

## Featured Dojocho, August 2018



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Division 2

I spent most of the first 40 years of my life in the Los Angeles area. For most of that time, I lived in or near the San Fernando Valley.

My first introduction to the martial arts was with karate training when I was about 15. After a while, it became clear to me that karate was not the martial art for me. I didn't know what art would work, but I knew I wanted to train.

So, my best friend and I did some research. We found a magazine that had an article about different martial arts and how to choose one for yourself. The article had information about aikido. It told about how aikido is the martial art of peace. But it also said something like, "even though aikido is about peace, don't mess with them!"

I wondered how an art could be peaceful but powerful enough that I shouldn't mess with them. I had to check aikido out.

This was about 1972. There was only one aikido dojo in all of the San Fernando Valley. My friend and I visited the dojo. The Sensei wouldn't let us on the mat that first day. This was the first time I saw aikido, and I was mesmerized. I couldn't believe how beautiful it was and how much fun it looked to be. Despite my obvious enthusiasm, Sensei would not let us on the mat that first day.

While my friend was not interested, I returned quickly and loved training. I trained for a few years, until marriage, parenthood, law school and being a lawyer intervened. I vowed to return. It took much longer to return to formal training than I had imagined.

We moved to Nevada City, in Northern California, in 1995. My son Alex one day came home from school with a question. He said that one of the teachers at school was offering an aikido class. Could he attend? Yes, what a wonderful idea, I said.

Very soon after that, Alex came home and asked if he could train at the dojo. I agreed again. Except this time, I told him I'd go with him. I have continued training since then.

That dojo was Mountain Wind Aikido in Nevada City, led by Jan Kirkpatrick Sensei. The school teacher was Asia Currie, who is still a member of my dojo. After regularly traveling to Aikido of Ashland, I was honored to become Michael Friedl Sensei's student. Friedl Sensei continues to be my teacher to this day.

In 2007, Steve Baker and I opened Aikido'Ka in Grass Valley, California. The dojo is an absolutely wonderful group of people training together and building an incredible community. I continue to be amazed at how much fun we all have together.

## **My Most Memorable Aikido Experience**

In 2013, Michael Friedl Shihan and I became the co-hosts of Aiki Summer Retreat. Aiki Summer Retreat has been held annually for more than 30 years. It is one of the very few immersive, week-long aikido retreats left in the country. Until 2013, the Retreat had been hosted by Frank Doran Shihan or Robert Nadeau Shihan. Hiroshi Ikeda Shihan had been their guest instructor for many years. This was quite the act to follow, to say the least.

For many years, the Retreat had been the highlight of each year for me. Indeed, many of my most memorable aikido experiences occurred at the Retreat. I have met so many amazing people and made wonderful friends there.

I was really nervous about co-hosting the Retreat. Michael Friedl Sensei's involvement, of course, made the Retreat possible and managing things immeasurably easier. But he had his responsibilities and I had mine. I took my part of the responsibilities very seriously. I was absolutely intent on helping make the Retreat as good an experience as possible for everyone and maintaining the high standards Doran and Nadeau Shihans set.

Doran Sensei was at that first Retreat for a few days, with him teaching on the last day he was there.

As the week progressed, we had our challenges, but people were having a very good time. The instructors were fantastic and it was a safe, fun environment. Everyone was learning.

After Doran Sensei taught a wonderful class, he told Friedl Sensei and I that he wanted to speak with us. We left the gymnasium where the training was happening and went into the foyer.

Doran Sensei has devoted much of his life to spreading aikido through his dojo, his teaching and through the Retreat. Sensei told us that he had been very concerned about the Retreat and the health of aikido overall.

He said that after being at the Retreat, watching the community, the teaching, the learning and the fun, he felt very good about where things were headed. In fact, Sensei told us that he felt that aikido and the Retreat were in really good hands. He thanked us, telling us that he felt good about the future of aikido.

That was, indeed, a memorable moment.