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Throughout my life, I have been continually drawn toward the path of personal and spiritual development. With that being said, and due in part to my precocious and hyperactive nature as a child, I had been introduced to yoga and meditation at an early age. Hence, the stage was set for what would later become a passionate yearning for the internal martial arts.

I began my aikido training in 1993, as a premed student at the University of Miami. I would soon become club president; and, within a few years, serve as an assistant instructor. What immediately impressed me about the art was that it seemed effective while also being so much fun. Besides, the best part for me was the spirit of loving protection in which we train.

During that time, two instructors in particular, Mark Kaye, and his teacher, Michael Casanova, were instrumental in helping me to begin exploring the aikido world at large. They presented a nice balance between energy flow, body mechanic, connection, and most especially, a deep love and respect for OSensei and his vision.

Currently, I have been training for 25 years, and I consider myself very fortunate to have delved into varying degrees of intensive study with some of aikido's most luminary instructors, including Mitsugi Saotome, Hiroshi Ikeda, Mary Heiny, Henry Kono, Ed Baker, Frank Doran, and Robert

Nadeau Shihans. I have also gained some experience in other martial arts, and cite as my senseis: Howard Popkin and Seigo Okamoto Daito-ryu Aikijujutsu, Frank Nieves Iaido, and Dan Harden. All of these master teachers continue to shape the direction of my growth and development. Among them all, Robert Nadeau Shihan holds a special place in my heart, and he has been my mentor throughout the past 18 years.

One story I would like to relate at this point comes from the earliest phase of my journey, when some of the extraordinary possibilities arising from aikido training were first being presented to me. In brief, I had miraculously survived a high-speed, roll over auto accident on the turnpike, although I did require reconstructive surgery of my right hand as a result. The hand surgeon who performed the operation gave me a prognosis of 50% recovery. However, by using solely aikido, aikicentric hand exercises, and ki extension (and never once visiting a conventional therapist for rehab), I was able to regain virtually 100% of my functionality!

On that note, I will tell you about our dojo. Besides having a spirit of perseverance – which was mandatory in those first few months of recovery – there are a few other qualities that have become highlights. First and foremost being the idea that aikido is a process for personal and spiritual development. Additionally, a holistic approach is emphasized while training, in the sense that mind, body, emotions, relationships, and environment are all taken into consideration within our process. To this end, it is strongly encouraged that our time on the mat is merely like being in a laboratory, and that most of our actual development is occurring in our daily life.

Furthermore, the process that OSensei exemplified for us is constantly being referenced in our dojo. His vision of Takemusu Aiki is paramount... and that of aikido being a multidimensional, forging process that helps us to become the finest and best versions of ourselves. With this idea as a guide, I maintain my own personal challenge: anyone who is sincerely interested in learning aikido, no matter how green, can experience aikido within 10 minutes! They may not have the most sophisticated or elegant applications of the art under their belt, but it can (and is!) possible.

Aikido has also been critical in terms of my professional development. My career path had been pre-med toward psychiatry, however my experiences with aikido diverted me into a more holistic track. After completing my undergraduate studies, I spent the subsequent four years in an integrative medical program that focused on traditional Chinese medicine and acupuncture. Now, nearly 20 years later, my private practice is continually being nurtured by the relationships I have been

able to build with numerous professional therapists, physicians, and coaches who span the entire gamut of the medical field. And when I am counseling, empowering, and facilitating transformative experiences with my own patients, I am perpetually drawing on aikido and the examples set by OSensei...

WHAT IS MY MOST MEMORABLE AIKIDO EXPERIENCE?

There have been many truly exceptional, highly memorable moments in my 25 years of aikido experience, both on and off the mat. However, there are a few that have made a powerful and lasting impression on me. One such moment came following the first time I had hosted Robert Nadeau Shihan in Miami. I had invited aikidoka from all over Florida and Latin America to attend, and had intimations at that time of a Florida Aikido Association that mirrored the structure and spirit of the CAA. The seminar weekend was fantastic, and at the end of it, Bob told me that I would have to come out to California to experience the CAA for myself. I registered for the upcoming summer intensive at Menlo College, trained for the week with world-class instructors, met countless, open-hearted aikidoka, fell in love with the natural enchantment of Northern California, and rediscovered heaven on earth.