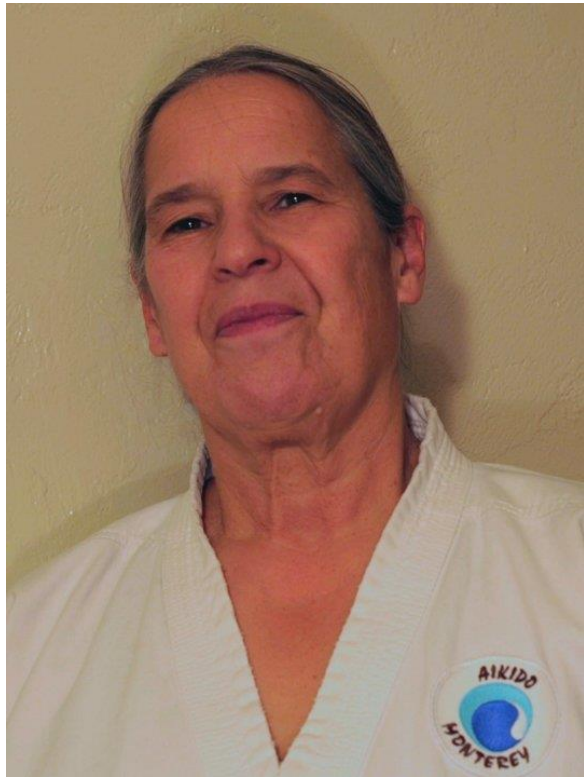


Featured Senior Instructor, January 2019



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In 1989 I was invited to attend the graduation of a Model Mugging class, the self defense and empowerment program that my female employer had just completed. Having been told from a very young age what girls could not, or were not allowed to do, I was intrigued to finally see a group of men and women exploring a woman's ability to fight when challenged in an attack situation. I had personally experienced the soul crushing effect of domestic violence and signed up for the next class which was held at Aikido of Monterey. As it turned out, most of the instructors were martial artists and when Aikido was offered at the Grange hall in Big Sur I courageously signed up my 9-year-old son, Kodi. Judith Roth was a shodan from Aikido of Monterey and held classes for the wild children of Big Sur

followed by an adult class of mostly Aikido moms. I would watch the end of class when I picked up my son after work.

I was a single mom living on an isolated ridge top in Big Sur, tending bar at a popular local restaurant and watering hole. As much as I loved the beauty of the place, and my fun working environment, I was at a low point, personally, trying to manage my life. It seemed like everything was a struggle or a fight. One day, Judith said to her class, "Aikido is a way of perceiving a situation not as an attack but rather as a gift of energy." I thought I might benefit from that way of thinking. I signed up for the next session and began my training on September 5, 1989.

When I began my study of Aikido I had a conscious desire to change the way I move, to change my body language, alter the image I seemed to project through that movement and my physical presence. I wanted to learn to exude confidence and grace, power and compassion, like the people I'd met at Model Mugging and the Aikido dojo. I didn't realize it was going to be an inside job and such a challenging one. I didn't expect to encounter my own dark side, all the fear, all the anger. Judith Roth, Tom Elliot and Lora King were my devoted Big Sur sensei, travelling Hwy 1 twice a week to bring Aikido to our remote little outpost. After about six months of training in Big Sur I also started training "in town" at Aikido of Monterey.

Danielle Smith and Dennis Evans were my teachers; Michael Smith was a brown belt. It was a 60 mile round trip that I made as often as possible for years.

Here's something I wrote in my essay for shodan: I'm beginning to understand O Sensei's message about defeating the enemy within. The techniques we practice and the situations we simulate give me my own clear picture, how I operate under certain circumstances and how I react to conflict. The opportunity we have to experience each other through the techniques we practice and the dojo experience itself allow us to evaluate our progress and personal growth. We are afforded a safe space to seek to embody our values. We learn to express and receive energy, to heal the separation we may feel.

My experience at Aikido of Monterey has enriched my life beyond measure and helped me to make better life choices in my work and personal life. Developing close personal relationships in the dojo over years of training, sharing a path and learning as others navigate the challenges in their own lives has provided me with positive alternatives as well as pitfalls to avoid. The leadership, skill, and spiritual guidance, the love and friendship extended to me by my teachers Danielle Smith and Dennis Evens, my most devoted sempai and teacher, Michael Smith, and fellow students have made them my family of choice. Our dojo's relationship with Doran sensei and his loving patronage over all these years has been something I have cherished as well as my connection to the larger Aikido community and all the amazing people I have met in dojo across the country. I have also been especially inspired by the teachings of Mary Heiny sensei, one of my teacher's earliest teachers.

My Most Memorable Aikido Experience

One of my most memorable Aikido experiences was referenced by Mitch Johnson in his "Spotlight " profile. I have always felt that Danielle sensei's method of randori was the only way to not only survive a multiple attack but to assure the care and protection of one's attackers. It involves positioning oneself so that the two uke left standing, after the first uke was thrown, were in line with each other and unable to reach you at the same time. When I was asked to demonstrate randori for my nidan exam, my good buddies Mitch and Sam were determined to drag me down to the mat. It had happened to Sam in his demo so now that was their job. Somehow in my randori Mitch managed to get me in a bear hug from behind, and had he not successfully pinned both my arms I would have tried the hammer fist to the groin I'd learned in Model Mugging. Dennis sensei called a stop to the first randori as I dragged Mitch across the mat behind me unable to shake him with the other two ukes up again and ready to pounce. Well, that was an embarrassing end to an otherwise acceptable demo. As we bowed to each other thinking we were finished, Dennis again said, "hajime!" and Mitch and Sam sprang up and barreled in so fast I was barely standing when they arrived. Sorry,

again, Model Mugging and the deadly heel palm, one for each of them. I was actually ashamed to have used that technique yet the dojo erupted in applause. So much for my high ideals about the art of peace. I completed that randori with a smile on my face and a slightly smaller gift of energy from Sam and Mitch.

Please note: no uke were harmed in the aforementioned demonstration due to the well-developed ukemi of the participants.