

THE KIAI

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Newsletter of THE AIKIDO INSTITUTE

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30 YEARS OF AIKIDO SPECIAL EDITION

Editor's Note: This special edition of THE KIAI honors the 30-year anniversary of the Aikido Institute. A number of senior students and former uchi-deshi have written articles prompted by this event.



The issue also includes the second installment of an interview with Hoa Sensei. The first installment of the interview was published in the Winter 1999 edition of THE KIAI.

AN INTERVIEW WITH HOA SENSEI PART TWO

[The second of a three-part interview conducted with Hoa Sensei by Peter Slote.]

Peter: What were your biggest impressions of the training at Oakland in 1978?

Hoa Sensei: As I mentioned before there were a lot of short moves, a lot of static techniques with strong grips, a lot of high falls, not much motion, and with a strong emphasis on weapons work.

Was Bruce Klickstein Sensei teaching at that time or was he away in Japan?

He was teaching at the time. He took just a few short trips, just a few months at a time. At that time he had to really be there in Oakland to run the dojo. I think he had just taken over the dojo from Alan Grow and Bill Witt.

How many years did you spend training under Klickstein Sensei?

Probably 5 or 6 years, I don't remember. From Dec 78 until whenever he resigned, 1986... perhaps 6 or more years.

I remember it was a rich time. The dojo was full of sempai who were really aikido sensei in training. There were visiting sempai from around the Bay Area and internationally. There were dedicated and sometimes maniacal uchi deshi and a large membership of soto deshi. What do you most remember from those years, and what had the most value for you?

There was a lot of energy in training. There were a lot of good uchi deshi. I had the good fortune of knowing most of the uchi deshi in the dojo since 1978, starting with Eytan Ben Meir and thereafter. I think that was probably the best thing that I had in the dojo. I got to know and train with all the people who really cared about training and those were the uchi deshi.

The uchi deshi used to stay in the dojo to a fairly mature rank, sho dan or ni dan. There seemed to less distinction between the uchi deshi and the really dedicated sempai who practically kept the schedule of an uchi deshi.

Yes, I think most of the good sempai were uchi deshi also at one point or another, if not in Oakland then in Iwama. Uchi deshi is good training to be an instructor.

When did you first go to Iwama?

It was the year my house burned, 1991. I went in May and the house burned in October in the Oakland firestorm. But before that there were many occasions when Saito Sensei asked me to come over, but I couldn't because I was settling down in this country and helping my parents settle also. I had to take a lot of courses to be on par professionally here, to establish a new career here. So I didn't have much time to go there. But the other thing is that the chief instructor [in Oakland – Ed.] at the time, Bruce, didn't seem to encourage the senior people to go to Japan. I thought that was an omission I wanted to remedy since I took over the dojo. I

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encourage people to go to Iwama whenever they can, even just for a few weeks. That's an experience that will enhance their learning. So my first time was in 1991 with Kim.

That seems like a good strategy to go over there with a colleague...

With an old timer.

What was Iwama like in 1991 and how did you find the training there?

I think I did not have to deal with the culture because I came from a similar culture, so that saved all my energy for training, which was great there. Keiko was once in the morning for the uchi deshi and the regular evening class with Saito Sensei. But I think that whenever a senior instructor would come he would give special classes to them and we had the privilege of attending those special classes. But what was most striking was the etiquette that pervaded the dojo life. I think that would be the most beneficial part of the training.

Etiquette has always been a big part of training in the Oakland dojo. I can see why, now, with Klickstein Sensei's Iwama training and with your high regard for it. What do you think about our level of etiquette currently?

First of all we should make a distinction between the etiquette in Iwama, Japan and etiquette in a dojo in California. They should be, must be, different because etiquette cannot exist by itself. We cannot transport the etiquette from one dojo in one country to another dojo in another country and apply it successfully. We have to modify it according to the local culture. The etiquette is almost part of the culture and must be supported by the culture in order to be effective. If the etiquette is perceived as too much of a foreign element from the local culture, people will strongly resist that and not adapt very well. So the etiquette in Oakland dojo in California is different from the etiquette in Japan. There are a few things we modify to adapt it to California. Not necessarily relaxing it, but modifying and applying it in a different form.

And speaking about form, the etiquette in Japan is strongly based on form, form in the sense that certain things must be done according to the book. But the etiquette that I try to maintain here is not so much the form, how it's done, but how you feel about it, on the principle underlying the etiquette, the spirit of the etiquette, rather than the form. That gives people a little more flexibility to conform. Also it gives the chance to understand the principle underlying the etiquette. People here want to understand before they act. They don't just do what they're told to, like in Japan.

I want to talk about some of the difficult years. I've reflected that there were two distinct negative aspects to

Klickstein Sensei's departure. First is that typically it is difficult for any dojo to lose a sensei. It's a difficult transition under the best of conditions. Secondly there were the circumstances of Klickstein Sensei's departure

Well there's a lot of history to talk about there but without going into a lot of details, it was a difficult time because the leader of the dojo was accused of behavior unbecoming a chief instructor. So there was no leadership at that time. Being the senior sempai then I had to take over the dojo and with the help of Kim Peuser we decided to run the dojo together and keep going. It would have been easy to close down and start something new somewhere else. Then we wouldn't have to deal with the difficulties attached to the person of Bruce Klickstein. A lot of people would have probably come along and trained there. But we were trying to maintain the good things about the dojo. There were a lot of good things – the connection with Iwama, the type of training that we had. And the people that were there were good people. We didn't want to rock the boat too hard, we wanted to keep those things so we hung on. The only thing that helped us through was just perseverance.

Certainly perseverance ("Gambate!") has been a battle cry on the Oakland mat as long as I can remember.

Yes.

You've experienced a number of losses in your life. Your family was uprooted from your home in Viet Nam, the loss of two family homes in the Oakland firestorm. Can you tell us how aikido training helped you in times of adversity?

It works both ways. Aikido training helped, but those particular situations also helped enhance the aikido training. Aikido training helped in the sense that it maintains a core part of my person that is unchanged throughout the other changes, losses or other external changes. I think it's important for somebody to have something of that nature to always fall back on, something that cannot be taken away by anybody or anything, something that remains at the core of a person irrespective of the changes in the surroundings or environment. Whether you lost your house or job or family member, if you have something that remains unchanged, that will help get you through the losses. On the other hand those losses are, I guess, part of learning in life. Those are opportunities to understand life. That in turn enhances your aikido training by helping you appreciate things more, appreciate your time and energy, and give you a broader perspective in life that nothing can remain permanent, except possibly some kind of spiritual core that you have built for yourself,

in yourself. That can remain forever, possibly.

I'm reminded of Phong Sensei. His aikido and his conduct seem to be extensions of his spiritual force, reflections his life experience...

Yes, I think aikido training would be worthless unless it is applied to life in the grander scale similar to those challenges that one encounters in the loss of other cherished lives or losses of possession or whatever. In any change in life's circumstances one has to approach them as one would with aikido techniques. In other words, receiving them completely, wholeheartedly. Seeing the real nature of the change. And then persevering through them, which is the extension part of aikido techniques and redirecting your life to someplace where you want to be. It is a big leap to make from that analogy to using it in real life but if one keeps training long enough that gets ingrained into one's self.

What are your hopes for the children's program?

A kids program is a challenge to run because it has to compete with all these other more interesting attraction for kids including TV and computer games. Those can give them instant gratification. Even some other martial arts and sport can bring about quicker gratification than practicing aikido techniques. But at the same time it gives the children a very strong influence on how they are going to deal with life later on. Those are things that are very beneficial to kids to learn



early on, especially ways of resolving conflict through body motion rather than mental discussions. Considering the violence that has occurred in many schools throughout the nation. I hope that one of these days aikido becomes a part of the curriculum in mainstream education. Some other martial arts have already been made part of physical education in some school districts in California. Martial arts that are a little more colorful like Capoeira. My kids are learning Capoeira at their school as part of the P.E. program so I don't see why we can not have the same thing for aikido. But again aikido has a lot of discipline and etiquette so it will be challenging. But nonetheless we should all help that effort because that can have a big impact on the future generation, how they will deal with conflict.

How would you see a curriculum being introduced in schools?

First someone has to take the essence of aikido and translate that to something that can be grasped by educators who are trained in Western education so they can understand how aikido can be used in traditional education. We can not just import it the way it is and insert it into the school system because there are so many conflicting areas of culture and etiquette. There have been attempts to make that bridge, that translation by various people, but I don't think they

were aimed at education. They were aimed at the corporate environment for workshops in conflict resolution. Someone has to do more research and make that translation more publicly acceptable. Either that or just have aikido as part of an option program or P.E. program. It should probably begin at the university level because they have more research resources. It would take somebody who has a lot of time and a strong understanding of the essence of aikido.

Since Bruce Sensei's departure you and Kim Sensei have operated the dojo in different leadership capacities. Would you tell the newer members about this?

It's a good system that inserts some checks and balances in the sense that one leader will take into consideration the perspective of the other leader. It is good deterrence against autocratic governance! In the beginning I took a step back after being partners with Kim for a while. I had a new family, but also it was to give Kim more room for direction. It could be confusing to have two leaders of one organization. There has to be one clear leader, the other in a supporting role. And then the situation reversed it self after five or six years. Kim had to change jobs and relocate. It was his turn to take a step back and I had to take over. It may have appeared confusing, but it's a good system because people don't learn to associate themselves with the person of the sensei, they have to just learn the aikido itself and continue their training through the changes. Kim and I have worked very well together. We've given each other a lot of room for development and at the same time supported each other.

The dojo certainly benefited.

I should mention at times it could be confusing. People have mentioned that this is the way Kim did certain things and this is the way I did certain things. I tell people to do exactly whatever that particular instructor in that particular class does. That same person could change what they're teaching next class or next week with different emphasis, like Saito Sensei does. It's confusing to everyone. But I guess that's part of the training. It allows people to try to perceive the non-changing part of the teaching, which is the essence of the teaching.

They could and do learn that lesson much later also by going to another dojo...

Yes, they could.

We are providing that experience...

In house!

[Hoa Sensei talks about his move to Davis, CA and the latest phase in the life of the Aikido Institute in the last of this three-part interview, in the next issue of THE KIAI.]

STARTING OUT

Two men struggle. The larger of the two seems to be winning when his slim, blonde opponent slips his hip through and throws the larger man to the ground. The winner is a Russian immigrant with an early Beatles haircut. His name is Ilya Kuriyakin and he works for UNCLE. I want to study judo, too, and learn to defend myself against school bullies and other bad guys.

Unfortunately there were no judo schools anywhere near where I lived. After I graduated from college, I still wanted to study martial arts. An acquaintance who had studied judo in high school told me he wished he'd studied Aikido instead. There were no judo schools in the Berkeley at that time, but there was an Aikido school on College near Claremont. I called and got the schedule. There was a class from 8-10AM on Sunday morning. Surely only the most dedicated students would show up for that class! That's the one I would check out.

I overslept, got to the class a few minutes late and found the door locked. That door was made of wood, and the screens in the windows were shut. I couldn't see inside. Hmm. Maybe class had been cancelled that week, or maybe they did not allow visitors after class began. I had read stories about students sitting in the snow for a week to prove their desire to be admitted to martial arts schools. I could sit on the curb ... I decided to return the next week.

Next week I showed up on time. It was hard to get up a 7AM on a Sunday to drive across town, but I did it. I told the instructor, Bruce Klickstein, that I'd come to observe the class. He told me that the first 30 minutes was meditation and that I was welcome to stay, but I had to remain still and silent. I'd never sat still and quiet that long before in my life, but I accepted this first challenge. I was determined to be worthy.

The door was locked, the students sat seiza in a circle, and the meditation began. After 30 minutes, the sensei clapped his hands and everyone began stretching. I don't recall the techniques taught that day – it was the first time I'd ever seen Aikido – but I was impressed enough I decided to join.

I bought a gi, paid \$21 for the first month's lessons, and began my study. I began by training 5 times a week. After about a year, I decided to get serious and began training at every class.

There were many differences in those early days of the dojo. For one thing, the students did not sweep the mat after class or participate in any cleaning of the dojo. We were all Americans, and due to our upbringing thought there must be a janitor who cleaned the dojo. I remember the Sensei talking to a few of us about his frustration that the students did not pitch in and help. We encouraged him to make his expectations clear, and the next week we all began sweeping after class and doing a more thorough cleanup after Sunday class.

KIM PEUSER

RANDOM THOUGHTS

Looking back through a twenty-five year association with this art:

I've learned to be more patient. I remember everyone who was impatient with me while I was beginning, and I expect other people do, too. The people from whom I learned the most were never dismissive or even disrespectful. Their prevailing attitude was that I had taken the trouble to get myself on the mat, and they'd do their best to help me.

I've learned to stay open. Someone once asked Ben Kingsley, the actor, how he'd come up with the movements for one of his parts, and he replied: "If you stay open to the character, you'll know how he has to move."

I do my best. This is such a variable. Sometimes I'm stupid, often I'm lame or just feeling OLD, but I still balance, center, extend my energy and try to connect with my partner. And, I can say with confidence that I'm the best woman over-sixty yudansha in our dojo.

ALBERTA HANKENSON



ALWAYS IN TRAINING

An open letter to the Aikido Institute on the occasion of its 30 year anniversary, about how I became Uchi Deshi and what it meant to me.

During the summer of 1987 I experienced a personal and spiritual revelation that grew out of a deep frustration and concern for the state of our world. I had been very politically and socially active, and had over time developed a disdain for the hypocritical methods of those working for 'peace and enlightenment', as I found they often used the same methods of power over others as those they spoke against. This method of problem solving didn't change the dynamics of how people interacted, it only changed who was currently on top.

In my search for a true alternative forum of problem solving, I found a program in Oakland, CA that trained people in and performed the service of community mediation. One of the biggest changes in my perception at the time was that in order to induce change in the world, I had to first make change in me; a classic example of physician heal thyself. I learned that in order to mediate between two parties one had to listen to, acknowledge and take into account, equally, both sides of the story, and then have each side modify its actions based on what it had learned from the other side until a win/win - or at least fair resolution was found. This

is fundamentally different from the 'I'm bigger than you' tactic that has brought our world to the brink of self destruction at the hands of ever growing nuclear arsenals, and offers more hope for lasting solutions as it engages both parties' agendas in the mix. This study also brought home a profound concept that I first came in contact with through the wisdom of J. Krishnamurti when he wrote, "you must be able to hear the truth even if it comes from your enemy"! From a more personal standpoint it means giving up a reactive disposition that is driven by pre-conceived notions and allowing oneself to experience each situation anew for what it uniquely holds.

In any event, back to my revelation. In the months preceding this profound experience I broke up with my long time boyfriend, I stopped seeing my counselor, and my dog, who had been with me since before I moved out of my mother's house - died. In other words, for the first time in my 30 years I was really alone. I went to the hills outside of Ukiah, CA and stayed in a friend's cabin for about three weeks. The



average temperature was 104. I didn't eat much and spent a great deal of time walking in the hills. During this period I meditated on the problems of this violent world and my lack of safety as a single (and alone) woman in it. I was struggling with a terrible sense of powerlessness. Slowly a new paradigm emerged, a concept that true power was something that one had within and could emit like the rays from the sun - not a power accrued from without, over people and things as we've been trained. Collecting material wealth like land, money, people (or war, rape and pillage) will never be the path for lasting power and safety because these things can be taken away from you. Power that comes from within is a birthright, and I realized it as the power that all great spiritual leaders have pointed to. The best thing about power from the inside is that it is not a limited commodity like material goods, and there is no need to compete for it. And, competition for power is the driving force behind a majority of the world's ills. When we all shine like the sun what happens? We have a beautiful galaxy!

When I returned to Oakland I was thinking of contacting a few individuals who had in some way or another been examples of this shining state. One of those people was a Sempei that I had had at the Aikido Institute where I studied for 3 or 4 months earlier that year- Hoa Newens. I happened to run into another Sempei, Elaine Hamblin, who told me that Hoa and Kim Peuser were now the Senseis at the dojo! I immediately knew that I had to start training again, and early in the spring of 1988, with maybe 6 or 7 months of total mat time under my belt, I moved into the Aikido Institute as Uchi Deshi.

Aikido is in many ways the physical expression of the philosophical concepts I've been talking about. I've often explained Aikido in this way: most of the world utilizes the strategy of a football game to win a dispute, i.e. they face off and usually the bigger, stronger, faster side wins by bowling over the other side. In Aikido instead of facing off with your opponent you act like a tributary to their river, literally aligning yourself with the direction that they are already going - seeing things through their eyes and standing as it were in their shoes. We call this blending. When you blend, you have the option to re-route your opponent in a direction that you feel better about going. And since there will always be someone bigger and stronger, bowling over one's opponent is not always an option where as re-direction is. You can't blend however, unless you accept who and what your opponent is offering you. Think of this as experiencing the truth as it comes from your enemy. I like to think of extending in all directions as the power that comes from the inside or shining like the sun, and of course the rays are always connected to and emanating from the center.

During my time as Uchi Deshi (about 16 months) I learned many things through training about Aikido technique and philosophy that I expected to learn; how to extend, get out of the way of my opponent, enter, blend, move from center. The most valuable lesson I learned however was that the most tireless, volatile, manipulative, unpredictable and important opponent was and still is my own ego. It is that seemingly incessant internal conversation that prevents me from being truly aware, humble or having the stamina to persevere by cluttering me up with preconceived ideas of what is, what I want, or what should be. Every time my blend was faulty or my ukemi less than graceful - as much as I wanted to blame it on my partner (which I often did), there was some aspect of my ego that prevented me from being a pure channel of the force, and contributed to my inability for being 100% present at that moment. It is all too easy to blame the mirror for being cracked when you don't like what you see.

I learned a great deal of life lessons during that time, many of which only became clear to me years later. My training partners, both experienced and novice, have been gifts to my learning, and have given me many lingering memories. I owe a deep sense of gratitude to Kim Sensei for all that he imparted to me. He was my main Sensei, and many of my ego battles were reflected on him. All of the people from that time hold a place in my heart and mind; Kim, Hoa, Alberta, Deborah, Peter, Bruce, Kayla, Pat, Louis, Geoff, Trung, Beth, Ted, Janet, Nina, Marshall, Paul, Annete - the list goes on. Thank you for being mirrors in my path.

Since leaving the dojo many new experiences have come

my way. I moved to Seattle in 1990 with Hugh Evans (Geoff's brother), and we married in 1993. In 1995 I gave birth to our son, Alexander. I continued with court room and community mediation for several years until turning my attention to the study of massage therapy. After becoming a licensed massage therapist I taught anatomy, physiology, technique - and just about every thing else at the Brian Utting School of Massage in Seattle. I became a chair person for the National Certification Board for Therapeutic Massage and Bodywork, a position I held until our recent move to Maine. In September 1999, we moved to the Blue Hill peninsula in mid-coast Maine, and into a 200-year-old farmhouse by the water. I have my massage office in town, Hugh is working at his passion restoring wooden boats, and 5 year old Alex is a joy and a wonder.

In all of my life experiences I have had to contemplate, practice and use the physical and mental principals of keeping center, blending, extending and keeping my ego in check. These things make up the core of my personal path, and I can't separate them out from my daily life. It makes me think



of a story soon after I left the dojo: I had just started a new job as a waitress at a restaurant in Berkeley, and was working the week-end brunch shift. In comes Hoa Sensei and a

group of people just finishing up a Gasshuku training and looking for lunch. Sensei asked me what I was doing there and I told him I had just started working at the restaurant and was in training. Sensei smiled and said "always in training!"

Heartfelt congratulations and best wishes to the dojo on its 30th year anniversary! Always in training, I am most humbly thankful to have been a small part of your history, as you have been a big part of mine.

P.S. Feel free to write or call, and if you are ever out this way please visit.

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REFLECTIONS

My reflections on the Aikido Institute begin with July 31, 1987, the day I began my training. At that time, I did not have a sense of who was the head of the dojo. I had come to train and what mattered was the convenience of the classes, the quality of the instruction, and the patience and receptiveness of the instructors and other students.

I trained three times a week, the Tuesday and Thursday beginners classes from 5:45 p.m. to 6:45 p.m., taught by

Sally Parks and Cyndy Hayashi, respectively, and the Saturday morning class taught by Deborah Maizels. The uchideshi were Marshall Spight, Adam Brodsky, and Trung Dinh.

For the first few months I continued on with my three classes per week. There were "regular" classes at 7:00 p.m., but by then I was on my way out the door. It was enough for me to handle the beginning classes. The movements felt awkward and the techniques seemed so different one from the other. I felt like my learning curve was more a flat line. I had no goal in mind, other than consistent training. The possibility of earning a black belt never entered my mind.

My 5th kyu test came in late November or early December. With the help of a wonderful and devoted sempai, Manuel Garcia, I learned the names of grabs, attacks, and techniques for the first time and I combined attacks and techniques to come up with the requirements of the test. I passed the test and continued my training according to the same schedule as when I began. After a year or more, several tests later, I shifted into the regular class. My primary teacher throughout has been Kim Sensei. When I took my shodan exam I was the first student to do so, who had not been at the dojo when Bruce Klickstein was its head.

A few months after I began to practice Aikido I attended a dojo meeting and for the first time became aware of the tumultuous turnover in dojo leadership that had only just preceded my signing on. Since entering on July 31, 1987, the leadership has changed a few times; when I began, Kim Sensei and Hoa Newens Sensei shared the leadership position; then Kim Sensei headed the dojo on his own; then later Hoa Sensei took over as dojo cho. Uchi deshi have come and gone as have other dojo members. The core of individuals who preceded me and still remain are Hoa Sensei, Kim Sensei, Deborah San, Alberta (Hankenson) San, Peter (Slote) San, and Steve (Kilmer) San. There are a few Aikidoka that came after me that have continued to train consistently. The other members that comprise the dojo have been in a constant state of flux. The location has been a constant during my time; we have always been at 51st and Telegraph, and the structure has changed very little.

So, what gives the Aikido Institute its unique character? For me it is the recognition it receives from the Aikido community, the excellence of its head instructors and the high caliber of the training. It is the sincerity of the students and their commitment to the dojo and the practice. But it is also the constancy of the people that have lead the dojo during my time: Hoa Sensei, Kim Sensei, Deborah San, and Alberta San. They have defined the spirit of the dojo with their dedicated service to the dojo and the students, the high level of their practice and the high expectations they have of the students, and their acceptance of all students who have come to earnestly learn their art.

KATHY MONTGOMERY

SAN DAN ESSAY

The fundamental principle of Aikido is blending. It is this essence that makes Aikido differ from many martial arts. Instead of combating force with force we learn to get off the line of attack and redirect it. We learn to use this philosophy outside the dojo by accommodating other points of view and not losing our own. By not getting caught up in conflict or competition we avoid being in the position of winner or loser. We can step aside and either let it go or choose to redirect it.

The practice of blending teaches us how to harmonize mind, body, and spirit. Through the mental discipline and the physical practice of Aikido, blending is ingrained into our bodies by the repetition of the physical motions. The body feels what is like to be in sync with some other force and also what it is like to clash. We learn how to position ourselves in such a way that we are off the line of attack but also staying in contact.

The mental part of blending comes when we are thinking about a technique, reading or writing an essay about Aikido. Visualizing yourself in a smooth blend or a continuous flow of practice is a form of mental training on or off the mat. The physical part of blending starts with balance. Balance starts with being centered. When we are thrown nage takes our balance, but if we are not centered we cannot control our fall. By blending we retain our center. Through mental and physical training we gradually develop a sense of harmony that becomes a part of our being. Blending can become a perspective by which all things are seen and felt.

The hanmi of Aikido is our first form of blending. Proper posture is a natural way of blending with gravity. It allows us to stand balanced and to move from a solid and sturdy position. We learn how to extend and retract without losing our balance. To be able to move smoothly from one stance to another is to blend our center with the gravity of the earth. We connect our center to the ground through hanmi.

Our next blending practice comes when we do forward and backward rolls, and learn how to fall smoothly and gracefully, without injury. Using ukemi has saved me on more than one bike ride in the Berkeley hills. Once, riding, I came around a turn and realized I was about to go off a jump. I hit it wrong and my back wheel was flipped up and out over my head. I was launched into the longest roll of my life. Everything went in to slow motion. My body reflexively went into a roll. I rolled, came to my feet, did a 180 degree two-step, and felt the momentum go right through me and into my back foot. I side stepped and guided the bike past me and on down the hill before I could make a choice on what I should do. I went home sore, with a few scratches but

no head injury or broken bones. When I didn't have time to think about rolling my body took over and did what it needed to preserve itself. Over a long period of time the practice of mental focusing and physical blending seeps into the spirit and you become more harmonious with yourself and with the people around you. Blending becomes a resource that can be tapped.

Receiving is part of blending and is essential in our training. It goes hand in hand with a humble outlook. You must be open to suggestions, to receive correction without an ego involved and to know that the help is given only to make you better. Humility is the perspective that allows this. To be able to give advice and then to use it yourself can be very helpful. For instance, in sankyo when nage's elbow is too high before the pin, you mention it to him or her. Then pay attention as you are doing the technique, to check the position of your own elbow.

As uke we practice receiving the attack without a clash or conflict. We do not practice hard blocks. Instead we try for a smooth transition and a redirecting of the oncoming force. Our goal is not to overwhelm our partner with strength, but to overflow their attack with a subtle blend that incorporates their energy and redirects it to a more manageable position. The humble part of receiving is being open to correction or redirection.

"Humility is not thinking less of yourself. It is thinking of yourself less." Anon

GEOFF EVANS



START

For some reason, most of the memorable events I've had at the Aikido Institute have involved Eytan Ben Myer. I walked into the dojo on a Saturday evening and watched Hoa Sensei, before he was sensei, teach a class. This was when the dojo was located on Piedmont Avenue. For some reason, I knew immediately that this is where I wanted to train. I joined and started going to the 6am classes. Most would view this as a hard-core martial attitude. For me it was due to my shyness.

Eytan was uchi deshi and I arrived the Monday after I'd signed up with no idea what I was doing or what to expect. We trained; I survived. Within a week or so, though, I had my first aikido injury. Like most first injuries, it was a shoulder sprain resulting from a bad forward roll. I recovered from that and continued to train.

Shortly after I started training, the dojo moved to Telegraph Avenue and soon after that I took my 5th kyu test. Eytan took falls for me. I don't remember if I asked him or not. I suspect that he volunteered. I was nervous, as most people are for their first test, and the only thing I remember about the test was some high falls that Eytan took from kote gaeishi.

I continued to take the 6am class and one morning during the first winter we arrived at the dojo to find the roof leaking and water covering the front of the mat. We dried up the mat as best we could and trained for the rest of the hour.

Eytan returned to Israel to open his own dojo and many years later, while I was training for my sandan, he returned to the Bay Area for a visit. One Friday night after class, most of the students stayed to train and Eytan and I were training with a few others. We were working on kokyu dosa variations and Eytan and I were sitting in seiza facing each other.

"Move back. You're too close."

I moved back.

"Still too close."

I moved back some more.

Suddenly, Eytan's foot was in my stomach and I was knocked backwards. By the time I'd gotten back up into seiza, he was calmly sitting there as if he'd never moved. I can't pretend I wasn't upset, even mad, but I did center and calm myself. If I didn't know Eytan and firmly believe that everyone in the dojo is there to help each other, I might have tried to hit him.

I think that's the most important thing I've found about training. Everyone is here to help. From the time you start to train and take your first test, through any disastrous or difficult situations, until you take your last test or move away from the dojo, all of the other students here, especially the instructors and senior students will help you get the most out of your training.

STEVE KILMER



LETTER FROM WOLFGANG

Dear Hoa, Thank you very much for your kind letter and invitation to the 30th anniversary of the Oakland Aikido Institute. This letter, if you wish, is intended for publication in the special edition of the KIAI:

For me entering the dojo as an Uchi-deshi meant entering the Aikido Family. It meant being able to sit as close as possible to the fire of Aikido and at the table of the Aikido community. Being uchi-deshi presented me with the question of

dedication and perseverance to the art of Aikido and it let me look deep inside its form and system.

Most of all it showed me that when you put forth a dream that becomes a thought that becomes a continuous desire and you persevere, it will present you almost immediately with the deep knowledge that you can and do achieve your goals.

So here is my story: Leaving the USA in February 1993 was a big step into the unknown. Together with my wife, Tammy, and my three-year-old son, Emiel, we travelled via Hawaii to Iwama, Japan on our way to Germany. Saito Sensei received us with some amazement, since we were leaving our Tahoe home and my dojo in Reno for good in order to resettle in a reunited Berlin. It seemed to Sensei that we passed through Iwama almost as if to ask his permission.

He sent us on our way with greatest of grace and it was a force that carried us until this moment and is still not ending.

We took with us a lot of good will and strong intention. We arrived in Berlin three months later, but we had no home, no dojo, no students.

Our extension towards our goals opened doors even before we had arrived. We were received by a friend and an apartment just happened to be vacant. I was offered a teaching spot in an Aikido dojo a month later and another dojo offered me the position of Chief Instructor of an Aikido group in the oldest Martial Arts school in Germany, Erich Rahn Jiu Jitsu, founded in 1906. There I taught three years and Takemusu Aikido Berlin was founded. Now we live in our home with my dojo next door. I teach seven classes per week with a huge kids group out of the neighborhood.

Saito Sensei visited us in Berlin last year with a very well-received seminar, the first time ever, in Berlin. He will be here again this year 24-26 November 2000.

Finally I would like to thank the dojo of the Oakland Aikido Institute for having started this process, all my sempais for laying out the path for me, Hoa Sensei for continuing to preserve the fire and exposing me to its intense heat without ever burning me once, my teachers who are the guiding light, Saito Sensei who is the embodiment and O'Sensei the Source, I thank you from the bottom of my heart to the end of my life and always.

Onokoro ni
tokotachi nashite
naka niiku
ai no kamae was
yhamabiko no michi
Morihei Ueshiba

If you live on the this earth with
 Vitality and Growth and you
 go to the center then the
 stance of love is the
 path of the mountain echo

Mountain echo equals Aikido, it is spontaneous, fresh,
 and blends with the force, in any language and in any way it
 was intended.

Namashite

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TIMELINE

Thought #1

There's a story about a guy who recently bought the ax George Washington used to chop down the cherry tree. He was so happy to own this amazing historical artifact, he immediately took it to show his friend.

His friend looks at the ax and says "This ax doesn't look that old to me." And the guy says, "Well that's because the handle broke a long time ago and had to be replaced... And then several years later, the head flew off and they had to put on a new one."

But the guy was still happy to own George Washington's ax.

The dojo is a lot like George Washington's ax. The location of the dojo is not the same as it was 30 years ago, the chief instructor is not the same, the style of Aikido is not the same, even the students are not the same. So when we celebrate a 30-year anniversary, just what exactly has been around for 30 years that we can celebrate?

What's left when you take away the building, the teachers, and the students? Well, when all that other stuff is out of the way, all that is left is all that is good, all that is strong, all that is vibrant. All that's left is the spirit of the Oakland Dojo. And that is what we celebrate. The intangible yet real spirit of the Oakland Dojo. A tough, obdurate, stubborn, intense, vibrant, strong, tenacious, joyous spirit that has persisted over all these 30 years.

Thought #2

I'm writing on the timeline on the wall in the hallway, writing names from the past, names of people I remember, some for good reasons, some for not so good reasons. As I take each membership card from the green box, I look at the signature and the date the card was signed. Sometimes I notice what was written in answer to Occupation, or in response to Any Injuries?. Behind me someone is watching me and says "Oh, I get it. It's like packing things up when you get ready to move and you have to look through everything."

Well, yes. We've reached a point where we can review the past, see it for what it is, remember it, be touched by it. We can review the names even as we discard thoughts and feelings that we no longer need to carry with us. Like cleaning a closet, we are lightening our memory load, keeping only those thoughts and feelings that still fit.

Good to review the past, put it in some order, place it in perspective as we proceed to the future.

Thought #3

I'm putting up the timeline thinking "what relevance does this have to the people at the dojo today?" Sure it means something to me because I was here and lived a lot of these years and memories, but most of the people here joined in the 90s. Why would they care to see names of people they don't know from the 70s? I must be really old now because I'm indulging in that favorite past-time of the aged: "I remember when."

But I watch as the new students pause and read the timeline, stop to think, stop to look. I hear some say "Wow", some say "Cool". They get it in a way that I don't. They have perspective.

They aren't caught up in each name, each memory. They see the whole. Seeing them seeing it, I get it. I look at the Timeline again. What was once made up of so many separate events is now a whole. A span of time. Thirty exceptional years.

So much has happened and yet the dojo is still here. For 30 years there has been this place where many have come to study The Way. That is exceptional. That deserves to be noted, to be honored, to be celebrated.

Our Dojo.

DEBORAH MAIZELS



THE KIAI

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