

Featured Dojo-cho, August 2004



Johnny Newsome

Morehead State University Aikido, Morehead, KY
Division 2

I began Aikido training in January 1980. Prior to this time, I had only dabbled in martial arts and did not want to devote myself to it because I was turned off by the macho attitudes that I had encountered. I discovered Aikido when I started with my children because I wanted them to have some form of self-defense. After a while they both quit. By then, however, I was hooked. I have been Aikidoka ever since. My first four years were with a Ki Society group and I feel that I learned a lot about basic blending and flow while I was there. When that group dissolved, I began training under Tom Read Sensei at North Coast Aikido. The training at North Coast was quite intense and was often referred to as "Hard Style" or "Live Blade". I was there for approximately 6 years. This is where I received my Shodan. I feel that Tom Read Sensei has been a big influence on my Aikido. The martial aspects of training that I learned at North Coast have been a good foundation for my subsequent growth. One of the lessons that I took away from that experience is that Aikido's non-violence is not a way of trying to avoid violence, but is rather a way of transcending violence. It is ineffective to try to back away from an attack. By going into the "Jaws of Death" we are better able to neutralize the attack. My personal Aikido path has been the study of how we can learn to accept an attack and respond with benevolence.

Sometime around early 1990 I started training under Frank Doran Sensei. I was independent and had started teaching classes with Karen Snyder at Aikido of Humboldt Bay. I had met Doran Sensei several times prior to then and was always very impressed. When Karen offered to recommend me to him I jumped at the chance and have been his student ever since. This past year he promoted me to

Yondan. Without reservation, I can say that Doran Shihan has been my primary role model in Aikido. His impeccable posture and undeniable martial effectiveness coupled with his joy and benevolence are truly inspiring.

An additional footnote that I might add to this short bio is that I am one of those lucky individuals who has actually been able to have my martial arts training pay for itself. When I was at Florida State (training with a great ASU group, by the way) I was given a full ride fellowship from the University. My primary responsibility was teaching self-defense classes. I taught as many as 5 sections per semester. I also got to teach stretch/relaxation techniques and some other great stuff. Aikido paid for my Doctorate.

Morehead State University Aikido.

In 1999 I moved to Morehead State University in Kentucky and founded MSU Aikido. Aikido is alive and well in Kentucky with a USAF dojo one hour east and an ASU club at the University of Kentucky one hour west. Louisville and Cincinnati are each two hours from here and often have excellent seminars, but I needed a place where I could train on a regular basis.

We started in an old moldy wrestling room with a leaky roof and rock hard mats that suffered from years of neglect. The ceiling was so low that weapons work had to be done between light fixtures. We also had to share the space with anyone who wanted to use it (shoes or not). Last year we moved into our own space. We now occupy a renovated racquetball court. We remodeled it and bought new mats.

When you enter the room now you realize you are entering a dojo. The mat is only 20'X30' but it is all ours. Typical classes range from 6 to 12 people and the space works very well for us. Occasionally there are as many as 20+ people on the mat and we need to be very organized with our lines, but we still make it work. The dojo energy is very good. Our regular classes are Mondays and Wednesdays from 4:30-6:00 with additional morning and weekend classes from time to time. All Aikidoka are welcome.

My most Memorable Aikido Experience

Let me relate an incident that was very significant for me. One day I walked into my home and found a burglar there. To make a long story short, I pinned him and held him for the police. (By the way, for those of you who are interested I switched pins several times and discovered that when working with uncooperative partners, a sankyo pin works quite well. It eliminates all the squirming around and other nonsense of them trying to get up). The significance of the story is this. In the following weeks, I discussed the foiled burglary with many people and was amazed at how many expressed the opinion that I should have used the opportunity to get in a few extra "hits" on the scoundrel. I am pleased to say that the thought of doing that never even occurred to me. My training in Aikido has taught me many things but one thing it has not taught me is to think of others as "the enemy". For me this is essential and it is why I have chosen Aikido as the martial art that is most appropriate for me.

I agree with those who say that Aikido is a "metaphor for life". I wish to live my life in a way that transcends hate and I prefer to train in a manner consistent with

that ideal. Further, I do not agree that harmonious cooperative Aikido is ineffective on belligerent individuals. My experience has taught me otherwise. For years I worked in a hospital where there were no security guards and I was called upon many times to help the staff deal with hostile situations. I consistently found that it was possible to diffuse situations by getting the angry person to focus on me. Then I would simply close my openings. I believe because I did not perceive these people as "the enemy" that they were able to restore their own harmony once there was no longer a target for their conflict. My training has allowed me on many occasions to transcend violence rather than to defeat an opponent.