

Featured Dojo-cho, April 2017



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Division 1

TRAINING HISTORY

I started training in martial arts as the only girl in my Tae Kwon Do school at around the age of six. I didn't last longer than a year, due to what was viewed by my parents as an 'extremely' intense lead instructor, so my parents made the decision to continue my training at West Coast Tae Kwon Do. Being the only child in my family interested in martial arts also made it quite difficult, as it was quite taxing on the family to be taking one child across town several days a week. Throughout my childhood and on, I participated in multiple activities: softball, basketball, tennis, rock climbing, snowboarding, skiing, boxing... Finally out on my own for college, I immediately began searching for another martial arts school. When I told my mother about my new activity her reply, in the most loving and humorous way, was "Again? I thought we were done with this."

While I was looking, it was clear that I wasn't eager to participate in the competition aspect. Years of competition sports had burned me out on the focus of winning. My first preference had always been Japanese martial arts, but I was also fascinated by Kung Fu/Wushu. As a busy college student, time and money to train were not on my side for most of the schools I found.

In my Japanese class at the university I had a friend who often wore a beat-up tan shirt from Aikido of Wells with a screen print of a man with a bokken. I later learned that the man depicted on the t-shirt was Morihiro Saito Sensei, a student of O-Sensei. I went to

that dojo and loved the art immediately. Again finances stood in the way. Six months of saving later, I officially signed up to train at Aikido of Reno under Vince Salvatore Sensei. That was 2002.

At first, my training schedule was inconsistent due to work, school, and life in general. Eventually, Aikido became part of my regular groove. I began attending five or six days per week. About six months into my training, my lease was up, I had a bit of a falling out with one of my roommates, and a friend from the dojo had encouraged me to become uchideshi at the dojo. Not really understanding what it meant, I dove in to the opportunity. I was uchideshi for about a year before having to return to a full-time work and school schedule.

In 2005, Vince Sensei organized a group trip to train in Japan. Being uchideshi, I wanted to experience more of what that commitment had to offer, so Vince Sensei arranged for me to stay and train for an extra couple of weeks beyond the scheduled time. And the weeks as uchideshi in Japan felt like something I had never experienced in training before. Something about the practice was so direct, yet subtle when compared to how I had been practicing before. Shortly after my return I tested for and earned my Shodan. For the next few years I trained and traveled quite a bit at various seminars and workshops both in Reno and in other dojos. In 2007, the stars aligned again and I was able to visit Japan a second time. This time I was able to visit Osaka where I had a wonderful experience training with Seiseki Abe Sensei. I also was able to go to Hombu dojo where I was lucky enough to train with Doshu personally for a few moments.

HENDERSON AIKIDO

Henderson Aikido opened in 2009. At the time, we were renting a tiny dance studio and a children's facility. Some days it would just be me there. Others there would be my one or two consistent students. It's funny. When I first moved to Vegas, I was still a college student and I intended to train at one or more of the three schools available in the valley. For various reasons, mostly the sheer distance and travel time, I was unable to become a member with two of the schools. I never actually found the third.

Over the course of several years, we've managed to build ourselves from a very small school in a not so 'polished' location, to a well-respected and established business in the city of Henderson. I am constantly grateful for the truly outstanding effort of everyone at the dojo to strive for the best possible representation and true depth of understanding of Aikido. My students are so much more than just martial artists. We are a strong and diverse community that inspires physical improvement and personal growth in each other. We recently had three students test for their Shodan under me and Vince Salvatore Sensei and I could not be more proud of their performance. We are very lucky to have them in our school as sempai.

MEMORABLE AIKIDO EXPERIENCE

I've met a number of instructors I consider myself extremely lucky to both know personally and experience their Aikido.

How could I pick just one? I think my strongest memory from training in Reno was when I was 3rd kyu and one of our Black belts, Reggie, asked me to uke for his Nidan exam.

At that point, I hadn't even uke'd for a kyu-rank exam and I was obviously nervous. On top of that, he specifically asked me to be his weapons partner. I hated weapons at the time. I felt clumsy and disconnected when I used them. And yet, this guy wanted me to learn Nidan level weapons to perform in front of, not just our sensei, but Pat Hendricks Sensei, the head of CAA Division 1. This became increasingly nerve wracking when several of the black belts warned me, "Yea, so, weapons are her thing. So, don't mess it up..." This was the biggest responsibility I ever felt and I am still extremely honored and humbled by Reggie's request.

Reggie, his uke Norm (one of the tallest, strongest, and lightest fellows I have met), and myself spent a very long time working on the weapons. The morning of the exam, while running through the Kumi Jo, I remember Norm asked me "Hey, can you take a high fall from here?" Probably! "Wanna practice?" Nah, if it happens, it happens. Several hours later during his exam, I unintentionally took almost exclusively high falls. They felt natural, connected, and safe. I attribute this to Reggie taking very good care of me.

Training with Reggie for that exam had a lasting impact on how I would train, and what I learned during that time really set the standard for how I prepare for an exam or demonstration—it even helps me when preparing my students for a promotion to this day.