

Featured Teacher, August 2020



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Aikido Northwest, Milwaukie, Oregon

My path to Aikido is an interesting path. I did not necessarily find Aikido but, in a sense, it found and revealed itself to me. I grew up in rural Northern Indiana and had an interest in martial arts from a very young age. It was not until high school that I had the opportunity to engage in martial arts.

My introduction to martial arts was in the 1980s via Taekwondo which was short lived. One of my best friend's father was a former Special Forces operator in Vietnam and was an instructor in a style of Kung Fu that was interpreted as "The Way of Power." I was invited to join their practice which I did for a couple of years. When their kwoon closed, I stumbled across

a gentleman practicing martial arts, which happened to be Judo, in my high school's balcony on the wrestling mats. After a brief introduction, I was invited to begin training with him. I would later find out that he had been a member of the Romanian Olympic Judo team but had defected to the United States. We trained together at the high school for quite some time and occasionally trained at the YWCA in Ft. Wayne. After Judo practice there was always another class that took place and my teacher was invited to attend. He said it helped his judo practice. Eventually, I began staying with him for this class that I would later find out was Aikido. The Aikido sensei, Jane, was the instructor at the YWCA during that time. After a few more Aikido classes my judo teacher took me aside and said if I wanted to pursue Aikido that he was fine with that. I continued to train in Aikido for a few more classes but my irregular schedule of farming forced me to take a leave from training.

Fast-forward a few years, in 1995, my wife and I moved to Portland, OR. I went from living on a farm, working three jobs, to living in a 900 square foot apartment to working one job. I had tons of time on my hands and started searching for a place to train. As my wife and I were walking through the mall we passed a bookstore and I began to browse the magazine stand where I eventually picked up an Aikido Today magazine. As I read through the magazine, I noticed there was a place in Milwaukie, Oregon, Aikido Northwest, whose dojo cho was Craig Fife and they were having a seminar in mid-October hosting a high-ranking teacher named Doran Sensei. I missed the seminar but stopped by the dojo a week or so afterwards to observe class. The observation of one class led to the observation of another and then another. About the third time I observed class, one of the members, Paul Dalton, was coming up from a roll right in front of me and whispered "are you just going to watch or are you going to get on the mat?" That's all it took. I talked to Fife Sensei after class and joined Aikido Northwest that week. That was in October of 1995. I trained Aikido for about a month or so and there was talk of attending a seminar with this magical teacher named Hiroshi Ikeda Sensei in Ashland, OR. After a little coaxing, "they" talked me into going to the seminar with them in late November and I soon understood what they meant when they said magical Ikeda Sensei. His circles were much larger back then... just barely visible by the human eye. This was also where I was introduced to Friedl Sensei for the first time. In May, I was introduced to Doran Sensei at another seminar in Ashland and began to understand the meaning of impeccable posture, precision, and integrity, and was amazed and interested in how an individual could deliver such clear instruction as a teacher.

This story actually comes full circle. When my wife and I visited home, back in Indiana, I took my gi hoping to go back to the YWCA to see if they would let me train in a class. There was a different instructor so I asked where Jane was and was told that she had gone out to California to train with Doran Sensei. What were the chances of that? A couple of years after

that, I had the opportunity to travel with Fife Sensei to Redwood City for one of the semiannual CAA trainings and had the opportunity to re-meet and train with Jane.

As simplistic and maybe as short-sighted as this may sound, Aikido found me at a time where I had accomplished most of my initial life goals that I had set out to accomplish. Heck, even “hell froze over” and I was able to attend an Eagles concert which I never thought I would. Aikido was a goal that could become a life long journey for me. Something that I would never master but something I could always improve upon. I embraced Aikido and Aikido Northwest became my second family. The acceptance and openness of Fife Sensei and his passion for Aikido has kept me interested to this day and I continue to be a member of Aikido Northwest. Outside of my marriage and my career in education, Aikido is the most consistent and stable thing that I have been actively involved in for the last 25 years. I owe much thanks, gratitude and inspiration to Fife, Friedl and Doran Shihans and thank them for their life’s devotion to Aikido.

My Most Memorable Aikido Experiences

In February 2005 Fife Sensei and I were invited to Hawaii by Randy Scolville Sensei and Kit Michaels Sensei to train on Oahu at various dojos and then attend the Winter Camp hosted by Aikido of Hilo on the Big Island.

While on Oahu, Scolville Sensei was gracious enough to arrange an opportunity for us to train at his dojo, Nuuanu Aikido Club in the Honolulu YMCA, at the Hawaii Aikido Federation (HAF) University of Hawaii Aikido Club, and the Hawaii Aiki Kai. Scolville Sensei provided a great history lesson, related to Aikido and the development of these clubs, while we visited. In addition to Aikido, Scolville Sensei arranged a whale watching tour for us where we had the opportunity to snorkel around a coral reef off of Oahu.

From Oahu, we traveled to Hilo for the Winter Camp and had the opportunity to meet Barbara and Robert Klein Senseis and train at their dojo, Aikido of Hilo, before going to the camp near the volcano. On one early morning, we participated in Aoyagi Sensei’s class at sunrise from a hilltop that overlooked where the volcano was flowing into the ocean. The view was spectacular and to be training in Aikido while taking in the view made it even better. As with many Aikido trips, we did so much and met several people over a brief time period, and it seemed like it was over in an instant with only memories and a few photos left.

Aikido has given me the opportunity to create many moments that have become memorable and has given me the opportunity to meet several people and visit several places around the country. I look forward to creating more memories in the future.