

THE KIAI

Summer 2009

Newsletter of the AIKIDO INSTITUTE

Volume XV, Issue 2

INTERVIEW WITH ALBERTA HANKENSON SENSEI

Alberta Hankenson Sensei is one of the colorful characters of the Oakland Dojo. She has a lot to say and is a very busy woman. With her going to the opera, the theater, taking swimming or dancing lessons, flying to London or New York, she can be very difficult to pin down for an interview. We finally caught up with her at Pasta Pelican in Alameda.

KIAI: Alberta, our readers would like to know who was Alberta before Aikido?

Alberta: Well, I was born in San Francisco and was a single child. We moved to the Peninsula very soon after that. While other kids were playing outside, I liked to read. I don't remember ever not being able to read. I liked reading and I liked horses, even though I've never owned a horse. I also got involved in exhibition folk dancing and in ballet.

KIAI: You love theater and like to travel. Were you always interested in these things?

Alberta: My father and grandfather both worked for the Southern Pacific Railroad. I guess traveling is in my blood. And the best way to travel is definitely by train. I've never been in a Box-car, but my great-aunt and her family lived in one during the Depression, and I thought that sounded cool, being very young at the time.

When I moved to Berkeley to attend Cal, I went to as many plays as I could. I always liked the theater but didn't have much money then, so most of the performances were on campus and were free. And I always read reviews.

KIAI: What was your major at Cal?

Alberta: I majored in anthropology. But this being the '50s, it was not the best major for a woman. So, after much thought, I became a librarian. I knew I would enjoy the work, and it was good job security at the time.

KIAI: How did you get interested in Aikido?

Alberta: I know that at the time, I was looking for something. I had lost interest in folk dancing and in ballet. I don't know why. My aunt had given me \$50 as a gift. There was an on campus Tai Chi class at the University of California for \$75, and a woman's beginner course in Aikido for \$50. This was the time of "Kung Fu" and "The Avengers" on TV.

Everybody I knew thought that Mrs. Peel was really cool, so I opted for the Aikido course. Besides, I had \$50.

KIAI: That's hysterical. What was the class like?

Alberta: The class was run by a woman who was a 4th Kyu. Actually she wasn't very good. I remember that at the end of the first class, she did a forward roll and everybody applauded. Michal Zimring was also in that class and we became good friends. The class lasted for one semester.

KIAI: When did you join the Aikido Institute of Oakland?

Alberta: After the semester of Aikido ended, many of us started looking for a dojo in which to train. I was told by our instructor not to join the Aikido Institute because it was run by a man named Bruce Klickstein Sensei, who liked to throw people against the wall. Well, I certainly did not want to be thrown against the wall. Nevertheless, I joined the Aikido Institute on the first Sunday in October, 1975. The class started with a half hour of meditation. Then we started doing rolls, and Bruce Sensei came over to me and showed me the correct way to do rolls. At the end of class, I realized that I had not been thrown against the wall and decided to stay. Michal and I took our 5th kyu tests together.

KIAI: What was the appeal? When did you know you were hooked?

Alberta: Well, it was only \$30 a month then. I only trained 2 times week, because I was very busy. But that wasn't enough



AIKIDO INSTITUTE
5036 Telegraph Avenue at 51st
Oakland, California 94609



so I trained 3 times a week. Then that wasn't enough so I trained 4 times, then 5 times. Then one day the library where I worked closed. So, I came to every class. And I realized that I was hooked.

KIAI: What was your Shodan test like?

I took my Shodan test in December of 1979. At that time, all the dojos would come together and put up their candidates for black belt ranks, and a dojo was chosen for the tests. Pat Hendricks was a member of our dojo at that time and she was taking her Nidan test. Kim was my Uke and Hoa was Pat's uke. Also remember that neither Kim nor Hoa were called Sensei at the time.

At that time also, you bowed in at your dojo, got in the car and drove to the test site. So, Kim, Hoa, Pat, and I bowed in at the Oakland Dojo, got into a van, and drove to San Jose where the tests were being held.

I was having trouble with the sequence of Ikkyo through Yonkyo. I would forget something in the sequence. I trained and trained but always forgot something. So, before my test, Bruce came up to me and said, "Just remember how much you love Aikido".

KIAI: How did that make you feel?

Alberta: It made me feel supported. Bruce was very good at that. I relaxed and the sequence went fine. However, I had been assured by both Bruce and Kim that I would not have to do Kaiten Nage from Yokomenuchi, so I never practiced it. But sure enough, one of the Sensei, Frank Doran, asked for it. I came up with something and somehow got the technique.

KIAI: Were the tests very different back then?

Alberta: Yes, they were. Now you take your Shodan test in your own dojo with your sensei asking for the techniques. You have all your training partners cheering you on and you can have your friends come and watch. Back then, it was in a

different dojo, in front of strangers, and any of the sensei could ask you to perform any technique they wanted.

KIAI: Tell us about your knee surgery.

Alberta: About nine months into my Aikido training, I began to have knee problems. At that time, I was told that I was too young to have a knee replacement. So, I discovered acupuncture and that helped. From 1976 to 2000 I trained with a bad knee. I finally went to my doctor and said, "I'm not too young now, am I?" So, I had a knee replacement in 2000.

KIAI: How did that affect your training?

Alberta: You do what you can with what you've got. The main thing I learned in Iwama was that nobody expected you to be perfect, just to do your best. If you do your best, everyone will help and encourage you. Kim and Hoa Senseis have encouraged me to continue with my modified training.

KIAI: What advice do you have for beginners in Aikido?

Alberta: Don't train too much too soon. Listen to your body. An older body especially should be eased along, or it will complain. And if it's so early in the training that the person hasn't become hooked, we lose him or her. I've seen a lot of that. Older Adults are harder to teach. They are not used to taking instruction. Get through that stage as soon as you can.

KIAI: How did you feel when you became a Sensei? Has it affected your teaching?

Alberta: I was bemused. I never expected to be a Sensei. I don't feel any different. I still enjoy teaching and correcting people tactfully. The dojo is healthy and happening. One of the great joys is seeing a student improve.

KIAI: Thank you Sensei for your time. It was an honor to interview you.

Alberta: You're welcome.



IN THE NEWS

Congratulations goes to Jacob Clapsadle who took his Shodan test during Kim Sensei's recent Saturday Seminar. Jacob, uke to the stars, is a wonderful young man and a remarkable Aikidoist. He is centered, very smooth, and beautiful to watch. He was presented with a black belt and hand-me-down hakama by Steve Sensei to the applause of all around. Then he was hurried to the back mat where Kim Sensei and Steve Sensei showed him how to put on his hakama.



Being 6'2" and still growing, his hakama was a bit on the short side, but that did not keep Mr. Clapsadle from taking his first roll in perfect form.



His parents and girl friend were present for the occasion, and you good tell they were thrilled.

A big pot luck feast followed with lots of drink and Kampai's.

Congratulations Jacob, it's about time and well-deserved.



NOBLE SILENCE

The Lament. When I heard that Jacob would be taking his shodan test on 7/11, I was bummed because I knew I would be out of town on that day, and therefore would not be able to participate.

The Retreat. My reason for absence, however, was good. I was in North Fork, CA, participating in a Vipassana Meditation retreat. Vipassana is a form of meditation that is said to have been taught by the Buddha himself. The retreat is a 10-day intensive; one essentially lives like a monk for 10 days and observes a strict code of conduct, including a vow of silence and a vegetarian/vegan diet.

The Practice. Since the Buddha stressed non-sectarian, non-religious values, the practice is presented in a very plain and non-dogmatic way. As explained by the current leading lay teacher of Vipassana, S.N. Goenka, it is an "experiential scientific practice." One starts with observation of the breath (which most meditation practices do) for a couple of days. Once the mind is sufficiently quieted/focused, Vipassana begins: moving from the opening of the nose, the entire surface of the body is slowly and carefully 'scanned' with one's attention. Eventually, tiny sensations on the body, like tingling, vibrating, pulsing, and throbbing are felt, and the goal is to simply observe these with equanimity, becoming progressively more aware of their ever-changing nature. As one progresses, the experience of the changing nature of the body leads one to profound understandings of the self and the relationship between mind and body, which ultimately has the effect of 'liberating' oneself from the 2 main causes of suffering: aversion and craving.

My Progress. So, am I liberated? Lol. Different people will progress at different levels with regards to these goals. I made decent progress. I got to the point where I can scan most of my body's surface, with some blind spots here and there that I still need to work on. I wasn't yet able to achieve the "free flow," where one is able to scan the whole body up and down in sweeping motions and observe all surfaces (it is said that a very pleasant vibration throughout the body is experienced at this stage).

Buddha's Contribution. The teaching of Vipassana is divided into 3 main pillars: sila (moral code), samadhi (development of concentration and focus of the mind), and prana (understanding and wisdom). Goenka reminds us that these 3 pillars of practice were already being taught in the Buddha's time. He explains that the Buddha's main contribution to humanity was the teaching that the third pillar—that of understanding and wisdom, can only be attained at the experiential level by each individual for themselves; a person cannot become enlightened by only practicing a moral code, nor by sharpening the mind through

observation of breath only, and similarly, wisdom cannot be gained through mere intellectualization of these things. He thus taught that the technique of observation (and thus experience) of the self at the deepest micro-level is the only way a person can fully understand themselves.

Thousands of years before western scientists put forth the idea that the body (as matter) is made up of millions of constantly changing ‘particles,’ the Buddha taught a meditation technique that he claimed one can use to experience them—he called them ‘kalapas.’ To give a visual, imagine that you could see your body exist in this world from start to finish, like the landscape in a time-lapse video; what you would see is a body that starts very small, gets bigger quickly and grows hair, grows bigger even still, reaches a maximum height, perhaps gets fatter, perhaps gets thinner, and then starts shrinking, and then sheds hair, and then gets weak, and then stops working, and then ultimately disintegrates back to nothing. Imagine that the physical being you are now, is not the same as the being you are, say.....now. Now imagine developing the focus of your mind such that you could experience all of that as it happens. The body is in a constant state of change, and the Buddha taught a meditation technique for experiencing just that....

Noble Silence. When one starts a 10-day Vipassana course, one must take a vow of silence; no talking to others, no talking to self, no chanting, no writing or reading, no iPods, etc. This is called Noble Silence, and it is a requirement because it keeps a person’s distractions to an absolute minimum. Again stressing the Buddha’s teaching, Goenka constantly reiterates that true wisdom and understanding can only be gained through experience. Talking is OK for intellectualization, but then all a person has done is intellectualize the practice; understanding of the “mind-matter phenomenon” can only be gained by a person as he or she experiences their own body, and no amount of talking, explaining, praying, chanting, etc, can substitute for this.

Connection. This point led me to a realization about our practice of Aikido. We often talk about Aikido (and talk, and talk, and talk) as a way to intellectualize what we do—both on and off the mat. That’s fine. The Buddha’s teaching, however, applies to our practice just the same: we will never be able to reach the deepest levels of our training if we stay at a level of intellectualization. Talking about Aikido will never be a substitute for the deep bodily understanding we gain by experiencing Aikido.

Having already classified our dojo as being on the “talkative” end of the How-Much-Talking-Does-Your-Dojo-Do-While-Training scale, I had previously decided that it was just a part of our dojo’s personality. I now think differently. I am now questioning the amount of talking we allow, and I think it would do us good to develop awareness of this and take individual steps to minimize it. Talking about Aikido off the

mat is another story. Have at it. But while on the mat, we may be doing ourselves a great disservice. Sometimes it may be necessary, like when guiding a brand-new student through a complex movement. But in general, it may be unnecessary at the least, and at the most it might actually be an obstacle to real advancement in our practice.

The Challenge. I thus put forth a challenge to all (myself included, because I sure like to yap it up) to: 1) notice when we talk on the mat, and try to do it in less words; 2) discontinue the needless chatter altogether; 3) discontinue the needless “what if...” questions; and, 4) as the saying goes, shut up and train!

Dave Lewin



A FEW THOUGHTS FROM A NEW STUDENT

It goes without saying that aikido is a physical discipline. I make my living as a knowledge worker and I tend to intellectualize new undertakings, especially physical ones, as if vicarious experience were enough to learn the basics of a new way of moving. This of course only goes so far; since understanding conceptually is very different from autonomic response, which is only achieved through physical practice; yet still I find myself reading about aikido as if that will help me execute ikkyo properly.

I came to the dojo because I was looking for a more physical practice than I get from Hatha yoga and meditation practice. I have been studying Iyengar-style Hatha yoga for ten years now, and Vipassana meditation on and off for about four years. Both of these practices are intensely personal, inwardly-focused activities. The point of Vipassana meditation is to maintain equanimity through simple observation, without intent to change your seated position, breathing or thoughts. The idea is to observe the sensations that arise in you without trying to avoid any discomfort, or conversely to hold on to pleasurable feelings. Sensations arise and fall away without any conscious effort to move them. If this sounds simple, it is deceptively so.

The yamas and niyamas of yoga (the social and personal codes of conduct) instruct the yogini or yogi in asana practice (the poses) to develop the physical skill of returning to your center when perturbed, either emotionally or physically. For me yoga opens my heart and the space between my bones while meditation practice disciplines my mind. (Don't get me wrong, meditation itself is a physical skill that is deepened by practice, not an intellectual exercise; however the result is a disciplined mind.) The personal inward discipline of seated meditation stills the mind so that it can experience this centeredness; the active poses of yoga open the body and build strength and awareness of what the body is capable of and also what its limitation are.

Westerbrook and Ratti describe the four basic principles of aikido as: centralization, extension, leading control and sphericity. These principles have maintenance of equanimity at their core. What I have experienced here at the dojo is that aikido takes my two solitary practices of maintaining equanimity and brings them into the social world of dynamic interaction. It is no longer my own equanimity that I am working with but that of me in concert with others, and by extension, the world. So it comes from within to find flower without.

Each practice is different, as each partner is different, and my own understanding of myself and the movement at the time is different. One may step only once into the same river because the water that flows past is different water from the last time you stepped in. In the same way perfection is never achieved in an idealized sense of having achieved a perfect posture; rather, one strives to do the best they can with what skills they have (which foot should be forward here?) and allows that experience, within those parameters, to be the best that it can be.

But it is this physicality that I really like about aikido. I spend so much time in my head for the work that I do that I have a tendency to view all challenges as intellectual. I may

understand conceptually perfectly well what I should be doing, but my body refuses to follow the dictates of my mind because I haven't yet developed the physical response to the intellectual impulse. Therefore the act of performing the movement places me in my body and pushes the mind to the side, allowing me to be truly present in the moment and not anticipating the future or reviewing the past.

This is somewhat similar to motorcycling for me: When completely engaged in a corner there is no room for anything else but the physics of the machine that you control and your position on it. The speed you take into the turn, your lean angle, how far off the side of the bike your shoulders and hips are (and where your weight is placed), where you're looking and how much gas you're giving it all occur in an instant that can't be repeated, only sought; and the exit from that turn sets you up for the next, until you find yourself either in the total flow of a balletic experience or clenching your every impulse, contracting in the shoulders and leaning on the wrists, standing the bike up, clutching a handful of brakes and dreading the impact.

It has been said that the life spent waiting for the perfection of the cherry blossom is not a wasted life. Each moment contains the germ from which perfection can spring. I was privileged to be present at Jacob's shodan test. To my untutored eyes he displayed the quality of equanimity very well: each technique he was asked to demonstrate came from a place of deep centeredness; the power of his extension and leading control were evident not only in the one-on-one attacks seated or standing but also fully realized in the spherical control of the three-man attack. Poetic movement, considered, controlled, beautiful, perfect.

Erica Stewart



20TH MEMORIAL DAY AIKIDO GASSHUKU

The Aikido Memorial Day Gasshuku took place in Tahoe from Friday May 22nd to Sunday May 24th. It is an opportunity to train in the Iwama style with instructors from all over the world. It's a chance to train, eat, and sleep in Aikido. Yes, and party in Aikido, too. It's a time to bond with the other members of your dojo, as well as to meet and bond with other Aikidoka that practice in the Iwama style.



The fun begins the minute you get in the car and start driving to Tahoe. We always rent a house for the weekend. This year we had over 25 people staying at the house, which is a record. Just making breakfast in the morning was an adventure. How many aikidoka does it take to make bacon? A lot.



20TH MEMORIAL DAY AIKIDO GASSHUKU

This year was particularly exciting because it marked the 20th Anniversary of the Tahoe Gasshuku. There were Shodan - Godan tests, Demos by the Senseis, and a fancy buffet dinner on Saturday night.

Our own Lars Eric took his Sandan test in front of over 150 Aikidoka. He showed a brilliant display of Aikido and made us all very proud. Kim Sensei did a demo for all to watch. And he was... well, he was Kim Sensei.

After all the training and demos on Saturday, it was time to run to the house, get dressed, and attend the Banquet. The dinner was great. It gave us all a chance to mingle and talk. Lots of Good food and drink. Many funny stories told by the senseis who remember the first years of the Gasshuku.

And there was entertainment. Other dojos sang songs.

Eddie played the piano. And last but not least, the whole Oakland Dojo got up to sing the debut performance of the now famous hit single "The Yonkyo Blues". Words and Music by Richard Levitt, performed by Richard and Scott on guitar and the Oakland Dojo Chorus. "Like nothin' else I know."



HAIKU

Training for my test
Significant one, they say
Little time to write

Training for oneself
Can't be accomplished alone
Thanks to all my friends

—Jon Hesser

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL NOVEL

[Note from the author: Technically the following is not a haiku.

A haiku has 17 syllables, 5, 7, 5 per line. Normally it would have a reference to the season, and it would have a "pivot" after the second line. So the first two lines would kind of get you going on a mental picture, then the third line would tweak that or adjust it more or less subtly.

My poem is a little different, but it can be taken as literally or as expansively as you feel like taking it.]

Standing on the ground, I watch the clouds.

David DeLong

IN THE NEWS

Suprise!

Dave was all hakama-ed up to teach his Tuesday rotation class. He looks out the front window and see's someone crossing the street and heading towards the dojo. This person looks remarkably like Hoa Sensei. As the person approaches, Dave's eyes get wider in disbelief. OMG, it's Hoa Sensei and he's coming to train.

As Eddie hurries to class, he is told that Hoa is in the dojo. Impossible. Bad joke. He puts on his hakama and runs to the mat so as just to make it before people bow in. There sitting in the instructors place, is Hoa Sensei.

The shock is enough to raise everyone's energy level by at least 40%.

Hoa Sensei concentrates on students that are taking their 6th Kyu and 4th Kyu tests. We do Kote-gaeshi from various attacks and then Shiho-nage from various attacks. Then for the last 15 minutes of class we do Kaeshi-waza. That is really cool.

He tells us stories about how the dojo obtained the Scroll done by O' Sensei. And about the roll-a-thon to help raise money for the scroll. (one person was sponsored to do 500 rolls!)

You could tell that the Oakland Dojo is a big part of Hoa Sensei and that he misses it a lot. After class, we all took him out to dinner.



SHODAN ESSAY: A LITTLE FAITH

It's always a bit strange to watch the video of one of my own tests. I feel so focused on the mat, but when I watch it I always wonder who is that red-faced hairy guy with the gangly arms hopping around there? Although I am still proud of my performance, it reminds me of how I always have to deal with my somewhat awkward tallness. It's a constant puzzle of how to stay balanced and maintain correct posture while adapting to training partners who are often shorter than I. There are days when it seems like a riddle with no answer—and others where I try to bear a thousand answers in mind (“bend your knees more” being the one I hear most often). I have come to accept there is a middle road of using extension while blending—a lesson in balance that Aikido brings up in all kinds of areas. After all, everyone has something to deal with—whether they are tall, short, stiff, limber, old, young, or just all-around average. The wonderful thing is that Aikido is open to everyone, no matter what particularities of body and mind we may have.

At heart, I'm a bit of an idealist, which may have something to do with why I love Aikido. Let's face it: we aikidoka like to have our cake and eat it too—dangerous martial artists on one hand yet compassionate and skilled enough to disarm an adversary without injuring them or resorting to blunt force. Although we are aware that in a real-life self defense scenario we wouldn't worry about causing injury, we still train with the ideal in mind. This idea of the strong but responsible warrior



appeals to me very much. No matter how far I progress in training, I will always aspire to reach that height of character, to have such a balanced approach not just to fighting, but to relationships, work, and society as well.

Appealing as it may be, it is also rather confusing. If someone is attacking you, love and compassion are not the first things that spring to your mind. There is a certain “killer instinct” that is necessary to fight which seems incompatible with serenity and love. Too often people are divided between helpless pacifists and violent barbarians. How can the two exist at once? It is a bit of a paradox which confounds rational explanation, especially in a dog-eat-dog world so centered on cynicism and the survival of the fittest. Aikido offers another way, and even though it may seem like a grand contradiction, we learn through practice that even the most baffling conflicts have a method of resolution.

I still remember my first class on ikkyo urawaza. The teacher admonished us not to cross the line of uke's forward foot with the technique—that would be omote waza. When I hopped behind my training partner and yanked on his arm, however, nothing happened. My teacher tried to help. “You have to find the ikkyo in front with the first step,” he told me, “then push your partner around you as you turn”. I watched him execute the move beautifully, but when I tried again I was baffled. This doesn't make sense, I thought—I start in front to get the ikkyo position, but I have to get behind for ura, and there's a place in the middle which is neither, or both. How can I be in front of and behind my partner at the same time? To this day, I can't really explain it, but fortunately I have had patient teachers and now, sometimes, I can do it.



This kind of apparent paradox comes up in all kinds of places. Even something so basic as hanmi calls for both solidity and mobility, which can seem to be mutually exclusive qualities. In our very method of training there is a duality I find humorous: we aspire to find compassion for an assailant outside the dojo, but on the mat we must ruthlessly attack our training partners whom we really love!

Another example of conflict arises with kote gaeshi: here someone punches at you and you dodge it, grab their wrist, and toss them with a flourish. At least that's how it's supposed to go. In practice, when I jump off the line to dodge the punch, the punch just follows me and if they do miss I'm out

of position, disconnected and cannot proceed with the technique. Dodging is not really the point at all, but staying in place just gets me punched. Owch. How then, can I make them miss without dodging? How can I accept the strike without being touched by it? It is a confounding and frustrating situation. Teachers have come to my aid giving me priceless demonstrations, coaching, and sound technical advice. Through their help and many hours of practice I sometimes feel a glimpse of understanding—that place right between dodging and being hit, were both my uke and I believe the punch will land, but it doesn't. It's not magic, but it's not something easily put into words, either.

IN THE NEWS

Congratulations went to the Students who passed their Kyu Tests in April 2009



Cassie - 4th Kyu, Ray - 6th Kyu, Esther - 6th Kyu, Sam - 6th Kyu



Liam - 2nd Kyu



Tim - 3rd Kyu



Sara - 6th Kyu

Sometimes sensei will give a simple instruction that makes a world of difference—maybe just “blend with his arm not his wrist.” or “turn your hips more.”, and suddenly it all seems to work. Still, it’s hard for me to accept that understanding the mechanics of a technique mentally is not the same as being able to feel it in my body, and my movements. When I’m learning new things, it can feel like progress will never come, either because I don’t understand or I don’t feel capable, or both. It takes a bit of trust, in my teacher and in the study of Aikido, to return to the same puzzles and challenges over and over. I think I have gotten a little better at quieting my urge to figure everything out and “make sense” of it. I try instead to watch closely, listen well, feel with sensitivity, and let the art happen.

It is an amazing feeling when a wall goes down, and something I could never do before is suddenly possible. I have found that it takes a little faith, and a lot of hard work and dedication. Learning an Aikido technique can feel like traveling toward a foreign land—you have never been there, and so you have no proof that it really exists. Maybe you have a map, and a guide assuring you that yes the place is real, but you have to trust them enough to make the long hard journey until you finally arrive. Then you realize there is another unknown destination to reach over the horizon. In this sense, I trust there is an answer to those greatest questions: the meaning of true nonviolence, and the nature of inner peace.

I find Aikido to be a very positive and happy discipline. I know that the beautiful and ideal movements, the sweeping turns and graceful throws are not as perfect in my own practice as they are in my imagination. I’m not a perfect person in any respect—but I choose to focus on the positive, the potential. When I’m stuck in a grab or frustrated or exhausted, I visualize myself being lighter, stronger, and energized—I think of my instructors, and I think of O’Sensei. If I still fail, I know I’m one step closer to success. The Oakland dojo is a great place for building this kind of confidence—it is full of positive people all supporting one another. The outside world is not always so caring. I am fortunate indeed to have Aikido Institute, a loving family, and good friends, all helping me to have faith in myself.

Jacob Clapsadle

IN THE NEWS

Congratulations went to the Students who passed their Kyu Tests in August



Laura - 6th, Adrian - 6th, Scott R - 4th, Damian - 2nd



Dana - 4th, Michael - 5th, Jon - 3rd



Charly - 2nd Kyu

IN THE NEWS

Clean Up

This year's clean up was spread over two weekends. It was not your ordinary clean up before Tai Sai. It was major. The dojo was prepared for painting. Holes were plastered, walls were washed, fixtures were repaired, and painting was started.



Lots of volunteers came to help. Everything from weapons to frames, to furniture was moved, dusted, washed, and put back. By the 2nd weekend the 2nd coat of paint was applied, and after more dusting, the dojo sparkled from top to bottom.

Now, it was time for the big change. The scrolls were to be put into cases and placed on the shomen. Sensei Dave DeLong, Carpenter by day, Aikido master by night, made the 2 wooden cases for the shomen scrolls.

Dave came from Texas to make the scrolls in Oakland.

Our very own Carpenter Jacob Sempai prepared them here and attached them to the wall. They looked Phenomenal. Thank you Dave Sensei and Jacob Sempai for all your work.

Thanks to everyone who helped in this year's Clean Up.

[See more photos from the clean up on pages 17 and 18 of this issue of the KIAI.]



IN THE NEWS: GOODBYE UCHI DESHI

William Liam Burke joined the Aikido Institute of Oakland as Uchi Deshi on March 2, 2008. He was a skinny kid who did not know what he was getting into. He eventually learned all the tricks that change ordinary people into very good Uchi Deshis. No ordinary feat (as many can attest to).

He has a wonderful boyish charm which sometimes kept him out of trouble. But most of the time didn't. But he was always in the dojo, attended every class (even the really early ones), and became the fixture that everyone depended on. It was great to see him improving every day. From being a real



klutz to taking big high falls and landing like a feather on the mat. (easy to do when you only weigh 90 lbs soaking wet).

Now, after almost 16 months of Solid Aikido Uchi Deshi style training, Liam is retiring from being Uchi Deshi.



He has started the transition of becoming a regular person with a normal schedule. His aikido got really good. He's still as annoying as ever, but really good at aikido. We will miss him a lot and hope he comes to train often.

Thank you, Liam.



10 KUMI JO RHYMES AND MEMORY AIDS

Inspired by Steve Sensei's "1, 2, 3 tsuki at the knee," line some years ago, Sarah Larus Tolley, Scott McCormick, and I attempted to come up with mnemonics for all 10 kumi jo. In preparing for my 2nd kyu test (and having a terrible time keeping my weapon moves straight), I wrote them all out, along with other hints and reminders I picked up around the dojo, into what has been referred to as "Diana's Kumi Jo Poem." Of dubious poetic merit, the following verses are mostly silly; some are more helpful than others, some may make no sense at all unless in the right mindset (ask Scott to explain the drawn "5" to you, e.g.), and, as can be seen, some are rather bare/incomplete. Edits and additions are more than welcome.

In 1, the defender starts with the 2nd jo suburi; in 2, with the 1st jo suburi.

1) "you tsuki, I kaeshi tsuki,
you tsuki again, and I shomen, shomen"
or "one is fun; it's long (four counts/moves, in start stop & awase)"

2) "I deflect with choku tsuki,
you yokomen at my KNEE (ni),
and we both end with tsukis"

In 4, defender does the big sweeping move (katate toma uchi); in 5, attacker gets to do it (katate gedan gaeshi).

3) "1, 2, 3, tsuki at the knee (attacker, beginning),
and be sneaky (defender, end)"

4) "far from the floor"

5) Nice illustration of aikido: in response to attacker's large sweeping moves, defender does smaller subtle moves. Also, attacker draws an angled "5" in the air (with katate gedan gaeshi and head strike)

6-10 all end in throws.

6) "4, 5, 6, hold down the stick,
come up under the eaves (elbows) for spiral throw tricks"

7) "a cross toward hell, a cross toward heaven,
partner's knee points toward heaven"
*7 and 8 are the only ones where attacker's first move is not a tsuki.

8) "(defender's feet trace) half of a figure 8" &/or
"partner (almost) ATE (8) the jo (makes him hesitate/stop before completing the strike)"

9) after the first tsuki and deflection "the shave is fine (end of jo to his chin), then keep him going, on the line"

10) "start in KEN-kamae, hasso, hasso and THEN,
partner's wrist and throat are PENned"

Diana Aehegma



MY LAST DAY

A few days before my departure date for Singapore, (New) Scott, Jon, and Richard somehow persuaded me that I had to go to Friday morning class that week. When my alarm went off at 5:30, the only thing I could think and I'm pretty sure I even said to aloud myself was: "seriously??" I stayed in bed for another four and a half minutes arguing with myself before ripping of the covers.

There was no traffic and parking abounded.

I stepped inside the dojo, surprised to see life forms already in gis walking around, stretching even. A silhouette (one of the Persuasive Ones) raised his arms in victory when he saw me. Thankfully, the lights were off because had they been on, I would have retreated to my car like a bat into his cave.

“Do you know any jo or bokken?” Kim Sensei asked me as we lined up. I made him repeat the question a few times because I heard words, but I couldn’t put them together coherently (I’m not a morning person).

“Not a lot,” I admitted. I had seen the 31 jo kata before, and thankfully that’s what we did for the first fifteen minutes of class. We practiced the entire thing at least a dozen times, at a pace I could almost keep up with. There was some stumbling, some confusion, and almost always wrong footing, but I was more or less following and even fixing some mistakes as we went. Sensei sped it up and suddenly I was surrounded by fast-forwarded Charlie Chaplins with jo’s.

It was then time for partner practice. I was intrigued but mostly intimidated at the realization that there were twice as many blackbelts as whitebelts. What kind of partner practice would this be?!

With my partner, I worked past the frustration of forgetting the art of a wrist-flick as soon as I learned it. Plus he taught me what “parry” meant. After half an hour, I could remember both attacking and receiving parts, and I knew victory was near. I was exhausted, but it was almost time to go home and crawl back into bed.

Sensei clapped loudly. “Black belts versus white belts!” I looked at my fellow whitebelts, Scott and Liam. Instead of explaining, they just smiled knowingly. The battle of the belts began. We were moving quickly, switching partners and then roles, and I was surprised that my body was so far ahead of my mind. If I stopped to think I got stuck, so I stopped thinking and just tsuki’d, parried, and tried to remember to exhale. When it was my turn to train with Sensei, I was a little nervous. But I got through without hitting myself in the head, as I had done earlier in the class, or hitting him in the head, which was not how I wanted to be remembered.

He clapped again. The hour was over and I felt what was at first unidentifiable and then unexpected – disappointment that it was over. I should have forced myself out of bed and gone to more Friday morning classes, or they should be longer, or I should delay my flight until next Monday.

“You want coffee?” Eddie asked.

We sat around for over an hour and ate scones and drank coffee, and one by one I said goodbye to my fellow Aikidoka. First Richard and Kathy, then Kim Sensei, and I didn’t feel sad or understand what that meant until I got home.

This goodbye does not entail that I will never be back, but it does mean that training in Oakland won’t play the same role in my life it has played over the past six months. When I say goodbye, I also mean thank you. Training with you got me through a lot over the past few months and your friendship and patience was always meaningful to me. I’ll miss you all so much.

Esther Slaman



HI FALL HAIKU

The Big Guy Went Up
He Fell Back Down To The Ground
The Dojo Went Boom!

–Stephen Sabas



WHAT ARE YOU WORKING ON?

Test time seems to bring about an increase in the number of us who attend class and stay afterwards to work on those techniques that we'll be asked to demonstrate. But while tests come and go, training happens every day you're at the dojo. So now that the current round of tests have passed, what are you working on?

Every day I come into the dojo I'm working on something: trying to *kiai* more, keeping my hands extended and in front of my center, or making my rolls rounder.

As you can tell from that list, what you're working on doesn't have to be an esoteric exploration of the hidden meaning behind a technique. It can be as simple as the all-important *kiai* or the connection between the hands and the center. The important thing for me is not to focus my aikido training on test requirements but on the basics of aikido that make up the core of all the techniques listed on the test requirements.

It's these basics that make me eager to come in and train regularly. Keeping hands and center moving together will help you do any technique, and coordinating breath and movement through a *kiai* will bring an energy to a technique that can't be developed in silence. And all of these are used in every technique you'll ever do.

But whether you are focusing on these few basic concepts or want to explore *nikkyo ura waza*, *shiho nage* high falls, or getting below your partner's center when doing *koshi nage*, I encourage you to have a training focus that isn't solely designed around test requirements and schedules, and instead gives you something to work on every day you are on the mat.

Stephen Kilmer



SUMMERTIME HAIKU

juicy plums falling
splat onto the hot sidewalk.
summertime *kiai*

the dojo stays light
but smells like stinky gym socks.
summertime training

sun's up when we clap
and I see sensei coming.
summertime mornings

warm-ups come easy
and sweat even easier.
summertime classes

familiar *kiais*
strangely absent in August.
summertime journeys

—Richard Levitt



BEAUTY AND PRACTICE

I've been coming to the dojo for the past three years. Granted, I've had long absences due to various life events—but I always come back. Why do I come back? The answer is elusive, but I know that there must be a reason.



The first time I watched an aikido practice, I realized that what I saw in it was what I look for in everything that interests me - grace. That grace, along with my long-standing desire to do something badass, naturally made me think I'd found the holy grail. I love watching people perform something they are really good at. The absence of unnecessary effort, the fluidity, the precision - all of these things add up to grace. I watch, and I want to do as they do, because nothing is more

beautiful than a beautiful movement.

But when I get on the mat, something happens to the beauty. It disappears. I feel thoroughly inadequate—uncoordinated and weak. So it becomes an exercise in patience and humility. Because as it turns out, the beauty only comes with countless hours of practice, and until then it's something, well, quite different. Until then it's painful, frustrating, disorienting. In the beginning, it's baffling how some techniques are supposed to be effective. They say it works, just



not when I do it. Then at a much later point it dawns on me: it really does work (even though I still can't do it). But that's still progress.

A revelation comes: they call it "art" for a good reason. There is nothing trivial about an art form. To be a master of an art is to embody it. To own it. A cerebral understanding of the way aikido works emerges, to be immediately followed by a thought that nothing so sophisticated ever comes without years of practice. That's right, they also call it practice. With practice comes ease of movement, bringing back the deeply coveted beauty. There's hope after all. My brain having completed this circular thought process is satisfied. (Perhaps another reason I'm drawn to aikido—the circularity?) The answer no longer eludes. Why aikido? Because it's beautiful.

Dana Jacobson

CLEAN UP 2009 - PHOTO GALLERY



CLEAN UP 2009 - PHOTO GALLERY (CONTINUED)



IN THE NEWS

Tai Sai is the anniversary of O'Sensei's death. It is celebrated every year at the Aiki Shrine in Iwama, Japan to honor the founder of Aikido, Morihei Ueshiba. It is a time when we remember him and all he has done for us and for Aikido.

At the Oakland dojo, we also have a special Tai Sai training, every year.

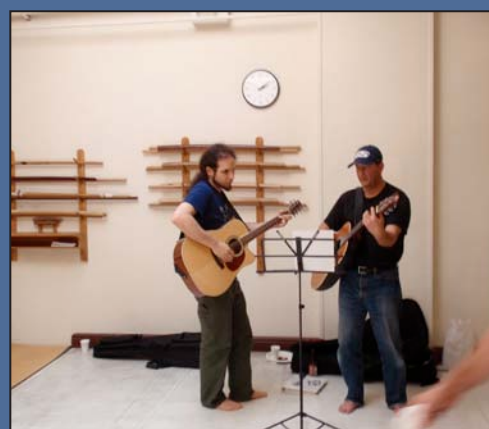
This year, the mat was full and there was lots of energy, as we trained in honor of O'Sensei. Kim Sensei and Steve Sensei both taught class.

This year, however, something was added. The kids class was invited to join the adults in the celebration. And they were wonderful.

After class there was a brief lesson by Kim Sensei on how to properly sweep the mat, and then food and drink was brought out for everyone to enjoy.

We had a wonderful time.

And after eating, Richard and Scott started our first rehearsal of the "Yonkyo Blues". Music and Lyrics by Richard Levitt, composed for the Tahoe Gasshuku. Like nothing else I know.





HITOHIRO SAITO SENSEI SEMINAR

Report by Curtis Mitchell



On the weekend of June 5-7th, Hitohiro Saito Sensei, son of Morihiro Saito, traveled from Iwama, Japan to give a weekend seminar in the Bay Area.

The event was sponsored by Pat Hendricks Sensei of Aikido of San Leandro. Taijutsu sessions were held at Pat Sensei's dojo as well as Aikido of Berkeley, along with weapons sessions at a park in the Oakland hills.

I had a great time during the seminar, meeting instructors and other students from across the country and training as hard as I could. The most important lesson I took from the seminar was to practice whenever possible outside of the dojo, including weapons and other solo exercises such as the two-step. This presented a nice balance to what I thought was an important lesson from the Lake Tahoe gasshuku, which was that you can train with great instructors almost anywhere.