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Division 1

"...Everyone has a spirit that can be refined, a body that can be trained in some manner, a suitable path to follow" (Morihei Ueshiba). I am starting my contribution with this phrase as it expresses precisely why I identify with Aikido and what I have experienced since my first point of contact. Still I would like to add what Aikido means to me in my own words: From my experience it combines discipline, passion, concentration, and attentiveness with ease and comfort – both from a physical as well as a mental point of view.

I took my first steps in terms of Asian martial arts in my mid-twenties when I joined courses at the adult education center in Mainz, Germany. During that period I made the acquaintance of the Chinese teacher Andy Susanto. Learning Kung Fu, I was at first fascinated by working on my sword techniques. Next to that I was additionally taught in Qi gong Ba Duan Jin and Tai Chi.

In 1993 I eventually found access to Aikido itself, when I met Jirka Friedl 5. Dan, who has grown to be a great friend and mentor over all the years. Our Dojo, which Jirka founded at that time, the Aiki Academy Mainz, still is a central part of our life. Moreover, I am especially thankful that I had the opportunity to be part of a great project he initiated as a Professor at the Faculty for

Digital Media in Furtwangen in the Black Forest. In autumn of 2012 students of his produced a corporate video on Aikido in the spirit of the Aiki-Academy in which I had the great honour of acting as one of the protagonists. You can find the result here:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3_yN2NfRKvc&t=46s

I passed my Shodan exam in 1999 with Sensei Pat Hendricks Shihan in San Leandro, followed by Nidan in 2001 and Sandan as well as Yon Dan in 2017. All in all it has always been a delight to visit seminars on a regular basis as Aikido became an increasingly big part of my daily routine and entire life.

Together with so many wonderful experiences, I particular treasure a seminar held by Sensei Ulf Evenas Shihan in which I participated in 1995. In the following years I was granted several opportunities to spend weeks and months as his Uchi deshi in a number of his seminars.

At this point I would like to add that it is close to impossible to list all people I met over the decades with whom I was blessed to share special moments. As a result I have to restrict myself to a couple who stand exemplary for many others.

Another constant part on my road has been Sensei Wolfgang Baumgartner Shihan whom I first met in 1998. Whereas we have regularly been allowed to welcome him in our Dojo in Mainz, I got to serve as an Uchi deshi with him and improve my skills in various fields of Aikido. One of the most intense periods I spent in terms of Aikido was when he and his family granted me hospitality in 2010. The heartiness and familiar atmosphere with which the family approached us was outstanding.

Furthermore I would like to mention the six months I spent as Uchi deshi serving Sensei Jean Luc 5. Dan (student of Sensei Daniel Toutain 6. Dan) in the Provence in France in 2015. I greatly profited from this experience as I did from so many others that I cannot list here. All people mentioned and places I visited are representative of the numerous people with whom I share deep feelings and whose acquaintance I wouldn't wish to be without.

That said, last but not least, I would like to elaborate on the very special relationship with Sensei Pat Hendricks Shihan. Adding to our passion we share for Aikido she has supported me in very human moments and has always stood by my side. We experienced one especially memorable moment together on the night before my San Dan exam, for which I extra came to the USA, a sharp knife fell on my toe. It was only thanks to Pat's help and support that I was able to successfully pass my exam the next day. After all: Where there's a will, there's a way.

Summing it up I have to say that I have made many emotional experiences with Qi Gong or Tai Chi. Still, they can't be compared with the fascination I have developed for Aikido, a fascination that has grown over the years and still is growing today. I have acknowledged Aikido as a never-ending personal growth, an ongoing process. To me it offers a constant source of inspiration.