

Featured Dojo-cho, October 2020



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Aikido of Konocti, Lake County, California
Division 2

Beginnings

I first heard about aikido in 1978. I was working for a seminar organization and teaching in the field of leadership and human potential. The company's founder (my boss) had just attended a new creation – *The Samurai Game* – authored and led by George Leonard. I was invited to hear about the weekend workshop. My boss mentioned that the inspiration had been aikido.

The ensuing talk was that he would now be taking aikido classes. But his interest soon waned. Slow learning, and practice for the sake of practice was not his thing. I stayed curious and promised myself that somehow, someday I'd study the art.

In September 1983, that same man crashed an airplane and was gone. By then I was one of the company's senior leaders. The bulk of his teaching and instructor development responsibilities passed to me. As months and years unfolded problems that accompany a founder's loss became apparent. The organization, initially traumatized, was now stuck. Much of the company leadership expected (actually craved) stability. "Don't change anything; just keep things going as they were when he was alive." We were in crisis. Organizational behaviorists know that "freeze" responses held over time lead to decline. It was a time of learning and new expression for me. I encouraged the company to shift the spotlight that in past times had focused on the organization's leaders. Instead it needed to illuminate the students. I urged company leaders to step down from pedestals and act with transparency. Some liked this. Most didn't. And so, a long path began to unfold that led me to connecting with George Leonard and Richard Strozzi-Heckler – neither of whom I referred to as "sensei". My world didn't yet include aikido. Attracted by their rigor, their love of people, their trust, their wise counsel and heartfelt support, I left the organization I had been working for.

By early 2000, George and I had built a solid bond. I made him an offer that he accepted: I would move his *Samurai Game* onto the international stage and train others to lead it in their countries according to his guidelines. As part of the process I would begin a study of the art that had inspired his work. That May, at age 50, I stepped onto the mat at [Two Rock Aikido dojo](#) and became a student of Richard Strozzi-Heckler – "Sensei" now to me. I'm still his student, and a member of his dojo where I train weekly. He and Michael Freidl, Sensei, have been most supportive in helping me bring Aikido of Konocti to life.

Teachers of Influence

Most influential in my development are Richard Strozzi-Heckler Sensei, and George Leonard Sensei. That said, many other sensei influence my life "outside the dojo door" – which is where I feel aikido must live. These stand out (along with life lessons I'm thankful for): Mitsuge Saotome Sensei (practice slowly – the slower you practice, the more visible will be your mistakes and the faster you will learn); Hiroshi Ikeda, Sensei (physically move the inside of you and include your imagination in your practice – feel energy rising and descending); Paul Lee, Sensei (no longer living) and Teresa Wang, Sensei of Republic of China Aikido HQ in Taipei (it's about *One Body*); Pawel Bernas, Sensei and Pawel Olesiak, Sensei of Krakow, Poland (train hard, laugh freely and have fun); and Motomichi Anno Sensei (be thankful, be humble, be simple, honor creation, honor your students and partners for they are your teachers and keep you young).

Our dojo – Aikido of Konocti

Aikido of Konocti is one of CAA's newest dojo. To my knowledge we're the only aikido dojo in Lake County, California. Being a new dojo, the challenge has been to attract and retain students. Our first class was July 17, 2019. Our first home was Mandala Springs Wellness &

Retreat Center near the village of Cobb. In January 2020, we moved to the Kelsey Town Center, in Kelseyville. The move provides greater visibility and accessibility for folks countywide. Lake County is rural. The population (65,000) is widely disbursed. Total dojo space is 1,200 sq ft; of which 700 sq feet is the mat. In March 2020, all of our in-person classes ceased due to the Coronavirus pandemic. Training reverted to “virtual / online” for three months. Then we secured a permit to use Kelseyville County Park, and resumed in-person classes, outdoors – “weapons only” with strict COVID safety protocols.

Why the name “Konocti”? First and foremost, it honors the Pomo, the indigenous people of this region. In Pomo language, “Konocti” means “Mountain Woman” – and reminds us that we all carry male and female natures within. “Konocti” identifies our offering as extending beyond any particular village, town or area. Mount Konocti is the large volcano that overlooks most of Lake County. Except for Clearlake, this mountain is the region’s most recognizable geographical feature. The word “Konocti” also reflects a kinship I feel with the three founders of [Aikido of Tamalpais](#): Leonard Sensei, Strozzi-Heckler Sensei and Wendy Palmer Sensei.

Upbringing and Other Things

I come from a rural Arizona mining community. I was fortunate to be schooled at West Point ('68 - '72), and graduate from there to serve ('72-'77). I have four wonderful children, and nine (so far) grandchildren. My professional work (now greatly slowed) spans 46 years in the field of experiential education. Home is a small cabin in the forest on Mount Hannah. The forest here inspires me to write, fulfilling a challenge that George Leonard Sensei put to me. Four years ago I began studying shakuhachi (Japanese flute) and found a master teacher from the Chikuyusha school, the largest organization of its kind in Japan. We practice together regularly. His lessons impact my aikido. Practice is slow, difficult, rigorous and joyful. The emphasis is on breath, posture and relaxation, cooperation with partners, attention to tone and note distance (maai) and timing (deai), as well as the unwritten nuances revealed only through practice. The music is entirely scored in Japanese. All reflective of aikido.

My Most Memorable Aikido Experiences

Many, with the following in the foreground.

- Sixteen years ago. Nick, my son, then into his second year of training at Two Rock dojo. For his birthday, I arrange for him to attend Doshu’s seminar. Best present ever, an experience for a lifetime.

- Fall 2011. My Nidan exam. As I’m about to sit seiza, Richard Sensei walks by and whispers an old axiom we share: “Expect Nothing. Be Prepared For Anything.” But tonight his words are not simply axiomatic. The norms and patterns I’d witnessed in his past exams vanish. Things erupt in surprising ways and paces; not only for me, but for those he calls on to serve as uke. He pushes hard, far beyond what I thought I could handle. I will appreciate him and that exam forever.

• November 2015, three days before Thanksgiving. I arrive in Shingu, Wakayama, Japan, after riding the rails from Nakatsugawa. Linda Holiday Sensei, Dojo-cho [Aikido of Santa Cruz](#) – encouraged and coached my solo visit to [Kishu-Kumano-Aikikai-Funada-Dojo](#). Tim Detmer Sensei greets me, shows me Shingu’s temples and takes me for a quick meal and then to a tiny hotel. Kiichi Hine Sensei surprises me with a phone call from the lobby, “Come downstairs for tea and talk”. Then he drives me to evening class. The following morning a student from Spain (now living in Shingu to study under Anno Sensei) drives me to class. Five of us attend. Motomichi Anno Sensei leads. He is full of vigor and intensity equal to any class I’d witnessed him teach elsewhere – those having hundreds of students per class. Afterwards we share a private conversation. Then Anno Sensei steps outside to be alone, trim plants and tidy up the dojo stairs. A student from this morning hands me a large envelope. “Here,” he says, “Sensei wants you to have these.” Calligraphy .. small to huge .. originals, all by Anno Sensei’s hand. Hine Sensei takes me and a few others on an adventure to Tamaki-san Mountain. We walk, talk and pray together at a sacred site often visited by O’Sensei. Aikido and gratitude, inside and outside the dojo door.

• July 17, 2019. Aikido of Konocti opening night. Seventeen attend a joyful start.



With Motomichi Anno Sensei at Funada Dojo