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Division 3

I began training in 1993 on the recommendation of Eric Lerhman, nidan, who insisted I give it a try. I hesitated, but finally agreed to check it out. When I walked into sensei Robert Nadeau's dojo in San Francisco for the first time I had no idea what I was seeing, but somehow the art resonated with me: the physicality, the conversations on the mat, the focus on centering and settling and improving how we can be more effective in the world. Before long I was training four or five days a week and never looked back.

Nadeau sensei shared and explored O Sensei's process of personal transformation: easing the prominence of the I/mind/ego and allowing something else, something universal and inexplicable to "have a turn" in our practice, in our techniques. And whenever I could actually set my own agenda aside, I found that my technique suddenly took another step forward. But of course, the moment I tried to "own" this new insight or improvement, to make it mine, it would slip away again.

I was raised in a small Louisiana town where being religious was a given and no answers were to be questioned. But this kind of life didn't work for me! I left home as early as possible, but the questions I had about what these teachings were good for stuck with me. I never could find anyone in my family or hometown community who wanted to explore these questions. But as soon as I started training aikido, I found my community under Nadeau sensei was focused precisely on the practice of transforming from mere mortal to full realization of our divine identity. Aikido illuminated the religious instruction that had been pressed into me early on. For the first ten years of my aikido life, I was fortunate to have not only Nadeau sensei leading the exploration into O Sensei's teachings and process, but also Nick Scoggin sensei honing our techniques and etiquette, and Richard Moon sensei focusing on taking our aikido training back out into the rest of our lives in practical ways. What a wonderful combination of teachers! In 2004, Moon sensei retired from teaching weekly aikido classes in Marin County, CA, so I and two others took over his dojo. I was the junior instructor, and I took primary responsibility for the children's classes for four years. In 2008 I moved to Decatur, GA, where I started a dojo for children and adults. Aikido Decatur now has a thriving program for students from kindergarten on up. We welcome all students who have a sincere desire to practice and explore O Sensei's process and techniques for making the world a more peaceful place.

My Most Memorable Aikido Experience

In 2004 Richard Moon sensei invited my extended family to an introductory class as his gift to me for my wedding. All my aunts and uncles and cousins and their children—about 40 people in total—excitedly stepped onto the mat in order to see what aikido is about. However, my mother and father refused to try it; they wanted to sit on the sidelines. Frustrated, in the dressing room I asked Richard sensei what I should do, since my parents wanted to watch instead of trying the class. In three words, Richard reminded me of the essence of aikido: “Let them watch.” Even after ten years of training, I had to be reminded of the most basic principle of the Art of Peace: blend with what is rather than trying to force others into doing things our way.