

Featured Dojo-cho, June 2003



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Division 1

In the spring of 1989, I finished playing collegiate basketball; little did I know how much my life was about to change. With plenty of energy and free time but with no desire to compete anymore I was searching for an outlet. My older brother, an ex-karateka, persuaded me to take an aikido beginner's course as it did not have competitions. I instantly loved it, as it was a new challenge both physically and mentally.

My aikido studies began at the Ottawa Aikikai, in Ottawa, Canada under the direction of Mary Heiny Sensei. I found it an incredible challenge and was astonished at how so many small people could move me around with relative ease. After studying in Ottawa for a short time I moved to Guelph, Ontario to further my education and found an aikido dojo on campus under the direction of Bruce Stiles Sensei. I trained there for a short time. Finally, my desire to train intensively outweighed my nervousness of travelling abroad and I took the big lunge and moved to Japan. In January of 1992, I moved to Akita City, Akita Prefecture in Japan to teach English and continue my study of Aikido.

In the winter of 1992, I met and became sotodeshi and later uchideshi under Kawabe Shigeru Shihan my first true teacher. I was exercising at a local community centre when a man passed by the weight room wearing a hakama. Unsure if this

was an aikidoka and knowing very little Japanese, I followed this man into a general purpose room. Once I entered the room I felt trapped with all eyes on me; nervously, I asked, "Aikido?" All nodded including the one who would become my teacher, guide and father while I lived in Japan, Kawabe Shigeru Shihan. For approximately two and a half years I lived in Akita and trained under Kawabe Shihan; for approximately one year I was uchideshi. During this time I was blessed to be invited to partake in a number of demonstrations and seminars in Japan with Kawabe Shihan including training in Iwama Machi, Ibaragi Prefecture under the direction of Saito Morihiro Shihan. Before leaving Japan, I met Pat Hendricks Sensei in Iwama Machi, who my teacher had praised for her weapons skills and as one of the best uke's he had ever seen. I inquired about her uchideshi program in the United States. After returning to Canada in 1994 and while finishing my university education and post-graduate work, I continued my uchideshi training yearly by either returning to Iwama or to San Leandro, California to train under Patricia Hendricks Sensei.

In 1997, I moved to Kitchener, Ontario, Canada for an economics teaching position at Eastwood Collegiate Institute. In Kitchener, I founded the Golden Triangle Aikido Shuren Dojo. I began teaching Aikido at a local high school under the community services umbrella two nights a week and as students wished to train more we rented mat space from a judo club. As our weapons classes became full and a safety issue arose, we opened our own 3,500 square foot location in downtown Kitchener, Ontario. We have 17 classes a week that run in the morning and evening, which include four children's classes. There are approximately 50 adult students, with 17 children in our program.

My most Memorable Aikido Experience

What is my most memorable aikido experience? This is an easy question to answer. In October of 2002, I had invited Kawabe Shigeru Shihan (my first teacher) and his wife to Canada for a seminar/testing and to be present at my wedding. Numerous family members, friends and aikidoka had come from abroad for these events. Sadly, Kawabe Shihan was ill and could not partake in a full seminar but demonstrated a few techniques and spoke of the importance of "kihon" and "kokoro". Kawabe Shihan also oversaw the testing of my first shodans. This made the testing especially memorable as he had tested me for my shodan in Japan. At this event my

parents met my teacher and his wife for the first time; it was a moving experience. My mother thanked Kawabe Shihan for helping me become the man I am today. Having my students, friends, family and my teacher present on that day and being in attendance on my wedding day will always be one of my most memorable experiences. I brought the three loves of my life together, my wife, my family, and Aikido.