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One day Aikido found me. It was 1996. I wasn't looking for a martial art but after an altercation I thought knowing some self defence might be a good idea.

There was an aikido dojo 5 minutes from my home and an enthusiastic practitioner living in the flat below me and he convinced me to come along.

I walked into the dojo. I didn't see a martial art, I saw magic in motion. People were flying in the air, rolling and getting up unharmed. Big people, small people, women and men with a large age range were moving and throwing others with beautiful circular movements and minimal effort. I was immersed in an art that was more about feeling than fighting. Feeling physical force and feeling energy.

Little did I know that this was just the beginning and it was going to get better.

A year or two into training I went to a seminar. A Sensei called Robert Nadeau was travelling from the United States to New Zealand. His aikido was Aikido on steroids. I was blown away. All those things I was experiencing in aikido went 10 fold. Here was a guy where energy just seemed to flow off him. It was frightening and exhilarating at the same time. I knew I was in the presence of a very special person.

A year or so later he took another seminar that I and others described as phenomenal. It was over 3 days and he kept pushing us to new better levels of ourselves. By the end of the seminar, it was as if half the people in the room were glowing with energy. Was this real or was this my imagination? If it was my imagination it was shared among a large number of people. Not saying that all got it, but I certainly was not alone.

This was magic and why I do aikido. I train to work towards that magic.

Aikido saves me

During this same timeline, I find myself at the end of a long term relationship. It was a very good relationship for most part but it just wasn't my path to be with my current partner and she was being brave and leaving me. However it knocked me back and my confidence was spiralling downwards.

One day I wake up with a stutter. I couldn't believe it. It was like listening to someone else speak. Words were failing to come out of my mouth and when they did it was like my brain couldn't send the words from my body. It gave me a real fright. I remember thinking "What is going on here?". I remembered meeting a lady I used to work with when I was a teenager. She would have been in her forties and she stuttered. She was a nice person but because of her stutter she was being shunned by society. She had become a very anxious person. The thought crossed my mind, is this what is going to happen to me?

Fortunately because of the Aikido training I had seen and experienced, I was able to recognise what was happening to me. It started with my own breath, recognising that the stutter was caused by lack of air flowing from the body. But as my awareness went deeper, I realised that my breath was being affected by my body, a body that now had anxiety. As I went deeper again, the anxiety of the body was an energy issue. Through this recognition and awareness I was able to fix the underlying issues and reconnect and accept where I was and what was happening. With panic subsiding the stutter almost disappeared over night. Nice trick right?

Yes a trick to remove the stutter but with a good sense of settling and reconnecting not only did the stutter fix itself but the anxiety began to move away as well. I was learning through body practise that it was "ok to be me". It took me a few years of practising "being ok with who I was", but it was this practise that started to transform myself into a better functioning person. I was going through levels of myself.

At one level I was able to speak clearly again. The next level I was able to accept the situation in life I was in and the anxiety was dissipating. Soon a new level of me emerged and now I was ready for another relationship. The next level of myself naturally meets a wonderful new partner. Next level I'm getting married. Next level I am father. Next level I'm able to leave my job that I didn't like. Next level I find a better way of living. ...

Now to be sure, it is not a linear thing. Each day is a new day. Some days I am back a few levels, some days there are new challenges that knock you down. But as I settle and explore where I am, challenges actually help you grow as a person. Sometimes it may not seem to but trust me, challenges in the right dose make us stronger.

A big part of Aikido for me is the same practise. You are put under pressure and you are in essence trying to settle with yourself so that a new level of you can develop to deal with the situation you are in.

I believe I have been very fortunate to have met and had the opportunity to learn from Robert Nadeau. His teachings have had such a large effect on my life and I am not alone. I have met many of his students and my sense of them is that they are also trying to reach new levels of themselves. Many of his senior teachers and students have also helped me and I am very grateful to all of them.

Present Day

Recently I moved to the lower south of the South Island in New Zealand. My wife and I run a dojo in a rural area on the outskirts of a small town called Oamaru.

In recent years I have been lucky enough to be able to travel to the USA each year to continue training under Robert Nadeau and have met a lot of very wonderful people and good aikido teachers.

Apart from teaching Aikido I also look after bees (my small effort to save the planet) and enjoy spending time with my wife and two children. We also spend a lot of time gardening and growing food organically.