

## Featured Senior Instructor, January 2018



### **Mitch Johnson, 5th Dan**

Aikido of Monterey, Monterey, California  
Division 2

I began my Aikido training in 1989. Prior to that, I had driven my car past Aikido of Monterey twice a day for at least 5 years, thinking each time on the way to work, and then again on the way home, "Someday I'm going to check that out..." I was working one day when a friend of a friend came into the shop, handed me a flier and said, "I think you might like this." The flier was for an "Introduction to Aikido" seminar... and here we are.

I have been blessed to find not only the perfect martial art for me, but also the best teachers. Danielle Smith Sensei possesses the perfect blend of technique and spiritual depth. Dennis Evans Sensei is fierce, and hard, and funny... and has managed to keep me at the edge of the abyss without letting me fall in. Michael Smith Sensei was a brown belt when I started and has consistently been a guide to what I want my technique to become.

Cathy Jaeger Sensei, Sam Drennan Sensei and I all came up within a year or so of each other in the dojo and I could not have been in better company.

I am fortunate to be a student of Doran Shihan, whose technique, whose teaching, and whose example I emulate to the best of my ability.

Any views, thoughts, or opinions expressed are, however, the sole responsibility of the author.

I noticed early that the aikidoka who looked like they knew something I wanted to learn always had very good ukemi, so ukemi has been the focus of my training. There are some of you out there that I've trained with that may dispute that. Honestly, I was trying...

I found the bokken and jo early and it has 'informed' my training throughout. I taught the morning weapons classes for many years and continue to include them in the classes I currently teach.

I've been involved with the kids' program in the dojo for several years and really enjoy it. If you want to learn a technique extensively, and occasionally seen it done in an unimaginable way....

## **My Most Memorable Aikido Experience**

Sam Drennan and I were in the habit of being one of the uke for every dan demonstration randori that we could manage to insert ourselves into. It was not unusual for us to press hard and for one or the other of us to take the person demonstrating down. Cathy Jaeger was demonstrating that day, I think it was her nidan demo, and we both hurried to be in that line. As Cathy bowed and we heard, "Hajime!", we rushed in, 2 charging bulls. We had angle, we had momentum, we had power, and we were coming in fast. We reached her simultaneously, not giving her a chance to get to the flank. It was a done deal, she was toast. My hands were on her gi, and I remember feeling a little sorry.... as she stepped between us, then seeing my feet profiled against the dojo ceiling and then hearing Sam hit the mat right next to me. After that I always felt that the mat had a slight indentation at that spot.

OK, another.

I was a newbie, 1<sup>st</sup> kyu, shodan, somewhere around there. I was at the San Rafael Summer Camp and walking toward the dojo with Tom Gamble Sensei, someone who I held (still hold) some regard for. I was talking to him about training in Japan, wondering how it would be different than the training I had experienced so far. At some point, he said, "You can go." Having been 'dismissed', I said, "Thank you Sensei!", and started to walk away. "No", he said. "I meant you can go to Japan!"