

# THE KIAI

FALL 2000

Newsletter of THE AIKIDO INSTITUTE

Volume VI, Issue 3

## 30 YEARS OF AIKIDO

I went to the Division 1 training at Dennis's dojo Saturday. I was late to the class, as I'd had to work that morning. There was a fair attendance, but I was disappointed that no one else from Oakland showed up. I think we have to provide more encouragement next time.

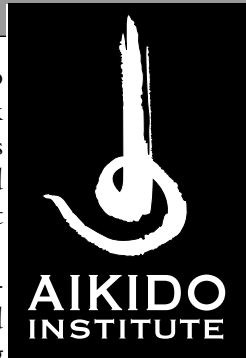
I think these events are important for several reasons. First there are always a number of people 3rd Dan or higher on the mat. What a terrific training opportunity for junior people! Second, it works against the provincialism of training in one dojo. In a single dojo, we all get used to our training partners. Division training is an opportunity to train with people from other dojos who practice the same style derived from the same single



instructor, Saito Sensei. Third, it is a place to make new friends. Fourth, it is an opportunity to observe and uphold the standards of our division. All 3rd Dan tests must be performed at a division event - either one of the two yearly AANC related events or at the Memorial Day Gasshuku. Everyone promoted to 4th Dan must give a demo at one of these events. The reason for this is to provide some measure of quality assurance for the division. Quality assurance is actually one of the requirements placed onus by Hombu Dojo. That said, here is my report:

I arrived about 40 minutes late due to my work. I quickly changed and got on the mat to train in the remaining time. The first person I trained with was Wolfgang who has not lost a bit of his power. :-)

There was a short break, then one 3rd Dan test and one 4th Dan demo. Both were by students of Hans Goto. Jenny Breeland took her test first. She is a small woman, but she quickly took control of her larger partners. My one criticism was of her partners in the randori - every single attack was



ryo-kata. Not only does this make for an uninteresting segment, but it does not give the nage the opportunity to show her true skill.

Judith Robinson then got up to do her 4th Dan demo. It was truly fine to watch. For those of you who do not know Judith, a little background. She is now 64 years old, about 5' 7" and quite slender - I'd guess no more than 120 lbs. Her posture is very straight. She was Hans's first

shodan candidate. She worked for years as a legal secretary to support her children. When they left home, she changed careers and became a bodyguard. She has trained in Model Mugging, Karate (shodan), Wing Chun, and Tai Chi as well as Aikido. A formidable martial artist and a very sweet person besides! I was fortunate to be able to ride up and back with her. Her demo was first-rate. She is having a little trouble with her knees, but still maintained a strong connection to the ground. When we tell students to bend their knees and lower their hips, we are trying to get them to connect with their feet and with the ground. Judith showed how to make that connection without a lot of effort. During her randori, once again all the attacks started as ryo-kata, but this time Hans told the attackers to vary their attacks. They began to come in with various strikes and grabs, and Judith really showed her stuff!

The \$10 training fee included lunch. During lunch, we had the instructor's meeting. Bill raised the issue of people trying to join our division. Sometimes they are people we sort of know, and sometimes they are complete strangers. We don't want to be just a conduit for promotion for people who have nothing to do with our style. We discussed the issue a bit, and it was decided that Bill and Pat Hendricks would draw up some guidelines for consideration by the other instructors. One possible requirement would be yearly

5036 TELEGRAPH AVENUE at 51ST  
OAKLAND, CALIFORNIA 94609  
[www.aikidoinstitute.org](http://www.aikidoinstitute.org)

attendance at one of the division training sessions. Next Hans Goto brought us up to date on Saito Sensei's seminar. All the dinners are soldout. Those attending will get "Aiki Joe" washable tattoos that are what will get you in to the seminar. There will be a separate space to stow belongings, but not a number system as was used in Denver. Hans sent special invitations to Frank Doran, Bob Nadeau, Chiba Sensei, Shibata Sensei, and the chief instructor in SF - sorry but I've forgotten his name just now. Hans asked us to encourage people to do some volunteer work in the following areas: helping set up and clean the mats beginning Friday at 1PM; help with serving or cleaning up after Saturday's dinner; help with security - mainly escorting people to their cars in the evening; help with cleanup on Sunday.

Kim Sensei



## CONVERGING PATHS

At the celebration of the Aikido Institute's 30th anniversary, Hoa Sensei overheard me noting how both yoga and aikido emphasize focusing one's life energy in an effort to move beyond physical discomfort, achieve a mastery of self, and neutralize conflict. At the time, I was speaking in reference to my chronic shoulder injury, which had been bothering me during the event, and was attempting to learn from it somehow. He immediately approached me to ask if I'd be willing to write an article comparing aikido and yoga practices and I willingly agreed.

A few months down the road, long after the spontaneous "yes" emerged from my lips, I became somewhat daunted with the prospect of drawing parallels between these two deeply spiritual and historically rich practices. A worthy comparison of the two arts would require a lifetime of scripture reading in the languages of the original documents, world travel to visit ancient sites and contemporary masters, a challenging disciplined daily spiritual practice, and, well, the attainment of enlightenment. In the spirit of simplicity and focus — important components of yoga and aikido — I will instead offer a few humble comparisons based on what I've seen, heard and felt so far in my life.

In the yoga community where I was raised, discussing yoga and one's spiritual progress was akin to chatting about the weather. My yoga practice as a child was sporadic at best — I could twist my little body into many pretzel-like variations and just didn't get why the grownups were marveling

over life-changing revelations resulting from some simple stretches. It took some life experience, dealing with a couple of sports-related injuries, and a more consistent, thoughtful yoga practice to begin to understand how the body can be a vessel for life lessons and spiritual growth.

A common goal of yoga and aikido is to seek harmony, then maintain this balanced state while adapting to life's often unpredictable twists and turns. Through "meditation in motion", yoga provides a vehicle for seeking this balance on a very personal level. When feeling discomfort during a yoga posture, one "holds the posture", becomes fully aware of the sensation, and uses the breath to extend prana (ki) from the hara (center in the lower abdomen) through the area of discomfort until it releases. The pain can present itself in a physical form, or in some sort of mental or emotional block. The practice of yoga creates the opportunity to bring awareness to the disharmony, extend beyond it, and achieve a harmonious state by unifying body and spirit. Since life is full of conflict and challenges, personally and in the world around us, yoga presents an excellent microcosm for practicing this expansive model of handling conflict and bringing awareness and harmony into every moment.

In the book, *Aikido in Daily Life*, Koichi Tohei describes how, by using aikido practice, one can achieve a similar state of harmony. "To master action in calm and calm in action you must concentrate all of your spirit in the single spot in the lower abdomen. Whether you are active or still, if you keep your body and spirit unified, you will have mastered the secret of unity of calm and action. When you have achieved this state you will be able to handle whatever complexities the world may offer with equanimity and accuracy." In aikido, this state of personal harmony is sought so that we can extend and receive energy in order to remain in harmony with others. As with yoga, bringing this sense of calmness to our movements and interactions can be incredibly challenging, requiring a continual willingness to grow and learn mentally, physically, emotionally, and spiritually. However, since conflict is an inevitable part of life, the quest is worthwhile, and the rewards can be vast.

Hoa Sensei, in his June 2000 Kiai article *Life is Conflict*, acknowledges that conflict is the interplay of energy expansion and contraction — a necessary dynamic of life. He notes that, "... by practicing Aikido regularly, we are learning to neutralize the apparent conflict of life. We eventually come to the understanding that this perceived conflict is not something really bad after all, and that it is life itself."

Accepting conflict as part of life — something to constantly blend with — reminds me again of the value of both



yoga and aikido. Shortly after the 30th Anniversary event, I took a break from my aikido practice to have shoulder surgery. Needless to say, I've had plenty of time to meditate on the more subtle aspects of both arts as I moved through each day, read about aikido, breathed through the frustration of physical limitations, did slow stretches, and eventually healed enough to return to class. The hiatus made me aware, once again, that these practices are spiritually rich and the lessons of each can spill over into daily life off the mat. Ultimately, it is the commitment to our path and consistent practice that allows us to get closer to achieving a harmonious state.

Tamara Shulman



## I HOPE ALL IS WELL WITH YOU :)

Dear Friends,

As I sit and type, the sun sets in New England behind rows of pine, with a glint of red through the solemn green.

I'm thinking of you all very affectionately and even longingly. I hope to return to train with you soon.

Did Ted take his shodan yet? If not, will he soon? I hope so!

Training for me now consists of occasional visits to a relatively nearby Aikikai affiliated dojo with a good solid crew from whom I am learning a lot (especially about the second third of our dojo code).

My hernia, which may receive the western knife soon, prohibits vigorous activity of any sort.

Employment : middle school science and English teacher in, believe it or not, local catholic school.

If airfares are extremely low and surgery went well, I may see you in Bolinas. If not....

Fondly,

Alex Gutterman

(PS A long and somewhat pedantic article was planned, but this must suffice for now.)

*"Do ordinary things with  
extraordinary love."*

Mother Teresa

## IWAMA PERSPECTIVES

*This article is the first of several concerning people's visits and experiences in Iwama, Japan. Sempai Alberta Hankenson provides these insights to Iwama as it was in 1981 not long after she had completed her shodan test.*



### A Day in the Life

Imagine waking up for training, pouncing into your gi, rushing into the dojo, and after bowing onto the mat, looking up to find a class of 20-30 people consisting of mostly high ranking Japanese black belts and also American senseis and sempais galore: Kim Peuser, Deborah Maizels, Pat Hendricks, Bruce Klickstein, Bernice Tom, Bill Witt and Stan Pranin. Does this sound like the 30th Anniversary of the Aikido Institute? Well it is a possible morning weapons class in Iwama, Japan in the early '80s. Get ready for Saito Sensei and do not forget to stretch for "It's up to you—get on the mat early and do what you need to do," according to Alberta Hankenson Sempai.

Before the 6:30 a.m. morning class, there is only time to do your duty by raking and evening out the gravel in front of the jinja. There is no time for breakfast and coffee until later. Saito's 5'8" frame makes its way into the dojo and in front of the shomen. The class remains silent, kneeling, and ready to go. "People who know him better say that he has a fierce temper, but I've never seen that. As for training, it's clear and straightforward—he wants us to understand what we are doing," remarks Alberta Sempai.

Everyone bows in and class begins. Tai no henko. Morote dori kokyu ho. The stiff cool morning tatami mats brace and shift from the first falls and slaps. Strong kiais abound. The action stops. Saito Sensei gives an explanation. He only speaks Japanese, so students who know both English and Japanese (students such as Stan Pranin, Bill Witt or Pat Hendricks) translate on the side as well as others who translate for other represented languages. Sensei speaks and allows the translators time to explain. "I have a feeling," says Alberta Sempai, "that he understands English quite well. But he will not speak it."

The action resumes. Soon, one hears the one word that resounds in most Iwama veterans' heads, "Dame!" Or

“Wrong!” People describe Saito Sensei’s critiques as very direct and explicitly clear.

Alberta Sempai recalled one such instance while they were practicing shomen uchi ikkyo omote waza. Sensei saw her mistake, stopped the class of 20-30 people and had her demonstrate her mistake in front of everyone. He then explained the correction by telling her to get a solid grip with that bottom hand rather than curling the wrist over the top when grasping the uke.

While it would seem hard to take criticism in such a foreign environment full of many high-ranking people, Alberta Sempai explains, “I traveled to Japan to learn. It’s better to be corrected than to be ignored. If he ignores you, it’s not good.” Saito Sensei tests your ability to take criticism or correction. “I have never once made that mistake on shomen uchi ikkyo again.”

After morning class, everyone would change and it would be time for breakfast. A chore rotation determined which residents had the job of preparing breakfast that day. Following breakfast, Alberta Sempai would normally check in with Saito Sensei to see if he needed anything in particular. “If not, do your assigned chore, or shop for food if it’s your turn to cook.”

Then Alberta Sempai would normally train some more with Bernice Tom on things like the 31 jo kata partner practice before having lunch. The afternoons were free until evening keiko. Again residents would rake the gravel in front of the jinja and stretch on the mat on their own.

Believe it or not, the tatami mats were even harder than our Oakland mat. Soreness was normal. Classes were chock full of high-ranking black belts and hard falls and, as Alberta Sempai observes, “Class was only an hour long, and usually felt as if it were much longer.”

Dinner was also prepared in the dojo complex by and for the residents. Afterwards Alberta Sempai remembers, “We would often take one of the dojo bicycles into town to buy drinks.” The dojo had many bicycles that were free for people to use any time they wanted. The only rule was that you could not leave the bicycles at the train station.

One could get beer in town from a vending machine or also pop in and visit Deborah Maizels, who had her own apartment. “Her setup was astonishing. I seem to recall that she had quite nice furniture and even a television set that people had previously thrown away.”



## Clothes and Supplies

Alberta Sempai took two gi’s with her to Japan and bought one while there for “there was a custom at that time, of having everyone write on your gi just before you left to come home.” There was no need to take a sleeping bag or weapons, but in 1981 a good pillow would have been helpful because the ones in the dojo were small sacks filled with buckwheat. Alberta Sempai recommends taking a good mixture of hot weather and warm weather clothes no matter what time of year. A nice supply of English books would have been helpful. Iwama was an especially small town with lots of spare time, but no International bookstore.

For important occasions (like Tai Sai or other events), it was important for men to have a tie and jacket. While Alberta Sempai was there, she observed a ceremony in which, “Doshu and several other very important people came.” They were carrying quite a large object and kicked off their shoes before entering the dojo despite wearing very formal clothing.

The type of shoes you wore was very important. “Saito Sensei does not like Birkenstocks. At least he didn’t while I was there.” Alberta Sempai recommends, “Loafers or any shoes that you can get off without your hands are preferable.” Sandals are to be avoided.



## Japan and Iwama

Japan, especially a small town like Iwama, was a very foreign place. One only found “kanji” or Japanese characters and didn’t find any English or “rumaji” on any signs or postings once outside of Tokyo proper. While Bernice Tom Sensei met Alberta Sempai at the train station, not everyone was so lucky. Not one to worry too much, Alberta Sempai points out that crime was not a problem in Japan. “You could leave your luggage sitting anywhere in the train station while you grabbed some food.” People didn’t steal there, at least not in 1981.

Iwama was tiny. In 1981 it had no bank let alone an ATM. One used to go to Mito to do such things as cash travelers’ checks.

“When you venture outside the dojo grounds, be prepared to have people gawk at you.” Alberta Sempai continues, “I was walking along a road and an old man went by me on a bicycle, and kept looking over his shoulder and giggling, and I was afraid he’d fall into the drainage ditch, but he didn’t.”

Kids would see you and yell out “Gaijin, Gaijin.” There were several stories of Americans getting swarmed by curious kids who wanted to shake hands, “a very exotic thing to do,” recounts Alberta Sempai.

When eating in Japan at times it is okay to use your hands instead of chopsticks. But if Saito Sensei is there, you should, “Eat how he eats. If he’s not there, eat how the next highest ranking eats,” cautions Alberta Sempai.

Restaurants often times display numbered, plastic models of food out front to show what the food served inside looks like. That way you can memorize the number and use it to order.

It was okay to sit cross-legged in Japan and in the Iwama dojo, “I always am,” says Alberta Sempai, “Sensei is very sympathetic to people with bad knees.”

## Memories

Alberta Sempai seems to have many fond memories of Iwama, but mentions that the most rewarding aspect for her was “Finding that no one expected me to be perfect, but to do my best, whatever it was.”

J.R. Richards



## WOLFGANG'S VISIT

On Friday, September 1st, Wolfgang Baumgartner Sensei taught the 6:30 P.M. class at the Aikido Institute. Wolfgang Sensei started his Aikido training at the Aikido Institute a number of years ago, and now brings Iwama style to Germany at his own dojo, Iwama-Ryu Aikido Berlin.

At 6:00 that evening, the dojo was in a state of excited hush. Even Alonza was focused on the preparations, nestling t-shirts for Wolfgang Sensei and his family in a basket and lecturing the hamsters on the importance of good behavior. Peter Sempai arrived with beer, Kathy followed shortly thereafter with elaborate flowers, and the crowd began to pour in. The usual suspects from our own dojo arrived with even a touch more than the usual gusto, many bearing flowers. Then strangers started appearing, many with colorful hairstyles. This contingent was joined shortly by their leader, Jimmy Friedman of Sugunami Kai Aikido in San Francisco, who once shared Aikido Institute uchi deshi duties with Wolfgang Sensei for some length of time.

Then Wolfgang Sensei himself appeared, warm and smiling, happily greeting the dojo and his old friends. There was a last minute bustle of form signing, hand shaking and gi straightening, then a good two dozen warm bodies were

bowing in.

Wolfgang Sensei is big and calm and kind looking. He speaks precisely with a deep, lightly German voice. He practices Aikido lightly and concisely, seeming to expend no effort, like a clever healthy cat would lazily snatch a tasty rodent.

We started with a bit of tai no henko ki no nagare to warm up and get accustomed to the tight adrenaline charged choreography of the well-populated mat. The theme of the class then became kokyuu nage, mainly in motion. Wolfgang Sensei would demonstrate a technique with a casual hip turn and lightning quick kokyuu, and uke would fall from the sky onto the far end of the mat. Then it was our turn. Concentrating earnestly on replicating Sensei’s simple power and grace without throwing all the ukes together in one big heap, we each performed the technique as well as we could. The heavy breathing and heartfelt kiais were punctuated by the occasional crack of skulls bashing together as mat management failure occurred. A sweaty fog clouded the windows and spilled out the door onto the sidewalk. Microscopic organisms began growing on the walls, biosphere style, and every wrist was hot and slippery. Wolfgang Sensei mopped a drop of sweat from his own brow and joyfully threw another uke across the dojo.

Then it was over and we sat to bow out, spent and calm like the aftermath of a tropical thunderstorm. Tables appeared, and wonderfully cold and fizzy beer and water, perfectly accompanied by Deborah’s shamelessly chocolate brownies. Peter made a toast to Wolfgang Sensei and presented him with an uchi deshi t-shirt and 30 year anniversary t-shirts for his wife and family. Then Wolfgang Sensei’s wife and three boys arrived, followed by Pat Hendricks Sensei and her little one, and soon the mat was given over to a raucous bilingual game of pick-up ball tag, interspersed with old friends catching up. There was much laughter, and no one was hurt.

All in all, it was a lovely way to spend an evening.

Sail I White

### The Dojo Code

*I always look, listen and learn.  
I bow with humility to receive from  
O’Sensei, the Sensei and fellow  
students.  
I do my best, share and persevere  
in my practice.*



## WALKING GASSHUKU

*On July 28 to July 31 I took part in the Avon Breast Cancer 3-Day, a 60-mile walk in 3 days. The goal was to raise money to fight breast cancer.*

*Here's how it was.*

The Avon 3-Day is really a 4-day event. Day Zero (Thursday, July 27) is spent registering, a process that takes several hours. On Day Zero you receive the hospital wristbands that you must wear during the entire event. These wristbands prove that you are part of the 3-Day, that you have viewed the safety video, and that you are (or are not) a vegetarian. You also get your official badge with your official number to wear around your neck.

While the event takes 4 days, training for the event takes months. When you sign up you're given a handbook detailing the monthly and weekly mileage goals necessary to get yourself into shape. By the month before the walk, you should be completing 90 miles of walking a month including two 20-mile (back-to-back) days. You are advised not to attempt three 20-mile days in a row before the actual event. The organizers figure that if you can do two 20-mile days back-to-back, then at the actual event, given the adrenaline and other energy, you should be able to push to complete the extra day of 20 miles.

Of the 3-Day it is said that you get through the first two days with muscle, the third day with heart.

At Day Zero a very big deal is made about seeing the safety video. Once you are in the auditorium to view the video, you may not leave unless you are willing to come back to the next showing and sit through the whole thing again. You are not allowed to go to tent registration until you see the video. You are tagged as soon as you exit the auditorium to prove that you have seen the video. You must see the video.

So what's in the video?

The video is not only a safety video; it also sets the tone and goals for the 3-Day. Chief-executives of Pallotta Team Works, the event organizer, instruct you in basic walking safety, for example, walkers should call out "Passing on your left (or right)" as they move past other walkers. The organizers acknowledge the feelings of uncertainty throughout the crowd ("the old ones are thinking the young ones are in better shape; the young ones are thinking the old ones are better prepared..."). But beyond all that, the video begins to establish the new culture we will create for the next 3 days. We are urged to take this opportunity to create a world the

way we want it to be. One where people take time out for one another, where they do kind things for each other, where a stranger will stop and ask another how they're doing. A world in which people don't hesitate to help. How often in our lives do we see a chance to help someone, then hesitate and talk ourselves out of it? That voice in our heads tells us someone else will take care of the problem, that there is good reason not to stop, that it would be best to turn and walk away. The 3-Day is the chance to practice helping without hesitation.



3000 walkers have shown up for the event, of these 159 are men, 169 are breast cancer survivors.

I attend with a group of five other women, only one of whom I know. We seem a very disparate bunch, from varied backgrounds, of various ages, of various abilities. None of us has ever walked 60 miles in 3 days before. On Day Zero we are all still wondering how it can ever be done.

We spend the night in a local hotel. We will be up at 4:30 a.m. on Day 1, ready for the opening ceremony. It is a night of little sleep. The hotel has given a group rate to walkers. At 4:30 a.m. while the stars are still out in the cool morning sky, the halls are filled with women and their gear. Elevators are stuffed to overflowing with walkers in their 3-Day T-shirts and walking shorts.

We all meet at De Anza College to drop off our gear, eat breakfast and wait for the opening ceremony. It is now 5 a.m., the grass is too wet to sit on. But by 6 a.m. the wet grass seems inviting. The opening ceremony begins at 7 a.m. and is brief but touching. We hold hands. We are told that we have already succeeded. We have raised a net amount of \$6.2 million to fight breast cancer. Never before the Avon 3-Days have so few raised so much in so little time. We dedicate our walk as a living, breathing, moving memorial to those who have died and have suffered. We all wipe tears from our eyes. Then the walk begins.

It is now rush hour in the South Bay and we are in the middle of it. We are let out of the staging area in small groups so that we can be ushered through the stoplights that lie ahead. My group is among the last to get out on the road. We finally start walking at 9 a.m.



I have done a lot of training walks to get ready for this event. The training walks are learning experiences. If you forget your sunscreen on a training walk, you don't ever forget it again. When you get a blister on a training walk, you learn where to put moleskin. You find the socks and shoes that work for you by wearing them on training walks. Besides discovering that I am prone to get a blister on my left little toe, I also learn on the training walks that I am a slow walker. I am always at the end of the line, no matter how long the line. I learn my timing and my pace and I learn what 20 miles of walking in one day feels like.

The route we'll walk on Day 1 is 24 miles long and goes mainly through city streets. If you don't reach specified pit stops by specific times, you will be swept: a Sweep Van will pick you up and drive you into camp. I do not want to be swept. I have trained many hours for this event. I want to complete it. To me completing the walk has come to symbolize moving beyond the sickness, the fatigue, and the drag of having had breast cancer. To prove to myself that I have put the sickness behind me, I have set myself the goal of completing all the miles of the walk.

Now it is only a few hours into the walk and, knowing my pace and factoring in our late start, I know we have to hurry if we want to complete today by the 6:30 p.m. route closure. There is a constant sense of urgency. All day I walk as if I'm hurrying to catch an airplane that I fear will leave without me.



“Grab ‘n go’s” and “pit stops” are located every 2 miles along the route. Grab ‘n go’s have porta-potties, Gatorade, water and snacks. Pit Stops have all the above plus medical aid and areas to stretch and rest. The safety video has impressed upon us that we have to stay hydrated if we want to complete the event. We also must stretch more than we think possible if we wish to complete it. Signs along the way mark the route and urge us to “hydrate, urinate” and to “remember to stretch”. As I drink the required amount of fluids, I realize I'll have to make every 2 mile stop to use the porta-potties. The route has just gotten that much longer.



“Walking” is a deceptive term to describe what we are doing. “Walking” connotes a slow pace, a stroll. There is no sense of urgency in the word “walking,” no pain, no danger.

But what we're engaged in is more than walking, it is the difference between a Sunday drive and a long distance road trip, between swimming in a pool or riding a barrel over Niagara Falls. Walking in a group of 3000 is dangerous. You can trip. Someone in front of you can stop short and you'll run into them... In fact, one woman breaks her neck at the end of the first day. Someone clipped her foot, she tripped, did a somersault on concrete and now must wear a halo for the next 3 months. Add to this the irony that she is a breast cancer survivor who has undergone bi-lateral mastectomies and you really start wondering about the meaning of life.

The training walks have taught me how arduous a task all this walking can be. The five other women I am with are all faster walkers than I, but they aren't as aware of the pace as I am. Even though it is now 11 a.m., I've done the math and realized that our finishing by 6:30 is questionable. I start to walk faster. My body is already stiff. We are walking on pavement and feel every jarring variation in terrain. As the day persists, I can continue to walk but it becomes increasingly difficult to bend, to sit down, to stand back up.

Each pit stop offers us Luna bars, Oreos, goldfish crackers, Gatorade and water. The pit stop crews makes Gatorade cocktails for us in our outstretched water bottles by diluting Gatorade with water. At each stop we stand in line for the porta-potties and wait to pee. We re-apply sunscreen. We stretch. We re-adjust our fanny packs and start out again. This is the rhythm of the walk.

There are unforgettable moments along the way. One of the largest lessons is how much easier it is to walk when there is a supporter there to urge you on. Cars pass by and honk their horns. People wave at us and give the thumbs up sign. There are families waiting along the route to cheer on their Mom or sister. Friends have left signs along the way with words of encouragement and love. A small boy stands beside the road with a sign that reads “Thanks for walking for my Mom.” A little girl has set up her lemon-aid stand and is today offering lemonade and MandM's to all the walkers for free. A woman stands outside her home holding her child and looks each of us in the eye as we pass and says, “Thank you.” “Thank you.” “Thank you.” I am sure she will say it 3000 times. A hand-written sign next to her says “13-year Survivor. Thank you.” We all fall silent as we walk by.

By the afternoon of the first day I have given up on my determination to complete the event in time. I have come to realize that I can't do this by myself. I need my team and their support. We five strangers have found our need for each other. Already we seem to balance one another. Either

we'll all finish together or none of us will finish, in some unspoken way we have tasted how difficult this challenge is and know we need each other to get through it.



24 miles and 14 hours after starting, we make our way into Carlmont High School. The day was so long and surprisingly difficult that the organizers are holding the route open longer than they had anticipated. It's been hard on many of us. Some walkers make it into camp, get their gear from the gear trucks and then just sit and cry.

Walking 24 miles is not the end of the day for a walker, once in camp you still have to set up your tent and eat. The camp holds over 3000 people, tents can be blocks away from the mess hall and from the gear trucks. 24 miles gets you to the entrance, there's still more walking to do once you arrive.

My team makes it into camp around 6:30 p.m. We hurry to shower before the shower trucks close. We hurry to get to dinner before the dinner line closes. I am grim. I am tired. We have to do this again tomorrow.

Our tents are located near the generators and most of the night we hear the roar of the motors. As I toss and turn before finally falling asleep, I tell myself it's ok if I don't walk the next day. It's ok if I don't finish this event. My body is hurting and I'm worn. It's no longer so important to complete every mile. All I want to do is rest.



The human body is miraculous in its ability to recover. The next morning I feel dead and leaden but I don't question my ability to walk. I go eat breakfast and sit with a woman waiting to see a chiropractor. She is young, athletic and in really good shape, but her back hurts her. I am relieved to know that she is feeling the effects of the walk, too. I had begun to doubt whether I had trained adequately. She says, "there's no way to train for an event like this, you just have to do it."

Everyone looks tired and worn. The day ahead of us is only 16 miles, but there are 2 steep hills. The one we'll climb after lunch in the afternoon sun is known as Hell Hill. I'm not looking forward to it.

We walk. We warm up. I feel a burst of energy. We sing. Things brighten up a bit. We come across someone who has

a terrible blister that covers most of her heel. Each member of my team seems to have some necessary foot care item that we can pool together to patch her up. We are helping without hesitating. But, truthfully, there is still a small voice in my head saying "now we're really not going to make camp in time."



When we stop for lunch on the second day the temperature is in the 90s. Hell Hill awaits us. We are each hoarding food from the different pit stops. My pockets bulge with pretzels, fruit roll-ups and potato chips. We all crave salty snacks, there never seem to be enough.

We start our climb. Hell Hill is an effort. The organizers have parked water trucks along the route. I am grabbing bottles of water and emptying them over my hat and head to cool off. Sweat mixes with water and sunscreen. My eyes burn, but for a brief instant I am refreshed. People turn on their sprinklers for us to walk through. Little kids spray us with hoses and water guns. Finally we make it to the top, we rest a bit but there is still more climbing to do. At the end of all the hills there are two guys dressed in drag who serenade us as we arrive. "Two guys in drag" doesn't sum up the emotion we feel for them, for the fact that they'd take time out to wait for us in the hot sun and sing to us. A large act of kindness.

As we get closer to Skyline College, the weather starts to cool. I am worn, I am tired and I am exhausted. Once again we get to camp near the route closing time. As we make our way into camp, we are guided between two lines of about 50 walkers who have arrived before us. Walkers who have had a chance to set down their packs and instead of eating dinner, instead of taking a hot shower, have headed back to the entrance to wait for us. They cheer us as we arrive. They applaud and shout and give us high-fives. We, the last, are made to walk through this gauntlet of love and accept their appreciation for our effort. My friends and I are in tears as we reach the end of this tunnel of support. It means so much for our effort to be acknowledged by those who know it first hand. The feeling is indescribable.

The fog rolls into Skyline. While the day was 90 degrees, the evening brings fog and cold. The line for the shower takes an hour. One woman collapses in the shower and is taken to the hospital with hypothermia.

With resignation we discover our tents are located directly across from the porta-potties. We fear we won't get sleep because of the sound of the doors banging open and shut all

night. In fact we don't sleep but the reason is the wind that blows and billows and howls. Event organizers move the gear trucks to block the wind and try to protect the tents, but the tents are in constant motion all night. Fog outside combined with warm bodies inside creates a mini-climate phenomenon: it rains inside the tent while outside it is dry. With the howling wind, billowing tents, and people bundled up to their teeth, the image is one of an Everest expedition. No one sleeps. People and equipment are wet when we begin to break camp at 5 a.m.

We walk through Pacifica to Fort Funston on a wet Sunday morning. Sadly there seem to be fewer supporters in San Francisco than there were in the South Bay. In the early morning fog, one woman stands on the median outside her house and rings a large bell as we walk by. Probably her neighbors are not thrilled, but the walkers love her.

This is the last day. My team is tired and sore. Even though we got an early start, our lead soon dissipates as we linger to stretch and tend to our blisters. We get to the lunch stop in Golden Gate Park only 1/2 hour before it is to close. Large buses parked near the lunch site wait to sweep away any lingerers. They loom ominously near us as we eat. I really want to complete this walk. All my team really does too. We are grim.

Our goal is to reach the holding area outside Marina Green by 4:30 p.m. With grit and determination we finally make it down Chestnut Street in the Marina. Most onlookers just stare at us as we walk, only a few cheer us on. I keep wanting to say "Hey, we just walked 60 miles in 3 days, doesn't anyone care?"

As we approach the holding area, there is more and more noise. Crews direct us to the entrance and we walk into a surging mass of over 2000 walkers. One of my team members says, "Stop!" I'm too tired to ask why, but I stop. We all stop, then she points to the finish line marker just above us. We join hands and walk across the line together. We are in tears. Another team member, a survivor, hugs me and says, "this was the second hardest fight of my life."

As we cross the line we are met once again with the tunnel of love and support that we walked through at the end of Day Two. Today it is magnified by the fact that all 2500 walkers who have gone before are there to greet us, to welcome us. There is such a feeling of accomplishment, relief and joy. And such greatness in feeling the acknowledgement from those who know first-hand what you've been through.

At the holding area we are given Victory T-shirts, blue for walkers and pink for walkers who are survivors. I don't

really want a pink T-shirt, I like the blue better. But I understand how important it is for me to wear the pink shirt, not just for myself but for others. There are 169 of us who have survived breast cancer there that day, 169 of us walking those 60 miles in 3-days. Our pink shirts make us stand out in the crowd. Before this moment, there was no one visual cue that let others know who we were.



Women see us and know that while it isn't yet cured, breast cancer is no longer the certain death sentence it was only a few years ago. Some may see us and be moved to finally get the mammogram that may save their lives.

We march into the Marina. Medical staff in red shirts march in first, walkers in blue shirts next. Finally the survivors in pink shirts enter and are greeted by the walkers, families and friends. People are in tears as they pat us on our backs, tell us how happy they are we made it. Many have lost family or friends to cancer and the pink shirts make us representatives of those who are no longer here. Families reach out to hug us and hold us, as they must wish they could still do for those they've lost. And I, in my pink shirt, feel how much they care, how deeply they are moved.

As I move forward through the crowd, tears stream from the eyes of the strangers who hug me and from my eyes as well.



We have walked 60 miles in 3 days. We have raised a ton of money. We have learned the meaning of support in the most visceral of ways. We have helped without hesitating and cried without shame. We have reached out to strangers and held them like family and cheered them as heroes. We have created the world of the 3-Day.

And I have done it. I have walked all 60 miles in 3 days. I trained. I practiced. And in the end, I couldn't have done it without the help of my friends.

.....

I'll leave it to you to make the parallels between this event and Aikido. There are so many. I'll just add that the only other time in my life that I have had such a feeling of accomplishment was when I received my shodan.

Deborah Maizels



## The Dojo Code

*I always look, listen and learn.*

*I bow with humility to receive from O'Sensei,  
the Sensei and fellow students.*

*I do my best, share and persevere in my practice.*