

Featured Senior Instructor, July 2019



Bruce Wonnacott

Aikido West, Redwood City, California
Division 2

I started practicing Aikido at University of Illinois in 1991. My first teachers were Sherri Stern and Knut Bauer, both students of Akira Tohei Sensei. In retrospect, I see that the club was exactly the right size. It was big enough to get good clean basic training, but small enough that I was compelled to travel to seminars. Chicago was only a couple hours away, so I went there often to see Saotome Sensei, Ikeda Sensei, Mamura Sensei, and many others.

In 1997 I moved to Silicon Valley for work, and had the great fortune of winding up at Aikido West. Having practiced in Doran Sensei's dojo for over 20 years has

formed every aspect of my practice. It has also been the perfect place to learn about teaching Aikido as an art in itself.

A question I often ask about my technique is, “Will this still work when I’m in my eighties?” If the answer is no, then I try to make adjustments. Sensei always tells his students to slow down and refine their technique. I find that working at about one quarter speed, and one tenth power, is a good way to practice. Of course, to do this, it is necessary to let go of the desire to be flashy.

Another approach which works well for me comes from my experience writing software. Over time, computer code tends to become overcomplicated, and removing a piece can make it work better. The same principle is true of Aikido technique... editing out unnecessary parts makes everything run more smoothly. Eventually, you approach a place which is clean, flexible and efficient. Minimal power, minimal path, minimal surface.

My Most Memorable Aikido Experience

One year on my way to Boulder Camp, I had some spare space in my weapons bag, so I packed a couple of toy lightsabers. These were the nice ones that light up and make the correct sounds when you swing them. They handle like a shinai.

Wednesday night after dark, we brought them out to the field. I enjoyed watching the various shihan duel one another... it was a great example of teachers who don’t take themselves too seriously. I tend to gravitate towards teachers like this, which is probably a good sign.

I particularly enjoyed a duel I had with Ushiro Sensei. He pretty much toyed with me for about a minute until he decided to effortlessly cut off my hand (that is, hit me on the wrist). Time for my first robotic limb, I guess...