

Featured Dojo-cho, June 2007



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Division 1

Whilst living in London in 1987 I saw a poster on the subway wall advertising an Aikido beginner's class. While I knew what Judo, Karate and even Kendo looked like I had no idea what Aikido looked like. With a combination of curiosity, a need for cheap physical exercise and, I must admit, childish martial art fantasies, I signed up for the course. Little did I realise that I was starting a journey that has so far lasted twenty years.

At the end of the course I returned to New Zealand and continued my training at a number of Wellington dojos, but principally at the Wellington Takemusu Aiki Dojo under Kevin Spry Sensei. Aikido was still quite rare in New Zealand at that time and most dojos were run by shodans. But what we lacked in technical depth we made up for in enthusiasm and vigour.

In April 1990 I accompanied Kevin Sensei to Iwama, Japan for a month's training under Morihiro Saito Sensei. I enjoyed myself so much that on my return to New Zealand I quit my job, settled my affairs and returned to Japan a couple of months later, this time for a fifteen month stay. I enjoyed my Iwama stay immensely; not only was the training top quality but I also made friends with many fellow devotees from around the world. I even meet my future wife

on the mat in Iwama. Saito Sensei claimed to be the matchmaker for the relationship, which, I guess, in one sense he was.

In 1994 I established my first dojo on the Kapiti Coast near Wellington, which I ran for ten years before I moved to my current address. I opened Hutt City Aikido in September 2006 at the local YMCA. There are currently six of us training once a week, but we hope to add more classes in the near future.

My most Memorable Aikido Experience

While I have many fond memories of aikido, especially of my time in Iwama, perhaps my most memorable Aikido experience occurred during my sandan grading. For the tanto dori component a real knife was to be used. This would be the first time I had ever experienced being attacked with a real knife in tanto dori. Already nervous about my grading, the news about tanto dori just added to my anxiety. And yet when I stood up to do tanto dori I experienced what I can only describe as an *intense* feeling of calm, the likes of which I had never experienced before or since. I felt so focused, not on the knife or on my uke but on everything in my environment. I felt nothing, no nervousness, no anxiety, no elation, nothing but an incredible feeling of calm.