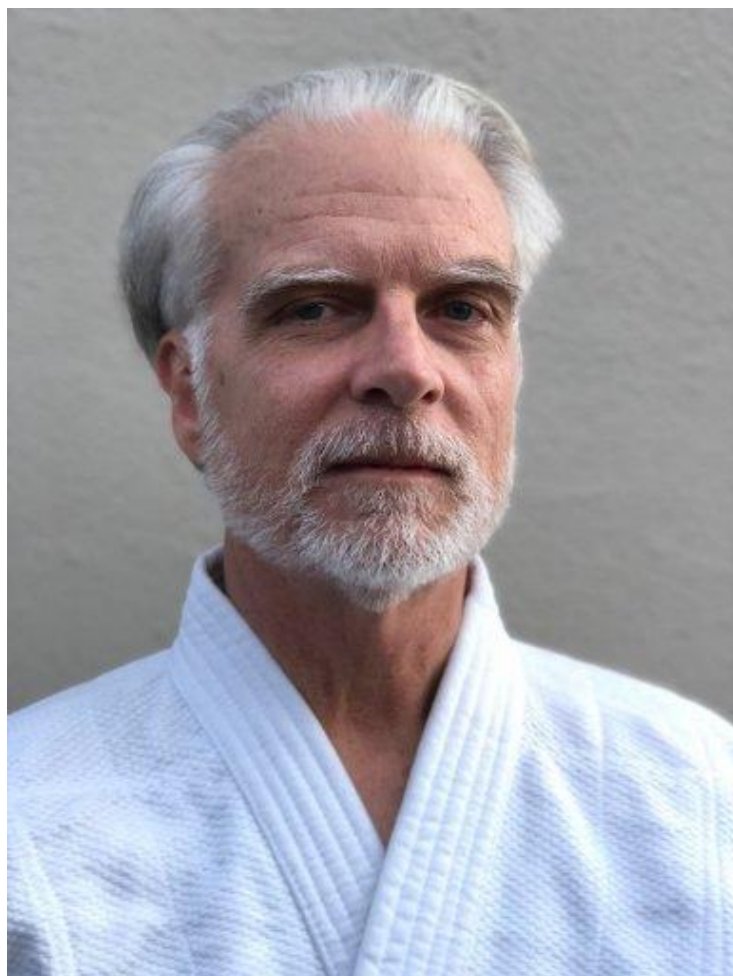


Featured Teacher, March 2021



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City Aikido, San Francisco, California

I began training in the martial arts in high school in the early 1970's at an Okinawan style Karate dojo in the town where I grew up in New Jersey. I spent about 6 years in this hard style with plenty of drills and physical contact. A few years after graduating from college with a degree in psychology I moved out to California. After a short stint in Los Angeles, I navigated my way to San Francisco where in 1988 I started training at City Aikido with Robert Nadeau Sensei. For the first 5 years I trained in the noon classes with Nadeau Sensei and Richard Moon Sensei before switching over to the evening/weekend classes on Oak Street. My son was very young at the time, so this schedule worked out well with my responsibilities. On Oak Street we also had Sensei's Nick Scoggin, Elaine Yoder, Ross Madden and others teaching and training. It was a great mix of talents and abilities all under the direction of Nadeau Shihan. I've been with City Aikido ever since.

Over the years, like most of us, I've had the good fortune to train with people from all walks of life. On the mat at any given time, we might have a: house painter; psychotherapist;

actor; doctor; small business owner; lawyer; farrier; waitress; tech worker; school teacher; designer; bodyworker; mathematician; dancer; administrator; soldier; manager; artist; construction worker; and who knows what. We all came together to learn, explore, and practice a way of being that would not only help us to personally protect and develop ourselves, but also impact our ability to get along with others and even transform the world we live in.

Trusting our bodies to one another we supported each other's physical, mental and spiritual development as we grabbed wrists, struck at heads, punched stomachs, and sometimes attacked with sticks. At first being present to, and then entering, evading, and blending, we came to know an alternative to our normal, often destructive, reactionary solutions to what the world challenged us with. As we continued to train together the lively camaraderie of fellow travelers deepened. While the world has very real problems, many of which we ourselves have created, it became clear we were all in this together.

Through training, old ways led to new ways and old dogs learned new tricks. Change, it seemed, was possible. We actually could learn to get out of our own way and center ourselves in relationship to each other and the circle of the world around us.

I love the practice of Aikido. I love what it stands for and the possibility it reveals and nurtures. The fact that it's fun, has real guts to it, and initiates the magic of transformation keeps it all very much alive and engaging for me. Through Aikido I've come to recognize and appreciate that I have an opportunity, and a responsibility, to tap into finer levels of myself, deepen my connection with others, and collaborate with the forces of our world that shape the future.

My Most Memorable Aikido Experience

While I've had my fair share of magical flying through the air moments in the dojo, one of my most memorable Aikido experiences came about off the mat. I was leaving work one day at UCSF getting on the N-Judah line heading downtown to the dojo. I climbed aboard the streetcar, used my Fast Pass to wand myself in and sat down in an aisle seat next to a young woman near the doors. Sitting back into my seat I looked around and realized I had sat down next to the only other person in the entire train car and had also boxed her in with my gear. I started feeling a little self-conscious about this thinking maybe I should move to another seat and give this person some personal space. Feeling a bit uneasy, with my thoughts drifting to what she might be thinking, something in me suggested I just "settle and open" as Nadeau Sensei has taught us countless times in class. Despite my mind wanting to move, I listened to the deeper voice inside, stayed put, and simply settled in where I was.

At the next stop an old woman with a cane got on. She was pretty shaky coming up the steps of the streetcar but managed to get to the top, dutifully pulled out her pass and then reached over to wand herself in at the card reader. Just as she did so, the train, without mercy, took off. The sudden movement of the train caused her to lose her balance and, in a moment, she was pitching forward down the aisle next to me with her head far in the lead.

In a flash, and without a moment of hesitation or thought, my right hand appeared landing open palm to her upper chest and stopping her dead in her tracks just before she would have surely gone crashing down the aisle.

After regaining her balance, I motioned her to sit down across from me and she expressed great appreciation for my intervention. She thanked me profusely. She said she had just come from her doctor who told her she had a fracture in her hip. A trip down the aisle in that streetcar would have been the last thing she needed in that moment, something that could quite possibly have changed her life forever.

In the aftermath, when I let sink in what had just taken place, I recognized that this was a bit of "Aikido in the world." It's one thing to react instinctively to an immediate situation or even respond decisively after many years in Aikido, but this I sensed was something more than that. What stood out for me was that I had no business being in that particular seat with the rest of the streetcar empty, not really. Cramping in the woman next to me, I just didn't belong there, and I "knew" I didn't belong there. And yet when I thought to move elsewhere, my system, the system, whatever you want to call it, passed on what I knew and felt, and instead simply settled and opened. Perhaps something deeper, finer was really at play, something Nadeau Sensei might have at one time called the "not so obvious." Who really knows? Yet, I have to recognize that the world is a mysterious place where finer things occur beyond our surface awareness. Think or say what you will about all this, but for me what took place on the N-Judah that day was a confirmation of the harmonious expression of Aiki in the world; I find myself very grateful for being a part of an Aikido community for so many years that explores such possibilities.

Settle and open...