

Featured Dojo-cho, May 2018



Kayla Feder

Aikido of Berkeley, Berkeley, California
Division 2

I began training in Aikido at age 9, in 1972, after accompanying and observing a 3rd grade friend who was practicing in the Aikido Institute's children's class. I'd been searching for something more deeply meaningful than baseball and other sports in which I was participating.

I fell in love with Aikido almost instantly; the dojo's serene space and vibrant energy fascinated me and drew me in. I vividly remember racing home to tell my mother that I had to pursue this extraordinary practice and I simply could not wait.

Mom signed me up that evening.

My first instructor guided me well. Bruce Klickstein was both gifted and flawed as a children's instructor.

At age thirteen, I met Morohito Saito Sensei at a San Francisco seminar. This meeting inspired me to decide that I would go to Iwama, Japan as soon as I graduated from high school. It became my dream to find my way toward being a full-time uchi deshi for Saito Sensei as soon as possible. That dream became my great fortune when I served as uchi deshi for Saito Sensei five times over a period of fifteen years. I also was his otomo, or bag carrier, and his main uke on three occasions during his intensive seminars taught in Europe.

I was honored in 2003 to be awarded 6th dan by Patricia Hendricks Shihan, through Hombu Dojo.

In 1981, at age 17, I started my first dojo in Benicia, California. I began by teaching at Benicia's youth activity center. Attendance grew rapidly, inspiring me to rent a space and name it Aikido of Benicia. I ran it for 11 years.

In 1992, I opened Aikido of Berkeley, a full-time dojo offering twenty classes per week (12 adult classes and 8 children's classes). I'm also honored to host Aikido of Berkeley's full time uchi deshi program.

Although my basic practice is based on Saito Sensei's foundational approach (deliberate, specific basic movement), my teaching and training also consider influences from Frank Doran, Bob Nadeau, Terry Dobson, Hiroshi Ikeda, Yoshimitsu Yokota, and Motomichi Anno Senseis.

My Most Memorable Aikido Experience

It's challenging to limit my response to a single exceptional experience, as I recall so many amazing and inspiring adventures from the past forty-five years in Aikido. I have had dozens of moments, both on and off the mat, which have enlightened, inspired, and mystified me. One encounter that stands out (and which I wrote in the journal to which I was faithful during the time) took place during my first week-long San Rafael (California) summer retreat, when I was 12. At the beginning of our afternoon practice, Terry Dobson Sensei bowed to me. Of course, I knew it was a great honor to work with him, since he was a distinguished guest instructor that year; however, I initially didn't understand that he also was unusual and gifted in that he had trained directly with O-Sensei. After class, Terry Sensei shared about some mystical experiences he had with O-Sensei; it was amazing to hear these stories. Later, as we were having great fun and training hard, suddenly, Terry Sensei stopped, and asking me to sit in seiza across from him, he took my hands in his. He then told me, with great earnestness, that he thought I was special and that my Aikido and body hold a perfect combination of form, flow, and depth. He emphatically insisted that I must continue to harness these qualities, always, and that I would go far in my teaching and training. It was both a confirmation and a blessing.

When we stood up to continue training, I felt as though we had entered a bubble, as if nothing and no one else existed. During that resumed training together, I felt as if something beyond our earthly minds and bodies was engaging. We seemed on an invisible track, with each move flowing through us organically, effortlessly. The rest of that class was vibrant and unforgettable for us both. From that day, until Terry Sensei passed away, we maintained a wonderfully heartfelt connection.

What keeps me training and teaching are the qualities from that story: Aikido's ability to inspire study of a practical, nuanced form, coupled with take musu, or creative spontaneous flow. The depth of Aikido seems to go on infinitely, and I continue to be awed by the feeling of being a beginner, again, nearly every time I step on the mat. I feel so fortunate to have found this amazing art at such a young age, as it has colored and enriched my entire view of life.

I am eternally grateful to O-Sensei for giving the world Aikido, an art founded in teaching humanity peace through budo. I am fortunate and honored to be able to support myself and my son by teaching this art about which I am so very passionate.