

Featured Dojo-cho, June 2017



Edgar Johansson

Denver Aikikai, Denver, Colorado
Division 2

I have been training in aikido since June of 1990 and have enjoyed this discipline and art in such a way that words cannot describe. In the late 60's and early 70's I enjoyed Kung Fu Theater in Baltimore, MD on our family's black and white TV. I was so impressed with the movement, the discipline and the commitment to a higher pursuit that I couldn't wait until I could have enough money and find a school where I could train. When I was 15 I found Ed Parker's Kempo Karate School in Baltimore, MD and learned to punch and kick but missed the lessons about control and discipline. I ended up in a number of fights and eventually stopped training. Street fights are painful and expensive.

In the late 80's I was still having troubles with fighting and bad behavior, which lead to run-ins with the law. These run-ins with the law eventually led me to a turning point in my life, and it was at the suggestion of a Police Officer and Judge that I was encouraged to change my ways. From this turning point it was suggested that I find a spiritual path that could take the place of my misguided past. I searched many different avenues and finally found aikido in June of 1990 and, except for short periods of time where I was injured, I have not left the mat since.

Having been asked who my most influential instructors have been I would be remiss if my first influence was not mentioned. When it was suggested to find a spiritual path to walk, a friend suggested that I read "The Spirit of Aikido" by Kisshomaru Ueshiba Doshu. This book opened up the door to a realm that

until then I had not been awake to. This book inspired me to find Baltimore Aikido and truly begin walking a new path of discipline and training. After starting aikido in June of 1990 I have had a very untraditional path; in fact I would describe myself as a mutt, a thief and a wanderer. I moved to Steamboat Springs, Colorado eight months after starting aikido, where a thirst to discover the secrets of aikido and what works for me took a hold and set me on the crazy course that has brought me to this day.

The top 10 influential instructors I have trained under would include Frank Doran Sensei, Cyndy Hayashi Sensei, Moriteru Ueshiba Doshu, Hiroshi Ikeda Sensei, Tres Hofmeister Sensei, Kei Izawa Sensei, Mitsugi Saotome Sensei, Shoji Nishio Sensei, Bernice Tom Sensei and Toby Threadgill Sensei. In addition I would say that I have been blessed to have trained not only with these recognized individuals but also I would include everyone who I have ever trained with as teachers. These teachers, friends and fellow students have taught me so much that the list would be almost infinite.

Denver Aikido/ Denver Aikikai is enjoying its 11th year at our current location: 1592 S. Broadway Denver CO 80210. The dojo is what I would call a "boutique dojo" meaning it is small (46 tatami) and focuses on principles and basics. The dojo opened here after losing our space at the University of Denver, where for the previous 6 years I had run a small college club. After 25 plus years of training aikido I teach three days a week and do my best to train at least two additional days. I travel regularly to train at seminars and invite/host many different instructors to the dojo. The club program that started as myself and one other person at University of Denver in 1999 has grown to a 30 person strong dojo. As a member of the California Aikido Association I could not be more proud of all the amazing men, women and children that over the years have made the dojo such a success.

One of the programs I am most proud of is the Aikido Summit. The Aikido Summit started 17 years ago, and we have had an amazing run ever since. The Summit came as the result of a conversation at a party for the Emperor of Japan's birthday in December of 2000. Seiji Tanaka Sensei, Kei Izawa Sensei and Ron Abo Sensei and I were discussing how nice it would be to get together and share the similarities versus the differences. After a few minutes of discussion these three Sensei's turned to me and said, "you do it and we will come"! Having never run a seminar, I went to Hiroshi Ikeda Sensei and asked what he thought, and he thought it would be great; so four months later the first Aikido Summit began. The format has been a one-day seminar with five or six different instructors from different organizations sharing similarities and views not normally seen at the same event. The format also includes a t-shirt, bento box lunch, taiko drummers (during lunch) and an after-event party. In order to keep with the original idea of keeping this event affordable we have been able to keep the cost well under one hundred dollars per person, making aikido affordable to as many as

possible. Our attendance numbers have ranged from fifty participants to almost one hundred and it has been a highlight of the year for the Colorado Aikido community for the past 17 years.

My Most Memorable Aikido Experience

When I reflect on my most memorable aikido experience I am overwhelmed with so many stories that it is hard to pick just one but if I had to pick one maybe the following experience would be near the top. After running the Tokyo office for the State of Colorado for four years (2000-2004) I was fortunate enough to be able to spend three weeks walking with the Yamabushi (Shugendo) in Yamagata Prefecture, Japan. Yamagata is Colorado's sister state and after asking some Japanese friends, including then Governor Takahashi, how I could spend more time at the Three Mountains of Dewa I was able to get invited and accepted into an extended mountain priest training program. Very few non-Japanese have been granted this honor over the past 1400 plus years that this practice has been active. I can directly tie my practice of aikido to the opportunity in opening this door that led to having this amazing experience. It is also here at Mount Haguro where my appreciation of the Crow/Raven (my favorite bird) became a focus that one-day was to become the sign/logo of the dojo. Fondly in my mind Denver Aikikai is called the "CrowJo".

In conclusion, or should I say as I turn the next page, I would like to say that my whole life has become an exploration of and appreciation of aikido and the budo way. I am very fortunate to have this life and aikido has been the path, along with being sober, that has exposed me to the principles and practical applications of how to be a better person. The motto of the Boys' Latin School of Maryland where I graduated in 1981 is: "esse quam videri" translated from Latin "to be and not to appear." Thank you to all the amazing folks who have helped me to be on this path and do my best to move in this direction.