

## Featured Dojo-cho, July 2017



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Division 1

I'd like to say I spent a lot of time researching several different martial arts, trying them out, and comparing before settling on aikido. But as it happened I was looking to get some physical activity in my life and a friend of mine had once said aikido was pretty cool. So in the fall of 1995 when I saw a flyer on the wall at my university, Appalachian State in Boone, NC I thought, "Huh. Guess I'll go check it out." Now it's 2017. I'm still training. And I run a dojo in Wheat Ridge, CO. Huh.

The University club was run by a couple of kyu students from different aikido styles (USAF and Ki Society if memory serves). One of them was a music teacher at the school. Most classes were run by sempai, and about once a month we would invite a black belt from "down the mountain" to come up and do a Saturday workshop which was always a treat.

In the spring of 1996 we hit the aikido jackpot: a new instructor, Ted Jones, came to the university. Ted had just returned from Akita Japan where he had obtained a 2nd degree black belt under Shigeru Kawabe Sensei. He didn't come to teach aikido, his area of expertise that got him a job at our university was fitness. But we didn't have to spend much time convincing him to instruct our little club.

Ted sensei introduced me to Iwama Aikido. He gave us interesting things to do with our sticks. We were instructed to make weird yelling sounds when we did techniques. I loved it.

When I travelled to Hirakata Japan (between Kyoto and Osaka) in the fall of 1996 for a university exchange program, there was no question: I wanted to train at a dojo that practiced Iwama Aikido. My Japanese was awful upon arrival so I had my language partner from school call some dojos and ask the all important question: "Are you a student of Morihiro Saito?"

Takanari Higuchi sensei's *Takemusu Aikido* dojo was three floors up in a small building near Sanjo station in Kyoto where he and his wife also lived and ran a business. We trained open hand in the small, 9-12 tatami space Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. Saturdays we would meet up at a place called *Budo Center* for weapons practice. The Budo Center was built in the late 1800s and still houses several different martial arts practices daily.

When I returned to the States in the summer of 1997, I bounced around dojos for a while before settling in Denver, CO at Nippon Kan in 1999. In 2009 I left to train at Kiryu Aikido with Andrew Blevins sensei. Going from a large dojo with many different instructors teaching a melting pot of approaches and flavors to a small group focused on a single style was like going to aikido graduate school. Blevins sensei pushed me to focus my training and make the small changes that produced significant improvements.

When Andrew sensei moved out to California in 2013 for work, my wife Tyffany and I decided the time was right to start our own dojo in Wheat Ridge, CO under the guidance of Pat Hendricks Shihan. We currently have 15 regular adult members at Kinjo Dojo and a small but energetic group of 4 in our kid's class.

### **Most Memorable Aikido Experience**

After practice one evening in Japan, sensei said we would be going out to clean the temple dojo and everyone was encouraged to come out and help. Since this was my first time hearing of a *Temple Dojo*, I was intrigued. He didn't have to ask twice.

I took the Keihan line through Kyoto to the last stop. I had never gone past the Sanjo stop before. From there I took another train to *Kurama* which is a small mountain town north of Kyoto. My train was full of hikers. When we got to Kurama and everyone else was stretching, I made my way to Kurama-dera which housed the "temple dojo."

Not even sure I was in the right place, I wandered inside and absorbed the silence and rich history oozing from the walls. After a while the others showed up, and we proceeded upstairs... and then went up some more stairs. One more level, and into the "penthouse suite" of Kurama-dera where there was indeed a dojo space. We bowed in and trained. Atop a Japanese temple, on real tatami, we practiced aikido. I felt like I was in a movie.

Afterwards we went into a different room and read a Buddhist chant. Then we cleaned the dojo. Nothing of significance happened that day. We trained. We cleaned. We hung out. But the day is forever seared into my memory because it was all new to me, and it was one of the rare times in my life where I really experienced *being there*.