



Featured Dojo-cho, December 2003



Louis Jumonville

Aikido of Pleasant Hill, Pleasant Hill, California
Division 1

I was introduced to Aikido in 1973 when I was in eighth grade training in Isshinryu Karate Do. Later when I saw a demonstration at a Karate tournament in 1976, I immediately knew that someday I would practice this art. I was fascinated by the dynamic movement and expressed spirituality of the art. Unfortunately the nearest dojo was two hundred miles away from my hometown. In 1977 when I entered the University of Illinois I began training under Robyn Bird Sensei in Shin Shin Toitsu Aikido. Then I trained with Joe Birdsong Sensei who was under Akira Tohei in Chicago, for about a year. In 1985 I moved to California to attend graduate school, and began training at the Aikido Institute under Bruce Klickstein Sensei, and at the Turk Street Dojo under Bob Nadeau Sensei in his noon classes. In early June 1987, I began a seven-year stint of living in a dojo. For one and a half years I was privileged to be uchi-deshi under the late Morihiro Saito Shihan, Caretaker of the Aiki Jinja, and Dojo Cho of O'Sensei's dojo. Upon my return to the states I continued as uchi-deshi for another five and a half years at Aikido of San Leandro, under the impeccable teachings of the highly accomplished Patricia Hendricks Sensei. I know I have been blessed to have had such dedicated, talented, and inspiring teachers.

I started Aikido of Pleasant Hill in the year 1999 with the help and unwavering support of my wife Carla. We currently have about 25 members. We offer two general training classes, one beginners class, one class of Aiki-Ken, and Aiki-Jo, one class of Ki Development, which includes breathing practices, yoga asana, and taicho, mantra recitation, fire purification, and meditation, and one children's class. Nadeau Sensei had lent us mats to use to get started, for which we are very grateful. This year we were able to purchase new mats.

My most Memorable Aikido Experience

My most memorable Aikido experience had to be during my one and one half year stay as uchi-deshi in Iwama, Japan under Morihiro Saito Shihan. It was an intense time of training as Saito Shihan was still in good health and classes were very vigorous. Saito Sensei was the very embodiment of an archetypal warrior/teacher, inspiring as he taught Aiki-Ken and Aiki-Jo in the snow and howling wind with only a keiko gi on in the freezing winter, and sweated buckets with the students in the muggy gasshuku season too. I particularly remember one day. It was on November 14th and Doshu came from Tokyo as he did every month on the fourteenth, to make offerings and chant and pray at the Aiki Jinja in remembrance of O' Sensei. Saito Sensei and the uchi-deshi were in the Jinja for the ceremony. The day was crisp, cool and not a cloud in the sky. While Doshu, Saito Sensei and the uchi-deshi were chanting the Norito, a fierce wind arose howling throughout the Jinja grounds and clouds covered the sun. As the candles on the shomen flickered, I felt the presence of incredible power. I knew that I was in the presence of spirit. As soon as the chanting ceased, the winds stopped and the clouds dissipated. The other deshi and I looked at Doshu and Saito Sensei and could hear them whispering about the Kami with great reverence. We were speechless. It was very inspiring for me to be in the presence of such profound sound energy and spiritual vibrations in Iwama. That experience continues to impact my training even today and reminds me of the foundation and spirit of Aikido.