

Featured Dojo-cho, April 2005



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Division 1

I first discovered Aikido during my freshman year at Barry University in 1982. Having just earned a brown belt from the Kodokan in Japan and a blue belt in shotokan karate, I was searching for karate and judo dojos or clubs where I could continue my training. During my search, I met Oscar Mendez, who was a professor and Jesuit priest at the university. Father Mendez was in the process of organizing an Aikido club on campus. My training at that time had been very competitive and "martial," and the concept of self-defense with a conscience was quite foreign to me. Father Mendez demonstrated Aiki principles by applying a nikkyo technique on me, and from that moment I was hooked and became a lifelong student of the art.

Michael "Ce" Casanova was my first Aikido teacher and mentor. He was the dojo-cho of the Barry University Aikikai which operated under the auspices of Mitsugi Saotome Sensei's Aikido Schools of Ueshiba. Prior to relocating to Miami, Florida, Casanova Sensei trained at the New York

Aikikai under Yoshimitsu Yamada Sensei and at the Bond Street dojo with the late Terry Dobson Sensei. In Florida, Casanova Sensei became a principal student of the late Edward Baker Sensei. Baker Sensei was instrumental in the development of Aikido in Florida and was for many years Saotome Sensei's chief representative within the state.

I trained with Casanova Sensei for approximately ten years. In 1992, Casanova Sensei hosted Terry Dobson Sensei's first Aikido seminar in Florida. Many of Florida's Aikido luminaries attended this memorable event. Although Dobson Sensei had recently undergone open heart surgery and his ankles and feet were still swollen from the surgery, he was quite magical on the mat. My love and appreciation for Aikido and for O'Sensei grew even more after spending time with Dobson Sensei.

I am a trial attorney by profession. I never tire of the Law because it is never static and is always evolving. Effective attorneys remain students of the Law, open at all times to its many possibilities. More so, Aikido is ever evolving and dynamic, and there is always something new or different to learn within this Art. I am one of those Aikido instructors who remain students of the Art.

I opened my dojo in the Fall of 1992 in Miami, Florida, at Dobson Sensei's suggestion and with his encouragement. I chose the name "Aikikai International, Inc." because I believed in O'Sensei's vision that Aikido could unite the world.

I have been a partner in one of the largest law firms in the Southeast United States; I served a tour of duty at the United States Attorney's Office in Miami prosecuting federal criminal cases; and I operate my own law practice today; I am most proud, however, that Aikido has been a constant in my life, and studying tenkan and irimi principles and receiving and giving ukemi have made me a better lawyer and, more importantly, a better person.

In 1993, I met Pat Hendricks Sensei and was thoroughly impressed by the clarity of her teaching and the precision in her techniques. I became an instant believer in the late Morihiro Saito Sensei's methodology. I remember with fondness taking time off from work and traveling to Hendricks Sensei's dojo in San Leandro for training. In

addition, my dojo hosted seminars in Miami for Hendricks Sensei and for Bill Witt Sensei, another longtime student of Saito Sensei.

At any given time, I have 20-35 adult students training with me. My dojo has a strong international component, with students from Italy, Spain, Germany, South America and the Caribbean. Most of my students are professionals, law enforcement officers and experienced practitioners from other martial arts. I recently started to teach children twelve years old and older. Classes are held three times each week and incorporate aiki ken and aiki jo techniques.

My most Memorable Aikido Experience

In April 2004, my dojo hosted a seminar conducted by Mary Heiny Sensei. While demonstrating a series of throws, Heiny Sensei threw me without touching me. This is my most memorable Aikido experience. I can be an irimi muscle-bound machismo meathead at times, and having this little lady toss me across the mat without grabbing me was just an amazing display of Aiki power. Many of my students and I have developed a relationship with Heiny Sensei over the past ten years and seen her technique evolve to the point where she can't help but to do incredible things on the mat. What's even more amazing is the humility and compassion for others that she demonstrates, and always with a smile and hearty laugh. O'Sensei said that Aikido is the manifestation of love, and I can truly appreciate that with Heiny Sensei.

I am blessed to be an Aikidoist. I have had the fortune to train under teachers with differing Aikido styles and philosophies, and I have developed strong relationships with teachers in the United States and Japan. Despite the style or federation, my teachers have demonstrated a deep love for the Art and have all made sacrifices in their pursuits to promote O'Sensei's vision. I thank them all for sharing their time with me.