

Featured Dojo-cho, August 2017



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Division 3

I discovered aikido in my 30s when I found myself ridiculously fit from running, bushwalking and kayaking, but getting less and less flexible from such linear sports. So, I spent a few months looking at activities to improve my flexibility - dance, climbing, gymnastics as well as many martial arts. By chance I saw an advertisement for an aikido demonstration, and was instantly hooked by the extraordinary beauty of it. This was Henry Lynch sensei (then nidan, now rokudan) who'd moved down from Auckland to set up a Wellington dojo (and do some work). So, in 1993 I became the first member of Riai Aikido Wellington, studying there for seven years under Henry sensei until he returned to Auckland. We then carried on under various 'home-grown' Wellington instructors, the senior of whom is Matt Tebbs sensei (sandan). When he decided to take a break from aikido a few years ago I took over as dojo cho. Matt is back instructing once a week now, and we have the support of some great and very active nidans and shodans to help with our adult, teenager and childrens programmes.

My main influences beyond Henry and Matt senseis have been Danny McIntyre sensei (godan - Henry's senior student in Riai Aikido Auckland), but especially Robert Nadeau shihan (8th dan) and his students – we've been hugely fortunate that he comes down under once every year or two, and that I can often attend his camps in California (a double pleasure as my sister lives in Berkeley).

So, Henry Lynch and Robert Nadeau have been by far my most influential teachers, and long may that remain so...

City Dojo

Riai Aikido Wellington had been operating from long-term tenures of community halls for over 20 years when, in Earthquake-prone Wellington, our dojo hall was suddenly declared 'seismically unfit'. That provided the impetus to really get moving and achieve our long-term dream of a dedicated dojo, which is now up and running in amicable partnership with the Wellington judo club. It a beautiful, expansive dojo looking out over Wellington Harbour, and with my love of woodwork I've had a lot of fun constructing the kamiza and weapons racks and other paraphernalia. Do come and visit when next in New Zealand's windy capital.

More background...

Well into my aikido journey I discovered the Feldenkrais Method of somatic improvement. It's as difficult to describe what this is to those that haven't experienced it as it is to describe aikido, so I won't attempt here. I've now been a practitioner of the Feldenkrais Method for some years, and it is the single activity off the mat that has – and continues – to really improve my embodiment of aikido.

I find aikido totally addictive, with my interest piqued in ever-changing proportions by the combination of effectiveness, beauty, physicality, philosophy, friendship, cooperation and the wonderment of ever bettering oneself and one's control of self. My current focus is perhaps, fueled by knowledge gained from studying the Feldenkrais Method, working on the 'neuroscience of aikido', of how to take uke's centre under the radar of their consciousness. But the main thing, apart from the pleasure of teaching and watching others grow, is that the learning and self-improvement seems endless.

Apart from aikido and Feldenkrais, I keep up my hill and mountain running and cycling, but my other main passion is expedition sea kayaking, often along remote coasts of developing countries: then, I have at times been reassured that I have access to a modicum of non-destructive self-defence skills (and can run fast).

My Most Memorable Aikido Experience

The only time I have had to use my aikido martially happened recently on a sea kayaking trip to Antarctica, sailing there from Argentina on a yacht with seven of us kayakers and two crew. On our return trip, our first mate went 'loopy' and attacked our lady skipper, and I had to restrain him. He was running down the narrow galley presumably seeking the fresh air of deck (in the expanse of the southern ocean he couldn't go much further). I just extended out my arm to blend with his, thinking I could easily move to ikkyo or sankyo. To my surprise he just kept on pushing through and I relaxed more and more until he calmed down and stopped. Just 'being' in relaxed, centred extension really works! Although, he was known to refer to me thereafter as 'that nazi hitman'.