

Featured Dojo-cho, July 2006



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Division 1

I first became interested in Martial Arts after being bullied at school and at about 11 years old I joined a Shotokan Karate class. As soon as the bullies found out that I had started they moved on to the next victim and I carried on training for the next two years or so. I used to enjoy the training and especially the Kata's, but hated the competitions; this hatred developed as our instructor insisted that we had to fight and, after a very bad beating at one competition, I gave up.

At 17 years old I started Shorinji Kempo and this was my first introduction to a Martial Art with a spiritual philosophy, but the class was on a Friday night and at that age I was more interested in going out with friends so I soon stopped.

At that time I also used to belong to a gym and I sometimes used

to watch an Aikido class through the Judo Room window. The teacher was Paul McGlone Sensei and it was his class that I first attended, but not for another seven years. I started training in August 1991 after a chance meeting with one of Paul Sensei's students. Paul McGlone Sensei was Vice Principal of Tony Sargeant Sensei's newly formed Traditional Aikido Iwama Style GB which became Iwama Ryu GB in 1994 following Saito Sensei's UK Seminar.

1994 was an exceptional year for me as it was the first time that I was Uchi Deshi at Pat Hendricks Sensei's Dojo and also the first time I saw Morihiro Saito Sensei. Both were incredibly inspirational experiences.

I trained with a number of Tony Sensei's students in the area that I lived until 1999 when I moved with my job and was able to train at Tony Sensei's dojo in Orwell, Cambridge. I continued to train in Orwell until Tony Sensei emigrated to Greece.

I founded Three Rivers Aikido in February 2000. I had taught before but I was so nervous that I lost my voice and croaked all the way through the first class. The club is small and has 11 adult members. I don't teach children at present but it is an ambition to have my own permanent dojo one day and if I am successful I will definitely teach kids classes. We have one Tai Jutsu and one Weapons class each week.

My most Memorable Aikido Experience

My most memorable Aikido experience was my visit to Iwama as Uchi Deshi. To have been in O Sensei's Dojo at Saito Sensei's classes for me is indescribable. I was only in Iwama for two weeks and even in that short time there were many memorable events but two were very special.

The first was travelling to Tokyo for the 39th Aikikai Embukai at the Tokyo Budokan. We were told to take our Dogi's but it wasn't until we arrived that I realised we would actually be taking part in a demonstration. Our demo was at 1pm but Saito Sensei was on at 5pm. He demonstrated the 10 Kumi Jo and then demonstrated various Sankyo techniques. When we got back to the Dojo we had a really good party; Hitohiro Sensei prepared sashimi and Saito Sensei gave us beer and sake. It was great to see Saito Sensei with his Yudansha just sitting, chatting and drinking. Occasionally he would break off his conversation with them and talk to the Uchi Deshi; it was a great night.

The second was my 1st Level Weapons Test. I had asked about taking it when I arrived in Iwama but no one had mentioned it since and I assumed that it had been forgotten and was actually quite relieved. On the Monday after the Tokyo trip Saito Sensei said that I would be taking the test the next morning. I didn't sleep too well that night. Saito Sensei decided to incorporate my test into the normal class, but had me stand right in front of him the whole time. I made the mistake of relaxing because the class was doing the suburi and aware with me and I think Saito Sensei decided that I had had it too easy because he made me do all twenty jo suburi, one after another, on my own in front of the whole class. The minute he asked me to start I forgot all the suburi and their names and it was only when someone whispered Choku Tsuki that I kicked into action. The class finished; Saito Sensei pointed towards me, said something to the Sempai Uchi Deshi and walked back to his house. A few of the Soto Deshi came up and said "well done" and that they were sure that I had passed, but it was not until an hour later that the Sempai Uchi Deshi told me that I had. The next morning Saito Sensei presented my certificate in the Dojo; the hairs on the back of my neck still stand up when I think about it.