

Featured Dojo-cho, July 2003



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Aikido @ Noon, Menlo Park, CA
Division 2

I heard about Aikido in the early 1970's. I was a partner in a bookstore called the Seed Center on University Ave in downtown Palo Alto. Our focus at the store was books on awareness and consciousness and there was quite a Renaissance happening in the bay area at that time. Many people came to the bookstore to buy books on many of these subjects. From the people who frequented the store, I used to hear about these guys from Stanford University who trained in Aikido and I always had it in the back of mind to go check it out.

So I went to a class at Stanford one day. It was the first time I ever saw Frank Doran Sensei. I trained in a general class for the first time. I remember the mat was very crowded, that everyone there was wearing a gi except for me, and I couldn't figure out why these people were falling down. My first experience was kind of strange and I did not go back again for a while.

My real beginning happened after I met my wife, Molly. She was

a second or first kyu when we met and had also just recently graduated from Model Mugging. I saw her Model Mugging graduation and was very impressed with her countenance on and off the mat. She was very careful not to pressure me to come and train myself, yet always made the invitation available to me. Since Aikido was such a big part of Molly's interest and we wanted to do things together, I came to the dojo (Aikido West) and began to learn the basics. This was around 1987. I was immediately welcomed into the dojo by this great community of people. I remember both Frank Doran Sensei and Cyndy Hayashi Sensei spending time with me as I learned the basics. I remember spending quite a bit of time with Cyndy, both on and off the mat, because she lived just down the street from us. I was very lucky and she helped me a lot, especially in the beginning. Because everyone at the dojo loved Molly, I got the benefit of all that, even though no one knew me very well. Doran Sensei would spend time with me after class sometimes and throw me around. Plus Molly is a fantastic teacher, and I got the benefit of her experience and we trained all the time at home. So these were my first teachers, Doran Sensei, Hayashi Sensei, and Molly, plus all the people who trained in the dojo at that time. I remember training with Doran Sensei after a class one day. This was soon after I had just begun to practice. He was letting me try to throw him with a kotegaeshi, and he kept reversing the technique which I had just learned. It was pretty hilarious.

Aikido @ Noon actually has a long tradition. It was a club for almost 20 years, and has been known as Menlo Park Recreation Center Aikido and the Burgess Park Aikido Club, for all of those twenty years. There have been various teachers, mostly from Aikido West. In 2002, the head instructor of the club, decided to retire from teaching, and the dojo was offered to me. Because Doran Sensei gave me his blessing I did, and I immediately made a formal affiliation with Aikido West and the California Aikido Association.

It has now been about 9 months and I understand the situation much better. I changed the name of the dojo to Aikido @ Noon and started a website to support it. I have also recently begun to promote the dojo and the classes to the community thru the local support of the daily and weekly newspapers in our area. It is a small dojo but the word is getting out little by little. There are really no other places to train in the middle of the day, and it is perfect for people on their lunch hour who are close by, and of course for people who are free during the day. We have two classes a week, on Monday and Wednesday at Noon, and we train

in the Burgess Park Gymnastics Center which is a fantastic sprung floor for the gymnastics. It's a great surface to train on, and Burgess Park is located right smack in the middle of the City of Menlo Park.

My most Memorable Aikido Experience

My most memorable Aikido experience without a doubt is getting my black belt and training with a hakama. When I put on a hakama for the first time, it was an amazing moment and I will never forget it. I love the ritual of putting the hakama on. If you are yudansha, you probably have already realized what many of the teachers have said: that getting a shodan really marks a new beginning in one's training.

Perhaps the word beginning is not the right word here, because it is more like a continuation. Yet the principal behind shodan is one of beginning. It is the beginning of advanced training. In this ongoing process, the hakama has been an ally and taught me much about movement, grace and connection. So have all my training partners.

Today however, my most memorable Aikido experiences are every time I step on the mat. I feel so grateful to be able to train, and that Aikido has brought me so much health, well-being and purpose.