness.

Without this understanding I could have walked away from Aikido all together, since Aikido had formed my life and given it meaning.

There is more...

The Truth of me was revealed, and this filled me with a fullness. I could feel this fullness in every fiber of my body, alive and glowing. I was struck by the experience that I would describe as Limitless Potential. The understanding came to me a few days later.

I realized that it was "Me" that had been revealed as Truth; a Truth that wanted to be seen, in all its glory.