

Featured Instructor, January 2005



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Division 2

My 24 year involvement in aikido started because I was a kite flyer. In 1976, I was working for a kite wholesaler in San Francisco. We manufactured, imported, and distributed kites to kite and toy stores, museums, and other retail outlets. We had been invited to put on a kite demonstration in Marin County for an event called the "New Games Tournament". The concept was to introduce people to new ways of playing. You were supposed to have fun without necessarily competing.

One of the segments was an aikido demonstration. I had been interested in martial arts since I was a child but had never seen anything like aikido. I wrestled in high school and college and had taken karate classes as a young adult. I enjoyed the activity and liked the idea of having self defense skills but found the competitive nature of those disciplines to be a dead-end street. I also was not comfortable with the injurious effects of karate on the attacker. The way aikido was explained and the graceful movements of the participants that day excited me. I knew this was the martial art I wanted to practice.

Five years later, I resolved to start my aikido training. I found a dojo on Piedmont Avenue in Oakland and started attending 6 AM classes with Eytan Ben Meir as my instructor. It was several months before I met the sensei of the dojo, Bruce Klickstein. While attending those early

morning classes, I met a fellow student, Tom Gambell. He was my uke on my shodan test . Later, when he opened East Bay Aikido, I continued my aikido classes there. That was 16 years ago.

I started my affiliation with the Oakland Hills Tennis Club when I heard they were looking to start a martial arts program for their members. Our first class was on Labor Day in 1992. We still have two members of our dojo that were there for the first night. We train on Monday and Thursday evenings from 7:30 to 9:00. Since our dojo is made up of only members and family from the Oakland Hills Tennis Club 12 people is a large class for us. We have a mixture of students that ranges at times from 10 years old to almost 70. We have the best view of any dojo bar none. We train in a large, well-lit aerobics room with huge windows overlooking San Francisco Bay. It is a treat for us to have guests so we would encourage aikidoka who find themselves in Oakland on a Monday or Thursday evening to stop by and train with a three bridge view of the Bay.

My latest aikido project has been to take aikido out of the dojo and introduce it to lay people in various walks of life. I have a presentation that I call "Aikido At Work." It illustrates how the principles of aikido can be used to resolve everyday conflicts. I try to show how the win/win philosophy of aikido can be used in real life. Isn't this what we are all training for? I have presented this to several service clubs such as Rotary, Lions, and Kiwanis groups as well as a college intro to business class and a 1/2 day session at a dojo. We spend a lot more time off the mat than on it so why not learn to put our aikido to use in the environment where we spend most of our time? We can all help to spread the aikido way of dealing with conflict. This may be the area with the most potential for growth for aikido in the future.

My most Memorable Aikido Experiences

My most memorable aikido experiences fall into several categories. Under surprise, joy and elation as a group, I remember being in the Turk Street dojo when it was announced that Pat Hendricks was being promoted to the rank of San Dan. We were all surprised and astonished. As a 5th kyu or so, this seemed like being around someone who had just attained sainthood.

In the nostalgia category, I feel very lucky to have had a special group of sempai at the Aikido Institute in Oakland.

My senior students were people like Pat Hendricks, Kayla Feder, Hoa Nuygen, Kim Puser, Cyndy Hayashi and Tom Gambell. I was exposed to some great fundamentals in terms of technique and dojo responsibility.

Some of my fondest memories involve road aikido.

Whenever I travel, two things I try to bring along are my golf clubs and my aikido bag. Several of my jobs have allowed me to travel and therefore afforded me the opportunity to train in a wide range of dojos including a basement in Hartford, a church gym in Louisville, school gyms in Albuquerque and Honolulu, an Asian cultural center in Phoenix, a week in Iwama with Saito Sensei, the Aiki Expo in Las Vegas and a community center in Kansas City. Two summers ago, I trained at a Tomiki style dojo in Malaga, Spain. I have always been impressed by the welcoming attitude exhibited by the various dojos I have visited. I have been exposed to many ideas, concepts, and techniques that I have been able to incorporate into my own aikido philosophy. I appreciate all the hospitality extended to me by the senseis at the various dojos and hope that I will be able to return the kindness to anyone who chooses to stop by Oakland Hills Aikido for keiko.