

Featured Dojo-cho, April 2007



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When I was 17, I had a very serious motorcycle accident I could not walk normally for 5 years and I had 7 major operations before I finally started to get on with life again. At this time a few of my friends had taken up various martial arts, Karate and Aikido, and I use to go with them to watch. This set me on my path and started a burning desire to take up a martial art at some time, but it was not to be just yet. Well life got in the way, family life, ambitions etc. - then when I was about 35, I thought if I don't do something now I am going to be too old to do what I always wanted to do.

So I took up Tai chi with a friend; after about a year I realized that if I was going to learn this seriously I would have to find a good teacher. I found one at our local sports centre and went along to find out some more and watch a class, but when I got there the receptionist said that there was also an Aikido class at the same time. This brought back the memories of watching my friends and so I thought I would just take a look before going to the Tai chi class. Needless to say I never got there; I watched and knew that this was what I really wanted to do.

My first teacher was Sensei Peter Reynolds who was under the instruction of Sensei Paul McGlone, whom I also trained with, and about a year later he joined forces with Sensei Tony Sergeant who became the head of their new association and he became my main inspiration. I trained about three to four classes a week and had a private lesson every week for more than three years, and after seven years I took my shodan (1997).

The Aikido path of the association was that of Morihiro Saito Sensei with principle guidance from Sensei Pat Hendricks.

To these teachers I will always be grateful as they forged my development and gave me my base in aikido from which I grew.

Just after my Shodan Grading in 1997, I started teaching at my own dojo in Salisbury, UK, which is now in its tenth year and has some 25 senior students and about 15 junior students. With a range from Nidan to beginner, many of my senior students have been with me from those early years. In 2002 I decided to leave the association that I had grown up with, as I felt the need to move in a new direction. Having attended many seminars and uchideshi programs and seen many top aikido instructors, the teacher that had made the biggest impression on me was that of Sensei Pat Hendricks. So I decided to go to her dojo at San Leandro and become uchideshi for five weeks to see if indeed this would take me in the direction I wanted to go.

It took only one class and I knew right from the start I had found what I was looking for and I have never looked back. I also graded to Nidan at the dojo. I have now been uchideshi five more times with Sensei Pat Hendricks. Each of these was for about a month and I have attended numerous seminars in Germany, New Zealand and of course England with her. In 2005 I was graded to Sandan and have also trained in Tai chi for six years and I am now training in Wing Chung which I have been doing for about one and a half years. Both of these have contributed greatly to my development in Aikido and to me as a person. I have been continuously training now for over 17 years, attended over a hundred seminars and uchideshi programs, many held by top Aikido instructors including the present Doshu, the late Morihiro Saito Sensei, and Hitohiro Saito Sensei.

In 1999 I built a dojo at my own home and now teach two classes at Salisbury and two classes at home in the village of Hyde in the New Forest National Park.

My most Memorable Aikido Experience

My most memorable experience in Aikido was not on the mat but whilst taking my two son's with my wife to some museums in London.

We traveled by train from Salisbury at 9:30am and it was full of commuters traveling to work. As we got on there were only 4 seats left. 2 were in the middle of the carriage and another two at the end. My wife and youngest son sat on the first two and I went on to the two remaining seats. When I got there a man in his early thirties was sitting with his feet on the seat reading a newspaper. He did not take them off. I knew he knew I was there and from his attitude I knew that if I were to ask him he would have told me where to go. So I politely but very firmly told him to remove his feet from the seat. He looked up with an intense stare and I said nothing but kept his gaze. The people next to us started to shift away. After a moment he slowly took his feet off and I sat down with my elder son. The man then lent across and said that "*most people would have said please*". I looked at him and in a soft but firm voice I said, "*most people would not have put their feet on the seat*". With this he flushed red and I put my hand out as if to shake his hand and said, "*forget it*". He replied "*you have really p..... me off*". I continued to look at him and in a very calm voice I said, "*Yes! I can see that!*" I could see his brain doing overtime. He was not getting the response he wanted. I was ready and in code red.

Then he folded his arms and looked out of the window for the rest of the trip.

Maybe I was foolish and maybe it could have ended much differently but sometimes you have to make a stand for something that's just wrong. But given a different time and place who knows. Aikido worked; it gave me the courage and strength to make a stand but without coming to blows and I had trusted myself as an aikido person.