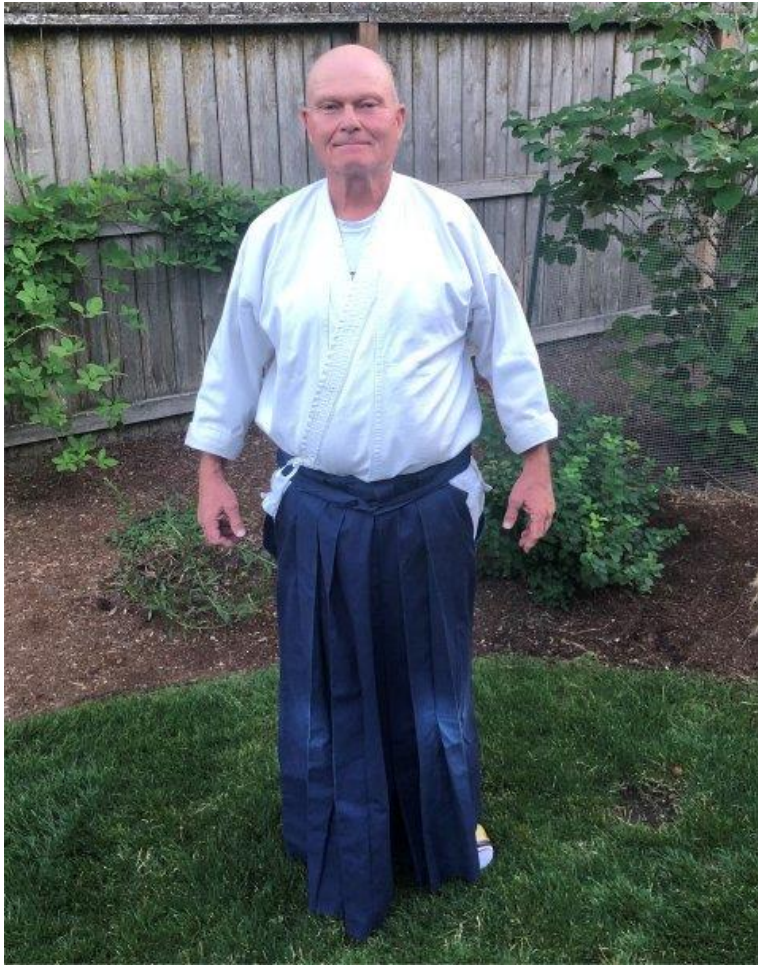


## Featured Teacher, July 2020



### **Rick Walsh**

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Shihan Michael Friedl has been my sensei for 35 years. I have much to be thankful for when he entered my life at an age where I had a career but didn't know how to navigate a successful career without a mentor and a friend to help guide me through an art that made me look at life professionally in a different way and made me successful in a way that is hard to describe.

Those that have studied Aikido will understand this but I am going to give a perspective from my experience that may be different from the turmoil that I have seen happening to this world over the last several months.

I started learning a martial art back when I was in college 45 years ago. I took Shotokan karate while I was there and continued studying several years after I left college before I got into my profession. I studied criminology while I was in college to prepare me for a career in law enforcement. I wanted to learn an art so that, when I became a police officer, I could only

depend on myself if need be to take care of business. Back in the early 80's, when I started in law enforcement as a patrol officer, I was one of the few who had that kind of experience. Our department did not have a defensive tactics program but, due to my martial arts background, I was asked to start the very first program for our department. I became a part time instructor at the police academy in Oregon and went through their defensive tactics program to bring that program back to our department. I learned that many of the techniques taught at the academy were Aikido based techniques. I then made a decision that I needed to seek out and learn this art. Learning how to control suspects without hurting them was much better than learning how to punch and kick them into submission.

I then found Shihan Michael Friedl. That began my learning experience for my entire career and life. I never realized what an impact he would have on me and my career. I have the distinction of being his first student that he brought from a raw beginner to my first black belt. I have considered this quite an honor! As I trained and started teaching police recruits, outside of our agency and those inside our agency, I realized two things that were missing with the training. You cannot have a defensive tactics program that teaches cops once or twice a year and expect them to be able to use those skills out on the streets. Also, there are no classes for police officers to learn how to be "humble." To learn how to walk away and understand I don't have to win every time and be okay with it is just okay! You don't have to win every situation. Just because it is justified doesn't make it right.

What does that mean? I had a car-jacking one morning where a suspect pulled a lady out of a car and drove it at a high rate of speed and crashed the car. He ran toward a house where some people were setting up for a yard sale. He ran at them and they ran into the house and locked the door. I showed up. He was trying to break down the door and turned and saw me. He grabbed a beer mug off from one of the tables and broke one end of it off and said, "let's go." I walked straight at him and told him he was under arrest and tried to kick the jagged beer glass out of his hand. It didn't work. He lunged at me and I stepped *tenkan* and attempted *kotegaeshi* with the hand that lunged at me with the jagged beer mug. He said, "you ain't going to get it." I went with his energy and brought it around hard for another *kotegaeshi* and he said, "you're going to get it." Which I did. Problem resolved and he went to jail. I was asked on Monday morning by one of my superiors why I didn't use deadly force when I was justified, since it was a deadly or dangerous weapon he was using against me. My response was I didn't need to as I knew I could take him. It didn't enter my mind to resort to deadly force.

I have used the physical aspects of Aikido in my job numerous times. I have used it to save lives and to control out of control people numerous times. I have said many years ago that all police officers should be required to take a martial art. An art that teaches how to take control of people and give officers the confidence to go to hand to hand combat when you don't need to jump to deadly force when not needed. The argument I have gotten is that if you require police officers to take a martial art then the agency needs to pay for it and pay the officers to attend the classes. I think that this is a "cop" out. Law enforcement needs to recognize that they need to do something for themselves and not expect compensation for that. Especially in these tumultuous times.

My Aikido training has changed since I have retired as deputy chief of a police department. But I have never lost sight of the fact that it taught me how to be humble in my life and my job as a law enforcement officer. I train for my personal growth and no longer have to prove anything to anybody as in my younger days. I always laugh at those that have come to our dojo in years past and say Aikido doesn't work. As Ikeda Sensei has said many times, "it is *your* Aikido that doesn't work." How true that is! Keep training! And hopefully law enforcement administrators will see that this is essential training, as I saw was needed many years ago.