

Featured Senior Instructor, December 2008



Paul Filbert

Aikido West, Redwood City, CA
Division 2

According to my 5th kyu certificate, which amazingly I still have, I became a 5th kyu in April of 1973. At the time I was attending the University of Minnesota, and the university Aikido club was full of many of my schoolmates, and a very good friend of mine finally brow beat me into going. Our instructor was Darrell Tangman, (now a rokudan teaching in Augusta and Atlanta) and who, and I would say pretty much single-handedly, started a real off-campus dojo. I and many others are forever indebted to Darrell not only for his instruction but also for the sacrifice of much of his time and treasure in keeping our dojo alive until it became a going concern. Our dojo was part of the Midwest Aikido Federation (then affiliated with the USAF) and Akira Tohei Shihan of Chicago was our Master teacher from whom all rank sprang at that time. Upon graduation in 1981, and after 8 years of training in the Twin Cities, I was fortunate enough to secure employment in the Bay Area, which was well known for its large number of excellent Aikido dojos and teachers. A good friend had moved here two years before I did and was training with Doran Sensei at Aikido West and I became a member a month or two after my arrival and I've been here ever since.

At Aikido West I am responsible for conducting the Monday night class in which we stick to pretty much basic techniques like those

on a first kyu test. In a typical class we'll generally practice 3 or 4 techniques for about 20 minutes each to allow people to work on their stuff and we'll change partners 2-3 times per technique to maintain interest and to ensure each participant gets to train with a range of skill levels.

My most Memorable Aikido Experience

My most memorable aikido-related experience? Like most of us probably, after a few decades of practice I really can't prioritize the many vignettes that come to mind when asked this question. Sort of like beer, they all are different but they all are good and to pick one or two out above the others would be to unfairly suggest that they are somehow better than the others – and I'm not sure what I found to be “memorable” in such events would be likewise for someone else since you sort of had to be there to make sense of it. I guess the best I can do for now is to simply observe that many of the aikido memories that come to mind (and they keep coming) involve a common thread of a hands-on experience with a vast array of different people - good friends, acquaintances, and total strangers – who will happily throw you to the mat whenever they can and give me the same chance when its my turn. Amazing, isn't it? And of course the most hopeful answer I could possibly give is that the most memorable experience hasn't yet happened!