

Featured Teacher, March 2020



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Aikido'ka, Grass Valley, California

Responsible for picking up my then eight-year-old son after his aikido lesson at Aikido West in Redwood City, taught by Foster Gamble, it never occurred to me in that moment in time, 1983, that aikido would be something I would do. Growing up, I was drawn to the television's Kung Fu and one of my brothers, a Judoka at San Jose State, taught me how to fall when I was a young teenager.

In 1984, I participated in a 10-day residential retreat hosted by the Lomi School of Mill Valley, co-founded by Richard Strozzi-Heckler, and one day we were at the Tamalpais dojo being introduced to aikido. It was fun and exciting and I was a natural athletic mover. Towards the end of class, the final piece was about responding to a bokken strike delivered by Robert Sanoff. I watched as everyone moved out of the path of harm and then it was my turn. The bokken was

raised and was coming to cut me in half and I didn't move, duck or cover. I was frozen. My mind was a whirl of inquiry... "What's going on with me?" As soon as I returned home from the Retreat, I registered as a new student at Aikido West, September 1984, adjusting my life so I could be the responsive single mom of two, manage my business and train Tuesday and Thursday nights with Frank Doran.

I had seven weeks of training when family responsibilities required my attention and I stopped going to the dojo. One evening during a phone call with my mother that was particularly difficult, I found myself calm and open. I "looked" at my posture and discovered I was standing in hanmi. When mother was complete with her delivery, I responded without defense, just appreciation. It was then that my commitment to training became real. Something profound had occurred in those 14 days on the mat.

I was fortunate to have "the Mothership", Aikido West, with Frank Doran, Cyndy Hayashi, Malcom Brown and a cast of enthusiastic aikidoka almost in my backyard. The very nature of Sensei's position brought marvelous guest teachers and dojos into the mix, too many to name. Though Northern California was rich with dojos and students were encouraged to train with other teachers, which I did, my home, my heart, my love was (and is) with Shihan Frank Doran.

Continuing training, I became Sensei's warm-up-the-class student every Tuesday and Thursday. I became the teacher for the children's classes in concert with my husband Jeramy (somewhere along the way, I married my beloved, Jeramy, but that's a story for another time.) I was given permission to teach at Oracle software company with my new rank of Shodan, teaching as sempai, where Ricardo Jenez, Jay Gitterman and Richard Balcon came to train.

My 10th Aikido Summer Retreat in San Rafael in 1995 was the most incredibly rich experience in all avenues... Frank Doran, Robert Nadeau, Hiroshi Ikeda and Danielle Smith were featured teachers with a treasured cast of others. At the follies my daughter, Kyrie, and I sang the song "Life's a Dance", changed up a bit to reflect aikido. There's a line in the song "...you might have to crawl even after you've walked." Little did I know that less than 24 hours later I would be inhabiting a quadriplegic body with the prognosis of no movement past my shoulders for life. Here is where the expansive benefit of the practice of Aikido, that "in the real-world stuff" off the mat, showed up... in my mind, body and spirit. The Aikido community rallied around me, someones visiting the hospital daily to massage me, feed me, laugh with me, cry with me, holding the possible. When I returned to the mat in all my spastic glory, they didn't even give a second thought to participating with me in whatever way that was possible.

And what was possible had me demonstrating for my Sandan and then Yondan. I was invited by Stan Pranin to teach and do a demonstration in the first Aiki Expo in Las Vegas 2002 and in two subsequent events 2003 and 2005. In 2016 and 2018 teaching in France hosted by Shihan Christian Tissier's students Senseis Daniel Lance, Pascal Durchon, Yamina Khodja, Chinh Trinh was quite the cross-pollination. As was teaching in Holland with Sensei Lydia Zijdel, the head of

the IAF task force on Disability in Aikido, a committee I am on by invitation from the IAF and the USAF representing students in the United States.

So here I am, almost 25 years in this little quad body, continuing engaging this incredible art that has unending depth and breadth and fascination and joy. This family that welcomes me wherever I go, engages the adaptive movement and response with grace and curious enthusiasm. Moving out of the Bay Area in 2016, has me away from the Mothership in a new home dojo, Aikido'ka in Grass Valley. Same love. Different location. Having just received my Godan, 2020, a joyous occasion indeed, I understand, once again, there is yet another mountain that I get to ascend.

My Most Memorable Aikido Experience

Which one do I share? A silly one because much of what I shared above was and is a profound and memorable aikido experience.

Summer camp in San Rafael, Sensei was teaching a weapons class out on the lawn in front of the cafeteria that was being filmed and I was uke. He's going about demonstrating and I am doing my part. Half way through class I feel something brush by my neck. It is then I realized I was wearing some long, colorful, dangling earrings. I understand, now, that he would have made some perfect joke about it, but I was freaked out then and rapidly popped them off my ears and into my gi.