

Featured Instructor, March 2001



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Division 2

In every life there are moments that are pivotal to everything that is yet to come. Such a moment happened in my life during the summer of 1978. I had recently moved back to Burlington, Vermont when my best friend invited me to attend a martial arts class with him. A few days later we met at the YMCA. As we descended the stairs into the very bowels of the building, I had no idea that the step I was about to take would affect my life so profoundly. We entered the room that had originally been built to accommodate judo training, which had become popular following its introduction into the Olympic games in the early 1960's. The room itself was dank, dirty, and smelled of stale sweat, but the activity that was happening on the dark green mat immediately caught my attention.

The mat was buzzing with a flurry of whirling movement. I watched with wonder as Michael Friedl, a gifted teacher well known to everyone in the AANC, was leading an informal workout. There were a number of things that struck me at this moment. The first was how different this was than the vision I had created in my imagination. Where was the fight with its attendant struggling, screaming, and gore? Instead of the extreme ugliness that accompanies real fights, Aikido carried the beauty of dance. On top of this, these people were smiling as they worked out. The practice appeared serious enough, yet there was a kindness and joy that was infectious. Clearly, this was something different, and I was intrigued. I signed up and thus began the path that has dominated my life for over twenty years.

In these early days the feeling I had was that of finally

coming home after years of wandering. The practice just seemed to be right for me like nothing else I had ever done before, or since for that matter. I immediately found myself fully immersed in my passion for the art. Unfortunately, Michael moved to Oregon about a year later and left a number of us just getting together to keep our training going. Since then my Aikido history is a patchwork of different teachers whom I've had the opportunity to train with. My priority has been to learn Aikido and every different teacher has given me gifts that have contributed to that process. Besides Michael the most important influences in this country have been Saotome Sensei, Yamada Sensei, Kanai Sensei, Ken Nisson Sensei, Terry Dobson Sensei, Ikeda Sensei, Massimo deVilladorata Sensei (Montreal), and of course Doran Sensei.

My most Memorable Aikido Experience

In 1992 I reached a personal dream and traveled to live and train in Japan for 7 months where I trained full time mostly at Hombu Dojo. While in Japan I also had the opportunity to attend regular classes with Kuroiwa Sensei, Nishio Sensei, Saito Sensei, and Suganuma Sensei. It was at Hombu that one of my most memorable Aikido moments occurred. One morning during the Doshu's (Kisshomaru Ueshiba) class he turned in my direction inviting someone to come and do uke for the next technique he was demonstrating. I looked to either side of myself, suspecting that one of the uchi deshi was next to me until I realized that it was me he was gesturing to! I was stunned but quickly jumped up trying to conceal my glee. For the last few months of my stay this became a regular occurrence and I feel honored and blessed to have had this experience. The last time I saw him he handed me my Sandan Certificate, punched me lightly in the shoulder and told me to keep up the good work. I found him to be a wonderful man as well as a fine teacher.

Shortly after my return from Japan I opened the Utah Aikikai in March of 1994 and thus began my adventure as a full time teacher of Aikido. Salt Lake City has been very good to me. Within three months of our opening the enrollment stood at over 100 students and has fluctuated between 100 and 140 since then. We have 26 scheduled classes for adults and kids, as well as less formal workshops and training sessions weekly. It was Michael Friedl who introduced me to Doran Sensei which lead to my affiliation

with him and the AANC.