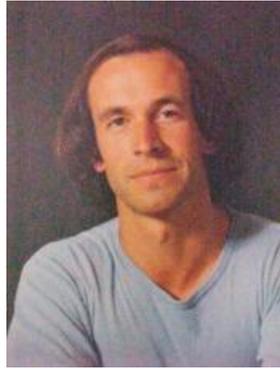


Featured Dojo-cho, September 2000



Steve Atkinson
Zanshin Aikido
Henderson, Nevada
Division 2

"Aikido practice leads us to places and relationships one could never anticipate, relationships that have been for me by comparison to those untouched by the aikido experience, more significant and sustained."



I started Aikido on January 4th, 1974. I had watched a class at Stanford being taught by Frank Doran Sensei just the day before. He could have been teaching volleyball and I would have signed up. His teaching style was thorough, articulate, and his technique, simply awesome... At that time, Doran Sensei taught at the Stanford Aikido Club, in the evenings at Woodside High School, and on the weekends at Aikido of San Francisco in partnership with Sensei Bill Witt and Sensei Bob Nadeau. Because he was so accessible, for the first year and a half of my aikido training, I trained on an average of twice a day, six days a week. In the fall of 1975, I went to Japan to train, beginning in Shingu with Hikitsuchi Sensei and then in Iwama with Saito Sensei. I returned four months later, and began a masters program while living in Berkeley. I trained primarily with Henry Yee Sensei and occasionally with Bruce Klickstein Sensei.

I am the Low-Level Waste Certification Official for the Department of Energy's Nevada Test Site (NTS). I assist in securing the disposal of so-called "legacy

wastes" from the above and below-ground atomic weapons testing that occurred over four decades at the NTS and that ended in 1992. A sticker with my signature on it goes on each barrel or box that's buried, and I feel so lucky to be part of the effort to put this contamination to rest in an environmentally-sound, final resting place. I am, I must add, in no way associated with the Yucca Mountain Project, the proposed NTS repository for the nation's high-level, primarily commercial nuclear reactor wastes.

Most memorable experience: One evening in Japan where I'd gone to train in the early winter of 1975, at that time 8th dan Saito Sensei gathered me up from the communal kitchen in Iwama that I'd called home for the previous two weeks and walked me up to the dojo.

As I understand Japanese cultural norms, being alone is considered a hardship, and Sensei's appearance in retrospect was clearly an act of compassion because, yes, I was feeling alone. I was the only gaijin in residence in Iwama at that time.

For nearly one hour, nonstop, the two of us coursed a fine and unaltering line up and down the mat doing nothing but "ki musubi no tachi," Saito Sensei nearly always in the role as uchitachi, the attacker, and me, uketachi, the defender.

Later that same night when he taught the regular evening practice, I was used as uke a number of times. As the only foreigner I already stood out. Having a full beard and long hair, I stood out even more. And yet that night, Saito Sensei chose to use me uke, privately before class, publically during class. It was then and remains an honor equal only to the day I stood as Doran Sensei's Best Man.