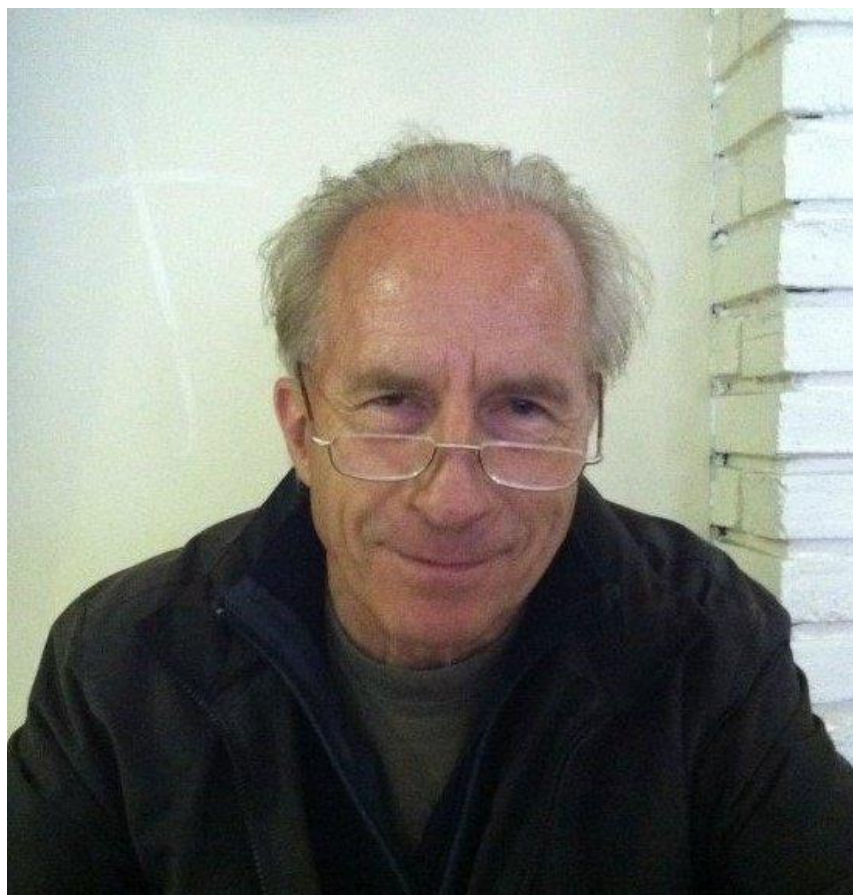


## Featured Teacher, April 2021



### Ross Madden

City Aikido, San Francisco, California

In 1980, my then-wife Maia was writing a graduate thesis on George Leonard, a modern-day renaissance man of sorts— past editor of *Look* magazine and jazz band leader, sensei at Aikido of Tamalpais (having trained with Robert Nadeau at Aikido of Northern California), and an all-round good fellow. When she went to interview him at Tamalpais, she called me and said she had had a vision of me in the dojo in a *gi* and *hakama* throwing people around. She suggested that I attend a class there that Friday night, after which we were invited to a going away party for someone at George's house.

So that was my first Aikido class, where my *uke* was a very kind, heavy-set man (wearing a white belt) who told me it was his going away party, as he was moving the next day back east to Vermont. When we bowed out at the end of the class, he told me his name was Terry Dobson, and wished me a wonderful journey through Aikido. Terry, who was sort of the Milarepa in the pantheon of Aikido luminaries, has thus always been a sort of guiding spirit to me since then.

Maia also told me that the person to train with was a fellow named Nadeau, who had trained with O'Sensei, taught in San Francisco, and had been George's teacher as well. So, I went to watch a noon class at the Turk Street dojo, where Nadeau Sensei was

doing *shihonage*, which seemed utterly beautiful and fascinating. I was hooked and signed up.

In the 40+ years since, I've been blessed to train with many other wonderful senseis and Shihans – Seiichi Sugano, Morihiro Saito, Moritero Ueshiba, Hiroshi Ikeda, Yoshimitsu Yamada, Mitsugi Saotome, Seishiro Endo, Christian Tissier, Donovan Waite, Frank Doran, William Witt, George Forbes, and others – in New York and Japan and Europe as well as in California, but I have always continued to study with Nadeau Shihan - my Aikido spiritual home is at his dojo, despite location changes 9-10 times since Turk Street. He taught me that *ki* is not a theoretical construct, but a vibrant, living energy that pervades us all if we let it. He urged his students to let the system operate through us without interference, and to let our own innate qualities grow to a deeper dimension. Ultimately, I have learned that Robert Nadeau Shihan is a most trustworthy spiritual ally.

## My Most Memorable Aikido Experience

On July 31, 1992, Terry Dobson returned to San Francisco to co-teach a class with Nadeau (who was not yet Shihan) at the beautiful ballroom dojo at the Catholic charities building on Oak Street. It was the last class he ever taught, and one of the most beautiful Aikido classes I ever experienced – as his partner Riki Moss says “I heard over and over that his last teachings were transcendent, and pure, and that his heart had never seemed so open”. He and Nadeau (who had studied together under O'Sensei in Tokyo in the 1960s) reminisced fondly about their experiences with O'Sensei, and I am fairly certain that everyone in the room could deeply feel the presence of what they were saying and, indeed, the presence of O'Sensei.

During the class, Terry walked up to me and said – what are you going to do if you don't have a ten-foot circle to throw somebody in, like if you're stuck in a phone booth? I had no idea, so he showed me – he stepped on my foot and effortlessly sent a loving ki-bolt from his pointed fingers through my heart, knocking me down fully and convincingly. I was both stunned, and thankful.

Something Terry once wrote rings true to what I learned from him that night, and illuminates what Nadeau Shihan and other exceptional teachers exemplify – Aikido is transmitted by great souls through the faculty of touch. We Aikidoka train in an art where we touch others not to harm them, or because we want something from them, but so that we may transform ourselves, and lovingly help them on their own journeys:

*“What is more important than anything I say is that I touch you. Through me, through my touch comes the touch of the founder of Aikido. There is no bible you can buy that says, “This is what Aikido is”. It is transferred from person to person. These vibrations pass among us”.*

- Terry Dobson

So, thank you all for touching me so deeply through these years.... Domo Arigato Gozaimashita.