

Featured Dojo-cho, December 2002



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I started aikido on tax day, April 15, 1989 with Donny Lyon Sensei. I was working out at a gym, doing the traditional workout stuff such as circuit weight training, swimming, racquetball, etc. and noticed a sign for a new class that was starting -- aikido. I was vaguely aware of it and the time fit well into my schedule, so I decided to see what it was all about. My late husband, Casey, was more familiar with it and also came that first day. Classes were held 2 mornings a week in an aerobic room and the first day there were about 50 people crammed in the space. I was fascinated by the gracefulness of the movements and, being an engineer, with the logic of it all. Before the end of the month the class was down to about 10 or 12 students, which was a much more manageable number and I was hooked. Within a year we moved to Clarendon Presbyterian Church, where we are to this day, and classes expanded to 6 days a week. I rarely missed a day. The more I studied it, the more hooked I became. I went to as many seminars as I could and was fortunate enough to attend a Saito Sensei seminar in my

early months. Also, the more I realized how fortunate I was to have Lyon Sensei as my teacher, who had a great balance of power and grace, and that he chose to share his knowledge with all of us.

I was one of Sensei Donny Lyon's first students, and other than the one year at the gym, Clarendon Presbyterian Church in Arlington has been our home. Donny passed away in 1996 and as sempei I made a promise to him I would do whatever I could to keep the dojo going. This was a difficult promise to make because I felt like I had so, so much more to learn and could I really teach anyone? My paying job is a civil engineer, where I design bridges. Although I love it, it is very demanding and the principles of aikido have helped me immensely. When talking to contractors, the ability to blend is a must. But Donny had poured so much of himself into the dojo and I didn't want to let him or anyone in the dojo down and reasoned that my little bit of knowledge was better than none. With the support of everyone (in particular Elizabeth Pennell (Weesie), Pat Hendricks, and my sempei Scott Burke) we thrived. Today we have about 20 people (unfortunately no children's classes) with classes 4 days week, plus the monthly Sunday weapons class in the park. Someday I would like to develop an aikido class for teenagers, especially females, who will soon be on their own, perhaps getting themselves in situations where the ability to defend themselves and the self-confidence gained from aikido will be a great asset.

My most Memorable Aikido Experience

My most memorable aikido experience is difficult to isolate. In 1991, I spent a month in Iwama. There is nothing quite like rolling out of bed, raking the grounds, then having a weapons training all before breakfast. And having this followed by experimenting with various techniques during the day with people from all around the world, then evening class, and finally hanging out in an aikido environment before falling into bed to start it all over again the next day. And then in 2000, I went to a week-long summer camp in Denmark with Saito Sensei. Again, the experience of living, breathing aikido with people from all around the world was a great experience.

Still to this day, I am in awe of the naturalness of the movements in aikido, its effectiveness, grace and power, and most important that it continues to fulfill me -- mind, body

and soul.