

Featured Dojo-cho, May 2002



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Division 1

I first came into contact with Aikido when I was around 7 years old. My Uncle was a black belt in Aikido and I went to see his demonstration. I remember being fascinated with the fact that people were flying all over the place, but nobody got hurt. Also I remember seeing people rolling around and that it seemed so foreign to me. The first time that I was able to feel the aiki techniques were in my Uncle's basement. He had some mats down there and my cousins and me used to rough house it in the basement until someone would start crying and go upstairs, then suddenly an adult would come down and break it up. (Then usually there would be more than one of us crying.) I remember always feeling envious of my cousins who were members of the Dojo. I didn't formally join a dojo until I got my own transportation. The first school I was a member at was the New Jersey School of Self Defense, with Sensei Robert Danza.

In 1985 I saw Saito Sensei's books for the first time. Thereafter I saw some of his videos and I knew at that time that I wanted to go to the source to practice. I got my second job, sold everything that I owned, and got a letter of introduction to be uchideshi under Saito Sensei in Iwama. In April of 87' I made it to Iwama with the plan to stay one year as uchideshi. Oh by the way, I was very lucky in the fact that Pat Hendricks Sensei had come to Iwama 3 weeks after I arrived, and I feel the training was at a high level

because she was an experienced student of Saito Sensei. After the one year was over I decided to stay another year as soto-deshi to really solidify my experience. That year turned into another, and another, and a marriage, and (just one marriage), and finally it was 1999. One of the things that I started to notice was that Sensei kept asking me; "when are you going back to the USA?" Then one of the Sempai stated that I was selfish and that I needed to return home to share the knowledge that I had been given. I came to the conclusion that it was time for a change.

In August of 99 my family and I moved to Reno, Nevada where I took over as the Dojo-Cho of the Reno Aikido Co-op. In July of 2001 we moved the school to a larger, more centrally located facility and changed the name to "Aikido of Reno". We are blessed with an excellent student body, and we also offer classes at the University of Nevada Reno and also at Truckee Meadows Community College. Currently at the actual Dojo we have around 80 adults and 25 kids. Our current class schedule has 16 classes per week. We also have an active uchideshi program.

My most Memorable Aikido Experience

Probably my most memorable experience in Aikido would have to be one of my most emotionally intense experiences. A few years back Saito Sensei was diagnosed with esophagus cancer. It was really hard for me to deal with, like it like it was for everyone at the Dojo. When Sensei went into surgery the feeling in the school was really empty. He came out of the surgery fine, and we were allowed to visit after a couple of days. When I walked into the room Sensei had a big smile on his face and made a fist that he lifted in the air. Of course he couldn't talk, but he signaled that everything was OK! What a relief. Then he unfastened his pajama shirt and showed me the incision that went from near his belly button up to his throat. That was a hell of a cut! Two days later I was sitting seiza lined up waiting for class to start. The doors to the garden were open and you could hear slow foot steps coming down the stone filled path. It was Saito Sensei walking very slowly up the path from his house to the Iwama Dojo. I turned and looked at Miles Kessler, we both were trying to fight back tears. Sensei slowly made his way to the shomen and bowed us all in. He called me up for ukemi, I thought my heart was going to burst out of my Gi. After going through the basics, Sensei called me up and gestured to grab him in munedori.

That was the most difficult technique I have ever done.
When people ask me to describe KI, sometimes I use that
story.