

Featured Dojo-cho, December 2001



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In 1972, while living in Cleveland, Ohio, I read an article in "Atlantic Monthly Magazine" that talked about "ki", an energy that we all have and can use instead of muscular strength. The article specifically mentioned the arts of Tai Chi and Aikido. I decided that if I ever found an Aikido or Tai Chi class that I would join. In the early fall of 1973 I quit my management job at Ohio Bell and moved back to California where I planned on teaching skiing during the winter months. In Monterey, I joined Dennis Evans, whom I had been dating while living in Ohio. Dennis was the clinical director for the mental health center at Community Hospital and had become involved with a self-defense class for health workers being taught by Stan Prandin, who at that time was a sandan in, guess what! -- Aikido! The self-defense course had ended and Stan started an on-going Aikido group, sharing a school with a local Judo/Jujitsu sensei. I signed up for Aikido, letting go of my skiing ambitions, and never looked back.

After six months of sharing space with the Judo/Jujitsu school, we began training in

our own space, Stan's two-car garage. We cleaned it up, put down mats, and the car had to find another home. As a beginner I was training several hours a day, 7 days a week - we dubbed it the "Aiki Lab." It was also the first dojo for me, Dennis Evans, and Tom Gambell -- what a group!

Those early days were very exciting. Aikido was still new. The highest ranked people around, like Stan Pranin, Bob Nadeau and Frank Doran were all sandan. We all believed that Aikido would change the world and that we were part of that change. Significant for me was the fact that there were very few women practicing aikido then, and only one yudansha, Betsy Hill. I remember that about half of our 40 members expressed astonishment at the suggestion that there were women black belts. I felt relieved and vindicated at the appearance, in 1974, of Mary Heiny, sandan, and Linda Hultgren (Holiday), shodan, both just back from training with Hikitsuchi Sensei in Shingu, Japan. I really got to appreciate the concept of role models and the responsibility of being one. Mary Heiny graciously agreed to come down from Santa Cruz once a week and teach a class, just for women, on Saturday at the local college. We drew the interest of a number of local women, including one 17-year old, Pat Hendricks. Following the very first class, Mary told me to "just review" what she had taught. That was when I discovered that I was to teach two classes during the week. So, there I was, a new blue belt, and conducting Aikido classes.

I received my shodan in 1976. Very shortly thereafter, Stan Pranin left the area and I became an orphaned sempai. Linda Holiday and Jack Wada made weekly trips from Santa Cruz to teach us until a year later when two more from our group, including Dennis Evans, were awarded yudansha. During this time, and for years to come, we received generous guidance and support from Robert Nadeau, Frank Doran, and Bruce Klickstein. I continued to be sempai and, for most of the time, we made decisions based on consensus. We continuously kept the dojo going in order for us to keep up our own training. In 1983, I realized that students were going for shodan who really considered us as their teacher. At this time, I decided to grow into the title of sensei. I have been sensei and dojo-cho of Aikido of Monterey, since that time. Also, in 1983, I ceased to be an orphan and gratefully acknowledged as my teacher Frank Doran Sensei.

Since the "Aiki Lab", we have moved five times and have been at our current location since January 1992. We offer 20 hours of daytime and evening classes. We

have 60 adults and 50 youth. I had no idea when Heiny Sensei asked me to review classes that I would still be teaching 28 years later. I am grateful of AOM and how we have all grown. It is in the faces of the new students that I see the original excitement about Aikido and its potential. Little by little it is changing the world.

My most Memorable Aikido Experience

When my son Colin was a baby, I would take turns at seminars training and taking care of him. Once when we were at a Saotome Sensei seminar at Aikido West, I was holding Colin on the sidelines. Saotome Sensei had been teaching moving in a relaxed natural manner. He came over to me and held out his arms to take Colin. I handed him over. Saotome proceeded to take him onto the mat and while cradling Colin in his arms, did a three-person ran-dori. Colin just looked up at him as Saotome rocked him from side to side, sending uke flying. Over the years, whenever he would see Colin, he would gesture, as if picking him up and rocking him, in remembrance of that time. It became a very funny sight as Colin grew to be 6'2" tall.