

Featured Dojo-cho, April 2010



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My most Memorable Aikido Experience

My most memorable and coincidentally first contact with aikido was when I was about 16 years old. It was probably in the early 60's, like 1961 at San Jose State College. As a teenager of Japanese American ancestry in San Jose, CA, I grew up with many of my friends and relatives doing either judo or kendo. It was almost a given for young nikkei boys and even girls to participate for discipline. The San Jose Buddhist Judo Dojo was where many local kids trained and it was open to anyone. It was probably one of the better community dojos in the country. I was not into judo however. I did not like having to grapple and throw an adversary down, compete, and win in order to achieve fulfillment. Actually, I think I was afraid to participate because I did not consider myself to be very strong and athletic.

So, my father took me to San Jose State College (SJSC) to see a demonstration aikido. A Japanese man named Koichi Tohei (9th dan at that time) came to introduce this art. I was amazed at how smoothly and dynamically he threw the multiple judoka and deshi attackers around the mat without

muscling them. There was no violence exhibited; only seamless blending and leveraging of uke's energy.

I was very interested and began to train at a local 15th street "garage dojo" near SJSC belonging to a judoka, Mr. Baker. The aikido sensei was a cop from San Mateo, who drove down the peninsula to teach us. There was also a sandan Shin Buddhist priest by the name of Haruyoshi Kusada who assisted with the teaching, and a man named Byron Honda. These were the early compassionate and good teachers of this art in San Jose, and I have fond memories of them.

I trained off and on and then in 1966 I visited the dojo of Sadao Yoshioka at Nuuanu in Honolulu, Hi. on my way back from visiting Japan. My mother had arranged for Sadao to pick me up and stay at his house on Booth Road. I did not fully know the significance of this event to meet and stay at this man's house. All I remember was that he had three beautiful daughters and I remember training and being thrown by one of them. I remember Sadao sensei buying me some tabis (water slippers) for a trek to a waterfall with about 10 of his students. We had to stand in waist deep water, the falls hitting our heads. While waiting for our turn under the waterfall, we did hundreds of repetitive bokken strikes. I was a reticent participant, but what Sadao whispered to me during the trek to the falls was, "your mom is my cousin, so, yoku gambare, yo". This means you are a relative so don't lose face, you better hang in there. Such pressure. I later learned that this was a part of traditional "misogi" training, to purify the mind and body, such that our actions and moves are not tainted by a muddled mind. I came back home and trained, but graduation and a job in L.A. took me away for about 4 years.

When I came back to San Jose, I was brought back to aikido by the influence of another Shin priest named Will Masuda who was training at sensei Bob Nadeau's Castro Street dojo in Mt. View. Here, I settled in to train with Bob sensei also. A few years later he opened the San Jose dojo in Japan-town and Jack Wada became the Dojo-cho. I moved my training to San Jose where most of my advanced training took place with Jack sensei. I really enjoyed training hard with the San Jose aikidoka and then enjoying a good bowl of J-town noodles or gyoza and beer afterwards. The camaraderie and ambience of this dojo was right in my comfort zone. Jack

relocated to Martha Street and I trained there until 2003.

More recently, my career move to Lodi has allowed me to have a dojo through the city's Park and Recreation Department. We have been training since about July 2009 and now have about 35 enthusiastic aikidoka, 5 adults and about 30 kids in 6 classes per week. This has been a fulfilling experience, to try to transmit the art of O sensei so that there continues to be an awareness of peaceful alternatives and life-styles in the world.