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The Aikido Center of Los Angeles

道の為、世の為、人の為 合気道

The Aiki Dojo

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Reverend Kensho Furuya

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*Sensei seated in front of a scroll brushed by
O Sensei which reads Commitment and Perseverance
given to him by Kisshomaru Ueshiba in 1970*

Letter From the Editor

by Mark Ehrlich
Editor, The Aiki Dojo

One Thousand Days, Or What You Will

This month marks the day four years ago when Sensei died suddenly and unexpectedly while sharing a lighter moment of laughter with his senior students after practice. Over one thousand days and 34,000 hours have come and gone, and the dojo that Sensei built remains; not unchanged, but nonetheless committed to the ideal that consistent training leads not only to better technique in Aikido but to living better as an integrated, aware person.

To say that Sensei's influence still makes itself felt in the world seems an understatement. Recently, I had the good fortune to train at Aikido Celebration 2011 in Honolulu, where I had a rare opportunity to train with students from Japan, the Philippines, Europe, and across the United States. During the last technique of the last hour of practice on the last day of the seminar, I met a very nice woman (I'll call her Eve) who nowadays lives and trains elsewhere but who, when she saw my dojo shoulder patch, shared that she began her training under Sensei before he built his dojo, back in Hollywood in the 1970s. We only spoke for about a minute,

but in that time I got that her relationship with Sensei felt complicated and somewhat painful, that she simultaneously owed him much for whatever he gave to her as a martial artist and also resented him for whatever he might have said or done (or not) during her tenure with him. Eve's is not an unusual story: Sensei could do the difficult thing, and if he ever committed any wrongs, I doubt that apologizing would have been his strength.

All this passed between us wordlessly, Eve's voice and face recalling the impression that this long-ago relationship had indelibly stamped upon her life. Then her brow cleared, and she shrugged and said lightly, "Say what you will about Sensei, he managed to create a generation of martial artists who keep practicing." We bowed, exchanged smiles and thanks, and I never saw her again.

Sensei touched many lives, and not always for the better. If he had a lot of gifts to share with the world, he also had a list of faults which impeded him from doing so. His tortured situation, though, I think endears him more to me because, in the final analysis, this amazing scholar and martial artist was just a human being like the rest of us. Please remember that, all of you who read this.

I hope you enjoy remembering the man we share this issue, and honor his memory this year by continuing your practice.

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Sensei with Yonemochi Sensei

Right Relations

by Reverend Kensho Furuya

Among the people that constantly come and go in our lives, there are some who are always by our side through thick and thin. We tend to take these people for granted but this is a big mistake. Above everyone else, they should be held in the highest esteem and treasured.

Many complain that they have a hard time getting along with Sensei, but this is how it should be. If a teacher becomes too familiar with his students, the chance for them to learn something honestly will be lost. If the teacher is too strict, the students will become too afraid to express and develop their own power. Just as the students must strive to understand the mind of the teacher, the teacher should always try to balance gentle-

ness with strictness and visa versa. However, if a good teacher is to err, it is better to err on the side of strictness. If students cannot understand this, they are really not there to learn anything at all. Of course, students should not simply endure all idiosyncrasies of their teacher. There must be what I call a spiritual connection at all times between teacher and students; without this heart-to-heart connection, everyone will always suffer from misunderstanding and conflict.

Nowadays, I have no ambition to go out and teach students. I am happy teaching the students who enter the doors of my dojo. I think teachers should have great ambitions, but teachers must also strictly follow the rule of decorum. We cannot be too boastful or power hungry. We should not desire popularity and fame. We must endure poverty and hardship. We must learn how to be completely devoted. All good teachers must seek a peaceful existence and harmony with their students. Outside of this, it is not real Aikido.

I don't want to talk about other martial arts or martial arts movies. I don't want to hear about gossip or chit-chat circulating on the Internet. I want to discuss real issues with you. I don't want to pat your butt and say,

"Nice, nice!" and confirm your impossible expectations, nor do I want to force you think this way or that, or attempt to correct your thinking in any way. Perhaps, Aikido and martial arts are simply becoming another leisure amusement to waste our time? How sad! Get serious, and let's discuss something important and relevant to your life! Otherwise, do not waste my time! I certainly do not want to waste yours! Zen masters often say, "Just go and have a cup of tea!" You see! They do not want to talk either. Haha!

Editor's Note: Sensei originally posted this article, in slightly different form, to his daily message board on November 4, 2002.



Sensei with Kisshomaru Ueshiba

The Question We All Should Ask

by David Ito, Aikido Chief Instructor

A teacher can consider himself truly blessed if he finds one good student in his lifetime.

– Reverend Kensho Furuya

On a cool March evening, Sensei passed away while he was talking with James Doi and me after class. Jacob Sisk had made a joke and with a single appreciative laugh, Sensei was gone. When a teacher dies, the residual effect of that teacher's life lingers on in the lives of his surviving students. The four years since Sensei's passing have taught me more about myself than all the years when I was his student.

From the beginning, Sensei could see that I had a temper. He called me *willful* and *stubborn*, and he was right. I never listened and had to do everything my own way. If he said right, I had to try left. When he asked me to study Iaido, I instead focused on my jo technique. When he praised someone, I immediately gave that person a hard time. I became notorious for my bad attitude, which later culminated with a lengthy suspension from the dojo. In the last year of Sensei's life, he repeatedly asked me to spend time with him over dinner, at the movies, or just doing daily chores around the dojo. My answer was always no. I couldn't be burdened by him because I was busy living my own life or, as I told him years later, I was busy *finding myself*.

Training under someone is a two-way street. To Sensei it embodied a sacred covenant between two people. The teacher agrees to teach and the student agrees to learn. The teacher teaches to the best of his ability and the student agrees to follow and place his trust in the teacher. They form a close symbiotic union where the teacher thinks about the student and the student thinks about the teacher. Each one extends a hand for the other's well-being.

Now that Sensei is gone, I realize the opportunity I missed. Somewhere along the line, I broke the covenant between the student and the teacher, Sensei taught me, and I took without a care for him as my teacher. When he needed me, I wasn't there for him. He trusted me as his student, but I let my

ego get in the way of trusting him. This realization came about after Sensei's death when I found a picture of him at his birthday party a year before he died. At first glance, it would appear that it is just Sensei surrounded by his students at some party, but since I was there I knew that it was his birthday party. Upon finding this photo I was immediately struck by the sad, lonely look in his eyes and in that moment I realized how selfish and what a poor student I had been, perhaps always was.



“Always act as if your teacher is watching.”

– Reverend Kensho Furuya

At the time, I didn't know what it truly meant to be someone's student, and today I am just now discovering what it means to be a good student. My ego and anger fogged my judgment. I couldn't see that Sensei taught for my benefit. Most of the things he tried to teach me fell on deaf ears and now I am feverishly trying to catch up and remember what he tried to impart.

This realization led me to explore what it truly means to be a good student. The first thing I discovered: the definition of what it means to be a good student will be different for each person. Some might value loyalty, perseverance, dedication, hard work, or self-sacrifice. Others might appreciate continuity, preservation, cooperation, or support. No matter what you choose, they will be characteristics by which you would live your life at a higher level. Everyone's definition will be different because it is based on their personal experience with their teacher. The second thing: your actions on and off the mat must match your definition of a good student. Do you live life based on your definition? You can't be like me and say you're a good student while acting like an idiot; that strategy just wastes time and pays you only in regret. The final key in-

redient: in living whatever definition you choose, you must apply it to your life regardless if you are in your teacher's presence or not. He might be away on vacation, standing next to you, or dead. No matter what, if your conduct remains the same, you will have what it takes to be a good student for the rest of your life. Sensei put it best when he said, “Always act as if your teacher is watching.”

When Sensei was alive he provided us with a straight and narrow path that kept us in line and propelled us toward our greater good. Now that he is gone we must navigate our own twisted and narrow way wrought with impediments. This becomes very hard, and many times our delusions or desires set in and we find ourselves straying from the path, forgetting what it means to be a good student in an upsurge of ego or fear or fatigue.

Sensei had to die in order for me to understand the lesson of what it means to be a good student. I can still hear him admonishing, “Always act as if the teacher is watching. Sensei always knows!” This is a difficult path to follow, especially here in the West where our mentality tends to hoist us into the number one spot; we alone, we feel, are masters of our own destiny, the peak of our own petty mountain. We forget that all of our successes build upon the sacrifices of the teacher, and the only way to pay that person back is to continue to be a good student.

The sad thing is that every year since Sensei's passing, he becomes a little more forgotten. However, his memory and teachings live on in all of us and that enables him to linger for at least a little longer. All we have to do is ask ourselves one or two questions like, “Am I being a good student?” or “What would Sensei say if he saw me do this?” to help guide us in our daily lives. If Sensei does live on within each of us, then in fact our teacher is still watching! Today I understand, and I hope that I have the strength of character to be the student that Sensei always knew I could become. I constantly remind myself by asking the question, “What does it mean to be a good student?” whenever I can. Sensei changed my life and was the greatest person I ever knew. I am grateful to have been his student and will forever be in his debt.

My First New Year With Sensei

by Gary Myers, Iaido Chief Instructor

When Ito Sensei requested a “first experience” article, of course, the thing that comes to mind is my initial meeting with Sensei.

But I have related that story in a number of newsletter articles and publications, so I tried to find a different “first”. Most “firsts” happened 25 years ago and my memory is not what it used to be. First class with Sensei, first demonstration, first dinner with Sensei, and first and last trip to Japan with Sensei, first time I got yelled at . . . all these experienced bounced around in my head, giving me the opportunity to relive them.

My relationship with Sensei had the added dimension in that we were the same age, so there was an additional bond of sharing the same generation. Although our backgrounds were vastly different, we grew up experiencing the same events of our times. Of course, we both loved Japanese antiques and culture and *chambara* movies, which was another tie in our relationship. We also shared the pain of having both parents die prematurely within the same year. I mention this event because it relates to the “first” discussed here.

The first that comes to mind was celebrating New Year’s Day with Sensei and his mother at their home in Altadena. To be honest, I forget what year it was, but it must have been either 1987 or 1988. I felt honored that Sensei would invite my wife Sami and me to his boyhood home to enjoy the celebration with his family. It was the first time I had been to the Altadena house. It was pleasure to meet Sensei’s mother for the first time; she was such a gracious lady. We talked about our respective New Year tradi-

tions and the importance of the New Year’s holiday within the Japanese-American community. My New Year’s tradition, growing up near Philadelphia, was attending or watching the Mummers’ Parade, although I don’t think I described what the Mummers’ Parade was to anyone’s satisfaction on this occasion. Sami and I were served the traditional New Year’s foods in *jubako*, multi-tiered wooden serving boxes, some of which we had never experienced. Sensei’s mother served *ozoni*, the traditional New Year soup, which is supposed to bring good luck for the upcoming year. Years later, Sensei himself made *ozoni* from scratch and served it to us. It reminded me of that New Year’s afternoon spent at his house, except he was the host, the parent if you will, and we were his family.



Parent/child dynamics are often interesting to observe, and so it was with Sensei and his mother. All parents typically want the best for their children and have an image of what that best might be. Sensei said that his parents wanted him to pursue a career in optometry, or to become a doctor. Their image probably included a wife for Sensei and grandchildren for themselves. So I am sure they must have felt a degree of disappointment when Sensei wanted to pursue a life in martial arts. Aikido, Iaido, teaching and learning, and swords were his passions, and Sensei’s students were his family. We cannot always live our lives according to others’ expectations or what they consider to be the best way. Each of us must follow the path that resonates within our hearts. Sensei exemplified someone who followed his calling and the Way. It is unfortunate that his parents didn’t live to see the full extent that his teaching and his influence had around the world. His parents would have been proud of his accomplishments as a great teacher.



Uncompromising

by Mike Van Ruth, Chief Instructor
Aikido Renbukai, Surprise, Arizona

My first visit to Sensei was in the hopes of finding the dojo I had longed for. Until that first visit I felt the only way to find a dojo steeped in tradition would be for me to travel to Japan. Arrangements were made for me to visit and participate in practice at ACLA, and I was told that that place might be the dojo I was looking for.

Upon entering the dojo, I felt a sense of reverence. I could feel the seriousness in the air. As an art student at the time, I had an appreciation for the dojo’s aesthetic. It was obvious that the designer of this dojo had an uncompromising eye. Little did I know that the designer’s uncompromising eye applied to all aspects of the dojo: the training, protocol, and etiquette. I had no idea how difficult the training would be or how deep the rabbit hole would go. Looking back now, I don’t think I could ever find a dojo like Sensei’s, or for that matter, a teacher like him, anywhere else.

In this modern age, it must have taken a tremendous strength of will and unfettered commitment to hold the path of his uncompromising vision for what it was to be a martial arts teacher. His commitment to the dojo, the art, and his students was incredible. As a novice teacher (at best), in this moment I can only dream of coming close to his dedication. But I am only limited by my own selfishness and lack of courage. I hope to keep Sensei’s memory alive in my mind as an example of what is possible in my life if I dedicate myself fully to an endeavor, whatever that may be.



Sensei and students with Roberto

The Amazing First Time

by Dr. Jose Roberto Magallanes Molina, M.D., Chief Instructor
Veracruz Aikikai, Veracruz, Mexico

In February 2002, before traveling to L.A., I looked on the Internet for a local dojo there where I could practice Aikido, and I found Sensei's Web page and called him and asked permission to come train at ACLA. He said I was welcome to come train anytime.

It was awesome to enter his traditional dojo, and every time I returned over the next five years it always felt just like my first visit. Now I know why guests have said that Sensei's dojo seemed more traditional than even some dojos in Japan, or even more Japanese than the Japanese; it reminds me of one of those rooms seen on *National Geographic* about palaces in ancient, feudal Japan.

After class, Sensei came downstairs to say hello; he addressed me as "Dr. Magallanes" and we began a strangely informal-yet-formal conversation that lasted about 40 minutes. I immediately felt invited to continue this relationship with him. He gave me some

dojo newsletters, and I read them all during my visit and on my flight back home.

We exchanged e-mails for almost a year, and in 2003 I dared to ask Sensei if he would take me and my dojo into his organization as an affiliated branch, and he said yes. In 2004, he invited me and my students to participate in his dojo's 30th anniversary celebration. I felt honored and flattered, so I accepted immediately. Five of us travelled to L.A. and were treated as special guests and enjoyed the well-organized seminar, party, and show that Sensei had planned so carefully: the dances, taikos, and sake, as well as the excellent teaching of Yonemochi Sensei, Sensei, and the ACLA senior students. And during the 2005 seminar, Sensei invited us for breakfast one morning; we all had such a nice time chatting with him, joking, and seeing him laughing, childlike, as we enjoyed the time we spent together.

In 2007, when I heard about his sudden and unexpected death, I cried like a child for several days. I could not believe it: I had lost a great teacher and a good friend and advisor – not only in Aikido, but in my life as well. Sensei made me realize everything about myself, both good and bad, and he gave me the confidence to keep my dojo going. Some of the several presents he gave us remain in our dojo's tokonoma, and his book *Kodo: Ancient Ways* is still mandatory reading for me and my students as well.

Now I am part of ACLA, and Sensei's senior students still reflect his outstanding way of teaching. I keep watching and studying his *The Art of Aikido* video series very carefully: I know he still sees my sloppy movement and still incorrect Aikido! Now that Ito Sensei leads ACLA, he has become my guide and friend like Sensei was. I have no words to thank him and his senior students for that, and I still miss Sensei and his original dojo.



Remembering Sensei

by Dr. Alvaro Hernandez Meza, M.D., Co-Chief Instructor
Veracruz Aikikai, Veracruz, Mexico

In the school of life, there are teachers who give us direct teachings and others that we learn simply by looking at them or living with them. In Sensei, I found a teacher that I could learn from by reading his daily messages and his book *Kodo: Ancient Ways*, and by nurturing the dream to meet him in person someday. When my friend Magallanes Sensei told me about the possibility of joining the ACLA organization and that we could receive direct instruction from Sensei, for me it seemed the chance to do what I had so desired.

Having the opportunity to meet and train with Sensei is one of the stages of my life I will always remember with great affection and gratitude, because there are few times in life when we have a teacher who leads by example, making daily life a lesson for those who have the opportunity to live with it. Although we could only be with him closely for a small amount of time during each of the O Sensei Memorial Seminars we attended, each occasion seemed to us an opportunity of pure gold, because for us Sensei always had the care, lessons, and advice that he somehow knew we needed. I remember in particular one visit, when he gave us a scroll with the word patience on it; while he saw our desire for progress in trying to learn from him, he still wanted us to take the time to digest each lesson despite the limitations that we have, at our own pace, without rushing the process.

It seems very clear to me that, regardless of the desire to achieve a goal, we must never despair because everyone has their own pace in life and their own timeframe to achieve their goals. Although his absence saddens us, Sensei still lives through his teachings that we revive in our daily practice of Aikido and our daily conduct in life. This helps us become better human beings every day by following his example. I thank life for the opportunity I had to meet Sensei.



Sensei lecturing on different occasions on swords and tsukas

One Piece of Wood

by Jeff Wheeler, Iaido 3rd Dan

I first came to meet Sensei while attending a local Sword Society meeting in the late 1980s. My longstanding fascination with the unique weapons and feudal culture of Japan had drawn me to the group to learn more. It became immediately clear to me that he was an uncommon man and a deep scholar. At the time Sensei played a key role in the organization, sharing his unique and vast knowledge of swords and the samurai culture, a knowledge base that remains unmatched in the organization to this very day. He was well known nationally and freely taught others the result of his decades of painstaking focused personal study and hard-earned expertise.

I became an Iaido student of Sensei shortly thereafter, and soon began to realize that what made him such a remarkable teacher wasn't necessarily what he taught, but how he taught it. He embodied the "old school" pedagogy in every sense. The unique manner in which Sensei lived as well as taught seems very much like the great teachers of old about whom we can only read nowadays; when I occasionally pick up *Kodo: Ancient Ways* or read an account of a Zen teacher long past, I often glimpse Sensei in the pages. His wry humor complimented his insight and the kindness of his heart. His teaching transcended the passing of technique on the mats: it became a consciously applied element of his interactions with his students at almost all times. We see it expressed even today in the words he wrote which still appear on the Iaido page of the ACLA website: *The positive ideals of the ancient Samurai warrior are instilled in each student.*

Speaking for myself, I think the some of the

most precious ideals instilled and reinforced by Sensei were many times transmitted outside of class and often passed indirectly or by observing his example. These lessons had to do with principles of service, attention to the needs of others, determination, perseverance, and (of prime importance) the conscious effort to improve and strive for a greater personal perfection. Sensei never tolerated complacency. While I remember many times when Sensei seemed pleased, I rarely remember him expressing that he was satisfied. The distinction might sound a little confusing, but one of his comments to me years ago might help to illustrate what I mean.

Just like each individual's training, the dojo was always evolving. There was always something more to refine, something more to construct. One of the projects I remember very well was the building of a traditional tea room at the rear of the practice area in the original dojo. From its design and proportion to the smallest detail of its construction, Sensei strove for it to be authentic and correct. Along with many other students, I helped with the effort and during the construction Sensei said something to me that has stuck with me ever since. I was preparing a piece of wood to fit between the panel at the top of one of the walls and the ceiling. I was determined to craft a piece of wood that fit the gap absolutely perfectly, hugging the slightly undulating surface of the ceiling and the largely straight structure at the top of the wall. So I would repeatedly take the wood outside, shave fine layers off the piece and return inside to test the fit. I repeated the process over and over.

After observing me for what must have been well over half of an hour and recognizing there was much more to accomplish yet that afternoon, Sensei cajoling asked

how much longer I was going to take to finish crafting that single piece of wood. I eagerly answered, "Just a little while longer Sensei. I want to get it perfect for you!" He surprised me at the time with his response, because he literally laughed out loud and, in a clearly amused and good-natured voice, quipped, "Don't you know by now, you'll never get it perfect enough for me!" I didn't immediately understand the significance of what Sensei was saying to me. His meaning only became clear to me after much time and reflection; often his teaching was like that. Ultimately I came to understand that, while he appreciated my intention and efforts, he was also telling me quite clearly that in his role as my teacher he may occasionally be pleased, but could never be satisfied. That piece of wood, like my own training and personal growth, will never be perfect – and can never end. The day I believe it to be so will also be the day my own progress and growth stops.

It has been four years now since Sensei's passing and I truly count myself blessed to have been one of his students. While I treasure the Iaido he taught, I have benefited immeasurably and hold as precious the ideals he consciously worked to instill in me. I deeply miss his presence, celebrate his life, and will always honor his remarkable spirit.

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The First Time I Saw Sensei

by Dr. Kay Sera, D.C., L.Ac., Aikido Shodan

The very first time I encountered Sensei was a year or so before he actually became my sensei. No, it wasn't at a demonstration or on a martial arts TV program. I had no interest in martial arts.

One evening I was having dinner with a friend at a Japanese restaurant in Little Tokyo called Tokyo Gardens, which was located at the southern entrance of the Japanese Village Plaza. In walks this middle-aged, overweight (Sorry, Sensei!), bespectacled gentleman. Somehow, I noticed him; he was very noticeable. I wondered, "Who is this guy?" as the proprietress ushered him enthusiastically to the counter, calling him "Sensei." She obviously held him in high esteem. I thought he was a professor or something. "Saba, as usual, Sensei?"

Approximately one year later I found ACLA. I joined. At first, the senior black belts taught class. (It turns out Sensei had a bad knee at the time and didn't teach many classes.) Then one evening he came down the stairs. I heard the heavy sound of his hand on the wooden handrail, his hakama swishing as he descended the staircase. I saw him and thought, "Gee, he sure looks familiar. . . ."



Sensei and students at Tokyo Gardens

Class with Sensei was a very unique experience. I always felt a heightened sense of awareness and a deep desire to perform my very best. Somehow he draws it out of you. One always became much more attentive, aware, and sincere in effort. I'm realizing more and more that that's what this practice is all about.

When I first started Aikido about 10 years ago, I would attend class three to four times a week, and Sensei taught at least one of those classes. I cherished his classes. I never knew when he would teach but whenever I heard his hand gliding on the wooden handrail, the swishing of his hakama, and his heavy footsteps, I would get very excited and grateful for the opportunity to

be his student. It was an experience of being corrected, scolded, chided, and pushed to be much better than I would otherwise be, because he demanded it . . . and he demanded it because he cared so much.

Around the same time, when I ACLA, I read my first issue of *The Aiki Dojo*. In this issue there is a story about the passing of the husband of the owner of Tokyo Gardens. Then I remember that the professorial gentleman I saw at Tokyo Gardens was none other than Sensei. Little did I know then that this man would have such a large impact in my life and hold a cherished place in my heart.

"Our ego is our greatest obstacle to learning." – Reverend Kensho Furuya

Growing Up (and Aikido)

by Stan Sung, Aikido 2nd Kyu

I was just a college student when I first started training in Aikido. My friend and I wanted to get 'hardcore' and find a dojo that would train us in martial arts the traditional way. I found ACLA and without knowing it, began my journey of 'First Times'. This isn't about my first experiences of Aikido, but more so about how a series of first experiences of Sensei shaped themselves to guide me on a journey of strengthening not only my mind and body, but also my character.

My First day of Training – I was told to wear comfortable clothes before I got my *keikogi*. I came to the dojo and practiced in sweat pants and a white t-shirt that read "Screw Milk..." on the front and "Got Beer?" on the back. At the end of class one of the black belts delivered a message to me from Sensei, "Next time, would you please wear a more appropriate shirt?" I had a knee jerk reaction of feeling a little resentful and wondering who this 'Sensei Guy' was and why he cared about what I wore. Then as I was driving away I realized that the black belt who was teaching class wasn't even Sensei! However, apparently he was around somewhere even though I didn't see him and he took enough notice of class to see

my shirt and made sure I knew of his disapproval. So Ninja! Any resentfulness instantly got replaced with curiosity and respect. I now wanted to meet Sensei and see his Aikido for myself.

The First time Sensei Taught Me – I had been coming to class diligently almost four times a week for weeks, always on different days, to try and figure out when Sensei taught class himself. Just when I was thinking that I will never get to take a class with Sensei, I caught him out of the corner of my eye in between *ukemi* drills, standing in the corner of the dojo ready to lead the practice. Adrenaline pumped through my veins and I focused intensely as he was demonstrating. I was surprised. Sensei wasn't the person that I had imagined him to be, a ruthless man that I'd be afraid of. In fact, I didn't have any impression of him. He had a calmness about him that drew no reaction one way or the other from me. I just sat and watched and practiced. How I felt is embodied in a time when he gave advice on meditation before class: "Don't make meditation too complicated thinking about doing it this way or that. Just sit. If you do that you will find that your mind will begin to calm, then will clear, and finally you will find that your mind will begin to focus." I just continued to practice not thinking much about how class or Sensei was supposed to be. I just practiced.

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A Special Day

by Shaun Menashe, Aikido 3rd Kyu, Iaido Nidan

A few months before Sensei died, he invited Mark Ehrlich and I to join him for lunch. After a series of e-mails we eventually settled on Nate N' Al's in Beverly Hills and I was selected as the driver. This was my first glimpse into how things were done in the dojo. As a relatively new student with less than six months of training, I had little experience in dealing with a teacher in the traditional method. New, impetuous, and driven by the desire to be closer to Sensei, I accepted. Ito Sensei, who at the time was Sensei's most senior student, briefed me on the general dos and don'ts, no doubt, the result of his witnessing numerous students before me fail to meet Sensei's expectations. These *faux pas* often made it difficult for students to recover Sensei's good graces: doors were to be opened and shut gently, my car was to be washed, surface-street directions were to be planned in advance, and Sensei was always to have an attendant present. Everything had a way, every action had a purpose. Although I felt more prepared for our trip thanks to Ito Sensei's coaching, I still was not really sure what to expect once Sensei got in my car.

The ride with Sensei was interwoven with periods of silence and pleasant conversation. I was amazed at his knowledge of the city. He did not like my MapQuest route and, instead, appointed himself navigator. Sensei had an acute sense of all the major landmarks around the greater downtown area, with its side streets and congested intersections. He shared stories of a bygone Los Angeles. Our path led us passed Chuck Norris's favorite eatery in the 1970s and buildings which reflected the new trend towards modern architecture, buildings which seemed to pop up like conspicuous, foreign plants in an otherwise homogenous garden. Sensei's history seemed so interwoven with this city, and his memories and nostalgia made me realize the subtle beauty that Los Angeles has to offer; although it might be difficult to see amidst the traffic, smog, and occasional barbed wire, when Sensei spoke about his experiences I had the impression that L.A., for him at least, was a kind of paradise. Although Sensei commented on the smooth ride of the SUV I drove at the time, I know that the height of the vehicle posed some difficulty for him, although he never complained or remarked of discomfort. I remember we joked about installing the inflatable slides used in airline emergency landings on the running bar for him. Despite this obstacle, Sensei conducted him-

self with an unassuming grace and instead continued on with stories of Aikido's past. He conveyed his personal history rather plainly but it still exuded a richness and depth. His martial arts experiences sounded as if they had been cast against a backdrop reminiscent of the Wild West, at least to my inexperienced ears.

We proceeded to fetch Mark. With another passenger in the car some of my internal stress abated. As we all chatted and continued on our way via surface streets to Nate N' Al's, I tried all the little tricks I could think of to make Sensei feel comfortable. If I thought an oncoming obstacle may necessitate a subtle honk of the horn, I held my hand a few inches over the center of the wheel. I had hoped Sensei would feel more at ease if I was noticeably more aware of the changes in the road a few hundred yards away. Other attempts were not so successful, as I quickly learned that Sensei was not a fan of my U-turn. This mistake earned me the moniker "erratic driver," a subtle joke tinged with an underlying truth. Finally, at Nate N' Al's we enjoyed a delicious deli lunch and engaging conversation. After two hours, we embarked on the ride home with full stomachs. We dropped Mark off at his home with a pledge to have lunch again in the near future and continued on to the dojo. I left Sensei with a bow and quietly waited for him to enter safely before steering through the narrow alley and heading home.

I am positive that throughout the course of the afternoon there were tests of character and ability, and I performed all the tasks that fell within my limited awareness as best I could. Pass or fail, I only hoped that my heart shined through in my actions. I was probably too new to be scolded very much for my mistakes and this allowed for a more pleasant experience, for me at least. In the end, this short ride was the only alone time I had with Sensei. With his untimely passing, I look back on this encounter with the fondness that Sensei depicted for his own personal history. Today, I have my own stories to recount as I drive through Downtown L.A. and Sensei is very much a part of them. He changed my life, shared his vision, and provided inspiration for Aikido, Iaido, swords and fittings, Traditional Chinese Medicine, and ACLA's traditional training methods. I feel lucky to have shared this time with Sensei. I feel lucky that I shared this moment with Mark. Perhaps it was a type of foreshadowing of things to come. For me it remains a very special day indeed.



"The only proof that we have mastered Aikido is the degree to which we have incorporated it into our lives."

— Reverend Kensho Furuya

Training With Sensei

by Louis Sukkoo Lee, Aikido Shodan

Whenever I look back on training days with Sensei, I become more and more grateful at the privilege of having him as my Aikido teacher, especially for a reason that is not so obvious on the surface.

It is still a big part of tradition here at ACLA that the students stay completely silent during the classes. But back then, even when an individual instruction was given during the class, we just bowed, without saying anything; no yes, no *hai*, just silently bowed. I believe that this practice was a part of the tradition which Second Doshu passed down to Sensei. Staying silent during Aikido training embodies such wisdom and practicality, which I realized many years later.

Some Zen Buddhists regularly go into a lengthy practice of silence, sometimes for as long as a full year. When they begin, they wear a small sign hanging around their necks that says *Silence Training*, so no one expects any vocal response from them in daily life, and discourages anyone from even starting a conversation. They do this practice regularly in order to obtain clarity, and rid themselves of noises from the world outside. I think we can benefit from our silent Aikido training exactly the same way. With an intense focus, we bring our senses to life through movements, ridding out mental and verbal noises that drowns us all day long.

In the summer of 1987, I visited several Aikido dojos around L.A. before I came to ACLA and met Sensei. All the places I visited were interesting in their own right, but when I came here and watched a class, there was something different, something I have not seen or experienced anywhere else. Class started and the students went through warm-up exercises. Just about when their warm-up was done, a heavy-set teacher, with no facial expression, but not quite angry (I guess “stern” might be the right way to describe him), walked down from the second floor and onto the mat.



Sensei in the dojo in the early years

After bowing himself to the photo of the Founder, he just waved out a senior student, showed a simple technique several times, and without any explanation, he waved the student off and turned his back to the students. That must have been a signal; immediately students bowed, picked partners, said “*Onegaihimasu*,” and went on to repeat what they saw Sensei demonstrate over and over. Sensei would sit at the upper right corner of the mat, his hands folded at his lap, and watch. Throughout the class he did not say much (maybe nothing at all, as I do not remember clearly). The whole class consisted of only a handful of techniques, simple and basic, almost too simple and too basic. And it was magical and intoxicating! A relief from a burdensome life of information overload and non-stop mental and verbal gibberish. I joined immediately without thinking twice.

There was something else, an effort not easily recognized, in Sensei’s quiet method of teaching. I think he must have tried very hard in order to teach the way he did. Somehow, he almost completely restrained himself from verbal corrections and instructions, even though I am sure that he regularly witnessed

less than perfect techniques being carried out by all the students during classes way more than he wished to see. Occasionally, when he apparently thought that things were not moving the right way or the whole class was lost, he would pick out a pair of students (probably the most problematic ones) and tossed them several times, and again waved them off and walked away. That woke everyone up pretty fast. By doing this, by being watchful yet distant in a way, he gave us a lot of space and freedom to try, practice, and grow into a potential we all possessed. He must have known that, like children, new *Aikidoka* should be trained with proper and correct basics, but at the same time must have a space to crawl, walk, and run on their own. Thus he tolerated mistake after mistake, as long as students showed desire and determination. So when talking with other students of how strict Sensei was, I, at the same time, think of how patient, flexible, and generous he was, allowing us to grow into our own shoes. I miss training under his wise guidance in this month of his memorial.

The Gift of Sensei’s Words

by Mike Hatfield, Aikido Ikkyu

The first time I met Furuya Sensei, I’ll always remember his words that day.

It was 2001 and I was wandering around downtown Los Angeles near Little Tokyo looking for a building I had read about in the late 1980s. The article, which had appeared in the Los Angeles Times and was written by its architecture critic, included the following description: “*To step into Furuya Sensei’s downtown martial arts studio is to step from the racket of a rundown industrial district into the serenity of a 17th-Century Japanese teahouse. A narrow*

doorway that once led from a loading platform into the former Los Angeles Post Office Annex now points the way to a straw-matted pavilion dedicated to the instruction of aikido.” Being a recent graduate of architecture school, I was very much interested in seeing such a fine example of adaptive reuse of a historic structure, but my efforts that day had yet to be rewarded.

Very much like stopping for directions in an unfamiliar city, I decided it was time to visit Mr. Norihiko Takatani at Anzen Hardware on First Street and ask for his help. Right then and there, he said he would call and introduce me. As he picked up the phone and dialed, I remember being amazed that

he knew the number without looking it up. After he had a brief conversation in Japanese, Mr. Takatani hung up the phone, gave me exact directions on how to get there, and said to go right away. No more than 10 minutes later, as I entered the front gate and proceeded through the garden to the front door, I remember feeling great anticipation and excitement: I was finally going to see this fantastic work of art!

Sensei came downstairs to greet me and in a very polite manner said: “You should come back when there is class.” I did. Ten years later, every day I still want to say: Thank you, Sensei.

My First Practice

by Santiago Garcia Almaraz, Chief Instructor
Aikido Kodokai, Salamanca, Spain

At the beginning of January, Ito Sensei proposed that we who knew Sensei and trained under him write something about a “first” in our relationship with him, to commemorate the anniversary of his death. Since then, I’ve thought about it, and I’d like to return to that first time I came to practice at ACLA, since I believe that that sensation, that particular “first time,” has framed my trajectory as a martial artist and as an *Aikidoka*.

The first time that I participated in a class given by Sensei, I was impressed by how easily he could explain Aikido so that somebody like me, whose English was quite mediocre, could still understand him. He always used the right word, without linguistic adornments in his explanations. I found it easy to assimilate what he said, but moreover, his technical accomplishment, his memory, the facility with which he could move his *ukes*, and the speed and subtlety with which he executed the techniques all impressed me enormously.



Sensei with Santiago

Until I met Sensei I had been learning Aikido with doubts and a great technical emptiness that left me feeling uncertain about my own practice and that of my students. My memories of that first class were intense . . . very intense, but the emotion perhaps partly came from finally being in the dojo that I previously had seen only in photos from across the world, and trying my best to practice, to understand, to correct myself whenever Sensei gave some instructions to me, and to show myself as combat-ready during all the classes.

I recall that, as the “new one” in the dojo, the other instructors had no problem training with me as they always did at Sensei’s dojo: hard, with intensity, seriousness, and with great respect.

Remembering the sensations of my first class with Sensei I still feel as if everything suddenly began to make sense in my practice. The pieces seemed to fit,

and although many of the things Sensei strived to teach me I suppose I will continue to do badly, I understood finally that Aikido can be explained, that it has principles, bases, and rules that are fundamental to understand and to advance in this art, and that its unique secret is the one of constant practice.

The Unseen

by Dr. William Allen, Ph.D., Aikido 2nd Dan

Kami

What does it mean to honor the memory of a person? Why do we do it? Despite our best efforts to record and retain, even the memory of a person is as transitory as the person himself in the grand scheme of things. All things pass.

I have never studied Asian philosophy very seriously, but Sensei was able to communicate

some of the basic ideas of Confucianism and Buddhism in a very straightforward way. The basic manifestation of Confucianism, particularly in Japan, is the practice of reverence for ancestors (The term “ancestor worship” has been used to describe this practice, but I feel that this term is not quite right.). The way Sensei related this was to say that if we think of the fact that our parents had to be alive to conceive us, and both of them had parents that conceived them, and so on, then we begin to realize what a tremendous amount of energy has been expended, and how many people have been raised and taught, and how many things have happened, just to bring each one of us into this world. When we think of it that way, our own seemingly small existence is clearly seen to be part of a web of connections to people past, present, and future that stretches across time and all of the known world. Most of these people are not present, but they aren’t “gone,” they

just have become “unseen.” They aren’t gone because they live in us, in our memories and in the way that they have shaped our behavior, and thus the behavior of all who come after us. So, it is only right that people who have played such a large role in our very existence should be remembered once in a while.

The Japanese word *kami* is often translated as “god.” Sensei once talked me into buying an old book on Japanese customs from a friend of his. I read the book, and was surprised to see the word *kami* translated as “unseen.” When I asked Sensei about it, he said, “Hmmm, yeah, that’s a good way to translate it.” I said that I thought *kami* meant “god,” and that “unseen” carried a completely different connotation for me. He said, “Yeah, it means god, and in Shinto everything is or can be a god, but that aspect of things is intrinsic, and can’t be seen. So, it is *kami*, or unseen.” When he told me that it was as if a flash of lightning went off in my mind.

Most of the world “as it is” is unseen. We can remember the past, we can reason about cause and effect to get an idea of the future, we can sense the depth of our feelings for our families and the people in our lives, and so on. All of these things are among the most important things we do, and we know of them because of human senses that are beyond sight.

Most of the people who are responsible for our existence, here and now, are unseen. Their influence on us is direct and undeniable. The only thing we can do is remember them, remember what they wanted for us, and remember how much they changed our lives.



Photo courtesy of Ric Noyle: ricnoyle.com

Thank you!

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ACLA would like to congratulate all of our Hawaiian friends at **Aikido Celebration 2011** on hosting a successful 50th anniversary seminar to commemorate O Sensei's visit to Hawaii "to build a 'silver bridge,'" thank you for inviting us to participate and, as always, for your kindness, good fellowship, and joyful training! Also, a special thanks to all the organizers and volunteers who donated their time to make the dream of this celebration become a reality.

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 Master of Ceremonies: Randy Scoville

My Many Many “Firsts” With Sensei

by Sifu Adam Hsu

1. First Voice: That was right before my first U.S. performance, in Oakland, California to be exact. I visited Sifu Brendan Lai in his shop and he was on the phone with a certain person in Los Angeles. “What, what, what? Old house? Old house?” “No! That’s *Ancient House*,” came a voice from the phone, a little high-pitched. Because Brendan Lai wanted to put the *kanji*, Chinese characters, on the poster, he was checking how to write Sensei’s last name, *Furuya*. That’s the “first voice” before I even met Sensei, heard second-hand from a long-distance phone call.

2. First Face: Some days not too long after in the Oakland Auditorium, not only did we meet, we sat one behind the other. We introduced ourselves and when I looked at his face, in my heart I told myself, “Oh. So. This is the Ancient House. Wow, quite a big house!”

3. First Talk: So we sat down and the program started. I performed Baji Quan and after I returned to my seat, he said many good words to me – sincerely meant, not just the polite compliments required by etiquette. Then I watched his performance of Aikido and after all that we had more time to chat. He really liked Baji Quan, liked my performance, not because I showed such a high level, but he said he really liked the old ancient art.

4. First Front Cover: I wasn’t sure I wanted to be on the front cover. Another famous, famous, even older and more widely distributed magazine had talked to me several times already, wanting me to hop on the front cover. Well, really, I’m camera shy. But then Sensei talked to me, so I went down to Los Angeles to the *Inside Kung Fu* office, met with him, chatted, and he was there with me all the time when we shot the cover.

5. First Dojo Visit: As you all know, Sensei started teaching in Hollywood, where he worked at *Inside Kung Fu*. I really don’t know even today why he got fired. The owner just told him, “You’re fired; pick up your things and leave.” Sensei called me, really puzzled and sad. I told him, “It’s good. Don’t hang around there any longer wasting your time. You do your own thing. OK?” So of course when he opened his first dojo in Little Tokyo, I had to visit. Then oh my god, what a surprise. I knew Little Tokyo was the biggest Japantown in the world outside of Japan but when I stepped into the dojo, I stepped into “Japan!” That’s my first impression of his dojo. Of course now you have a new dojo, a different location, but with internal decorations and everything like the original. That’s really great.

6. First Dinner: Oh my god, to my surprise we visited the L.A. Chinatown, a Cantonese restaurant, and of course I felt: *I’m Chinese, I’ll treat him good, I’ll order dishes and everything*. But no no no!! Everybody knows him, from the manager to the waitresses. Oh my god, I wondered if even the busboys and chefs knew him or not. We enjoyed the dinner. For many years after, we had dinner in many different places with different styles of



Sensei, Karita Naoji Sensei,
and Master Hsu

cooking and many countries. But the first dinner I still remember – I just don’t remember the name of that restaurant. We went back there several times, sometimes during lunch hour, really really rushed. But when Sensei showed up, the manager just pretended we had reservations and immediately let us in. Certainly we never made reservations but he ushered us in, sat us down, and our food was served.

7. First Workshop: I conducted several workshops in the dojo, as you all know. But the first one surprised me. Sensei in his uniform and wearing a white belt, kneeling down behind his students and bowing down to pay his respects – not to me but to the Art. So this is Sensei: sincere, humble, really serious too. I still remember that.

8. First Book and Tapes: His first book, *Kodo: Ancient Ways*, of course I loved very much and even today I’m introducing it to my students in the U.S. and Taiwan. And do you guys know this funny story – some stores placed his book on the shelves of the music section. I told him “That’s your fault – you shouldn’t have called it *Kodo*!” And the videotapes are another not very happy story. He shot a series of major videos, published by *Inside Kung Fu*, to my great surprise. He wasn’t given a fair contract and yet he treated the owner, the brothers, and the wives as friends. And that’s Sensei, OK?

9. First Worry: Several times when I returned to Taiwan I sent Sensei some ancient Chinese-style cakes and candy. He loved them very much. He liked sweets. And he also liked the unique way the old Chinese people wrapped the candies, of course using paper. Well, he’s that kind of guy. “Ancient House” really loved ancient style. Then some students warned me: “He has serious health issues, you shouldn’t send him sweets, candy, or cake.” OK, I stopped . . . and started to really worry.

10. First Helping Hand: Many of you know my daughter, Helen. When she went to UCLA for her B.A., I was much further away, living in the Bay Area. Sensei always reached out his first helping hand to take care of her. After her grad school degree, she decided to return to Los Angeles for her internship. No longer in school, she had to find her own place to stay. The first to pop up and help was Sensei. We all met with one of his students who worked at a newspaper. Immediately he took us to a nice and convenient area and showed us the apartment with a beautiful courtyard and helped Helen get settled in. So as a father you can see how thankful I was and still am to Sensei.

11. First “Long Time No See”: When I returned to Taiwan, I had my own troubles. We called each other many times, but no matter what we talked about – martial arts, economics, even weather – always he asked me to come back, come to L.A., come back soon, or sooner. And at that time neither of us could know we’d never meet again.

12. First Reunion: I’m looking forward to our first reunion. It won’t be long. I’m getting there. Closer and closer every day. I will report. Just wait. OK?



Izawa Sensei and Sensei

Encounters

by Kei Izawa, Chief Instructor,
Aikikai Tanshinjuku, Boulder, Colorado
General Secretary, International Aikido Federation

The first encounter I had with Reverend Kensho Furuya was in Pasadena in the summer of 1977. I was in California accompanying Kanai Sensei for a seminar and although Furuya Sensei would not be attending, Kanai Sensei wanted to pay him a visit at his home. So I went there as a *tsukibito*. Kanai Sensei, from what I fully understand now, wanted to take a look at many of the swords and *tsubas* that Furuya Sensei had in his collection. The two exchanged a never-ending dialog on the swords and *tsubas*, and while Kanai Sensei would give me some explanations on the swords, the level was too high for me to even comprehend what they were talking about. I have to be honest that while it was great to see many beautiful pieces, my perspective was still too superficial to truly enjoy it. (That perspective continues even today.) It was like hearing Shakespeare scholars exchanging profound notes on *Hamlet*.

Kanai Sensei had an enjoyable moment appreciating the swords and we left back to the hotel for the evening. Subsequent to this, I had the pleasure to accompany Kanai Sensei to many antique shops, garage sales, Salem and Boston Museum of Arts, and as many places as we could smell some antique swords. I was driving him around since he had neither a car nor a driver's license, but we had lots of fun. I started to buy some swords myself, and I even have a dagger I bought in Santa Monica that summer under Kanai Sensei's supervision. I still remember I paid about \$700 then. He was not impressed with the dagger itself, but he told me that the *fuchi kashira* were easily worth over two thousand dollars then. I still keep it as my treasure.

The meeting between Furuya Sensei and Kanai Sensei was the first for me to see two experts sharing their passion. But because I was just a *tsukibito*, Furuya Sensei totally forgot about my presence, which seems natural because he was so immersed into the conversation with Kanai Sensei.

Kanai Sensei was a seeker of *honmono* (authentic things or people). He liked iron so much, he said, because even though a swordsmith of fakes would try to make the swords look authentic, the iron *jihada* would always come out and tell the truth. The

aging of the iron also had to be authentic and no chemical or tricks would change the characteristics of a genuine aging process. In many respects, I think Furuya Sensei felt exactly the same. His legacy of Aikido is the pursuit of the real thing, as is all the Yagyū *tsubas* he collected, not to mention his book collection and *kakejikus* and scrolls. In my over 42 years of Aikido life, I have met many great senseis who have impressed me a lot but when it comes to the seeker of *honmono*, I must say Kanai Sensei and Furuya Sensei have been my first ones.

After our first encounter in 1977, destiny brought us together back soon after Kanai Sensei passed away in 2004. The trigger of re-encounter was created by Steven Shaw's move to Colorado and the desperate search by Furuya Sensei to find a suitable dojo for Steven in this part of the country. After consulting with Yonemochi Sensei and being told about my dojo, Furuya Sensei wrote me an e-mail but still did not remember I had met him years back. Afterwards we exchanged over 400 e-mails and I managed to meet him many times until he departed. Looking at one e-mail he had sent me on January 25, 2005, I wonder what was the fate that brought us together again or whether it was pre-programmed.



Kanai Sensei and Sensei

Let me quote him: "I met [Kanai Sensei] in 1968 and he had only been in the United States for two years at that time. Not many students were in the dojo and he was very lonely as he told me often. At that time, there were not many Japanese or Japanese Americans in the area as I found out myself while attending Harvard. I think we became good friends because we also both liked Japanese swords and we both are from Yamanashi Prefecture, as well as Aikido. His mother is a Furuya, so maybe we are very, very distantly related in some way. There are many Furuyas in Yamanashi. I have always considered him my first real teacher and have always thought of him with great respect and affection."

Untitled

Confusion, the enemy of the mind,
Cut him down like all others,
He only rises with the wind of disappointment.
Enjoy this day, be in the moment,
Thus holding the Sword of Reality,
Can we clear this Infinite Path.
Only words from the heart,
Can reach their mark.
The bonds of friendship,
Stronger than any force of attack.

Editor's note: Sensei posted this poem on Aikiweb's Aikido Haiku forum on 10/24/2003

“Most students are not defeated by their opponents,



they are defeated by the narrow limitations they set upon themselves.”

– Reverend Kensho Furuya

First Impressions

by Delano Leslie, Aikido Mudansha

Many of the important firsts of my life were the ones surrounding my experiences with Sensei.

My first meeting with Sensei was actually a phone conversation regarding my ability to join the class. I had surveyed some 17 martial arts schools looking for one with the right fit. At one of the schools my experience was so daunting I felt the need to be sure that driving to downtown L.A. would not meet with the same sordid result. At this school I was not acknowledged upon entering or any time soon after. I thought that perhaps they were testing my mettle in letting me sit there and wait. I was saddened to find that others of other ethnic and racial backgrounds were acknowledged immediately, so after one hour I left. So when considering Sensei's class, I wanted to be sure I wasn't wasting my time travelling all that way. Sensei showed surprise at my question regarding my ability to attend and showed concern for my experiences with other dojos.

My first lesson covered rolling, but in truth the lesson was about patience. As any student of Sensei's knows, each lesson was as much about self-knowledge, decorum, and wisdom as it was about Aikido. On patience Sensei had this to say: "How long does it take to prepare an entire McDonald's meal from the making of the bread to the preparation of all the meat, vegetables and sauces? Then why is it that we become angry when our food is not ready in four minutes? Many people display the same lack of patience when striving for a black belt. They quit long before they should. If they do not receive the belt within their own personal time frames then they give up."

I remember the first time that Sensei called upon me to demonstrate a technique. I was about eight months with Sensei and I felt quite skittish and new in many ways. The class up to this moment

had been about a very complex technique being demonstrated by Sensei and Ken Watanabe, his senior student and regular *uke*. So when Sensei called upon me I was petrified. I feared that my own grasp of the technique would be poor at best and that my effort would not meet his expectations. Sensei, however, asked me to demonstrate a basic move, one which I could show well. I believe that Sensei never wanted to see anyone fail. He seemed able to know what each person needed just when they needed it. However many students in the class, no matter how many pairs of students practiced, he seemed to know exactly what happened with each of us. I can remember his kindness and respect for me and all of his students.

My first outing with Sensei outside of the dojo was one that I count among my best and luckiest days ever. I had arrived early for practice to beat the traffic, as I often did, and I sat in the parking lot and rested. This particular day Sensei happened to be heading to a local sub and sandwich shop when he saw me waiting in my car. He approached and asked me if I was hungry and invited me to join him. His manner at lunch was open and unassuming; he let me ask any question and gave me as honest and sincere an answer as he could, and he took a genuine interest in my history and background. This was the most time I had ever spent with Sensei alone and away from the dojo. I count it to be the best L.A. traffic story ever.

When I had received the news of Sensei's passing my life was in a blur for a few days. Until this point I had always felt certain that I would one day return to be taught by him. I had spoken frequently of my desire to return to the dojo. Even my wife had noticed that over the years the part of me that shone when I was training had begun to dim. Three children and a hundred excuses later I realize that "life is what happens to us when we are busy making other plans." I will always miss his wisdom though I count myself lucky for having had the chance to know him. I keep his book nearby if I need a bit of his insight.

The Second Time I Met Sensei

by Dr. James Doi, Ph.D., Aikido 5th Dan, Iaido 4th Dan

I first met Sensei in the fall of 1969. He was teaching a student Aikido club at USC as a Senior at the time, so he must have been about 22 or so. I believe that he held his Sandan in Aikido. He was kind of a nerdy guy. When he laughed, he didn't laugh so much as giggle. He was very different then. He graduated that year and went on to Harvard. For the next 20 years, I moved around California for various jobs, but still practiced Aikido with different teachers.

In 1988, I returned to LA and contacted Sensei. I don't remember the exact first time I met him, but I vividly remember the "second" time. The first thing I said to him was, "Hi Dan, what's happening?" or a similar dated phrase. There was awkward silence. It took about two years for me to get over that little *faut pas*.

My father grew up in Honolulu in the 20s and 30s, and during this time, Imperial Japanese naval training ships would dock and there would be events like Kendo or Judo exhibitions or "friendship" competitions with the locals. Apparently during these events in Hawaii, my father observed some of the Kendo and Judo sensei from the ships. Pre-war *Kendoka* and *Judoka* were very different from present day so-called martial artists. When Sensei and Ken Watanabe came to my wedding soon after I joined ACLA, my father told me afterwards how impressed he was because Furuya Sensei was a "real sensei" like the men he'd witnessed in Honolulu so many years ago. A "real sensei" is not just a teacher or instructor of a skill; he is all that and much, much more. The terms *sensei*, *sifu*, or *guru* are sometimes translated as *master*. However even this term doesn't quite describe what a sensei is.

In the twenty years between Sensei's late Sixties USC student club and my second encounter with him at ACLA, he changed from Danny Furuya to Kensho Furuya Sensei. Part of the change was, of course, natural maturation and dealing with the problems of life. The pressures and headaches of the dojo were also factors in his change. His parents and grandmother passed away in the late 1980s and he took care of them before they died. These were also factors in his changing. However, I believe the difference between the USC Aikido club instructor and Sensei was that he consciously chose to become the real thing.

Sensei was deeply aware of the things that the role of Sensei entailed. Once he explained how a sensei can never really be a friend with his students because it makes teaching too difficult; the student will never be in the right frame of mind to learn. A warrior with a good sensei will be more afraid of disappointing his sensei than being afraid of his enemy. This calculated inspiration of fear mirrors the tactics of Spartan mothers, who supposedly told their warrior sons to return from battle either victorious or "on their shields" – that is to say, having died trying. If this kind of tough-love relationship sounds harsh, it certainly can be, but there is always a method to what can feel at times like madness.

Being a sensei means playing a very specific, difficult role, and knowing how and when to play it. I remember several times when



Sensei with Kisshomaru Ueshiba

Sensei was really, really angry about something, everyone would be scared to death, and then he would call me up to his office. He would then talk about the garden or something in a completely matter-of-fact way; it was all a staged performance! However there were other times where I could not tell if his rage was real or not. Similarly, Sensei told a story about how when he was training at Hombu Dojo, he and a friend were walking down the street when they noticed a senior instructor that they were scared of, but he didn't see them. They both fell back into an ally and went around the block to avoid meeting the instructor on the street.

Once Sensei was talking about how one of his teachers would go ballistic over small mistakes but would ignore major, major screw ups. When he was telling this story, I was thinking that he did exactly the same thing. Once in Iaido, I was getting a lot of grief from Sensei about the position of my hand (we are talking about a difference of no more than one inch). I then totally screwed up the next movement in the *kata* and everyone in the room knew it. Sensei completely ignored the mistake and said nothing. The lesson to me was that major mistakes were obvious and would be immediately and easily corrected, while small, important details are easy to overlook but must be recognized and corrected at great effort.

Sensei once talked about the Founder's involvement with Omoto Kyo. For Sensei, the actual attraction of the religion was not so much the particular beliefs, but the personal charisma of its founder, Onisaburo Deguchi. Deguchi felt that one should treat one's life as a carefully executed work of art. Sensei said he very much liked that idea and tried to live like that. It was his art and responsibility to teach Aikido and Iaido the best way he could. He decided that the best way to teach Aikido was to teach in exactly the same way as he learned from his masters. Sensei used to say that the Aikido he taught was the best way to learn what Aikido was all about, so that over time each student would develop a personal style. He would show his own personal style at demos sometimes. However, he would also always, always practice the basics.

Every once in a while, when I was talking to Sensei in his office at the original dojo, he would make a joke and giggle at his own humor, and my old friend Danny Furuya would show up for just a split second.



O Sensei Memorial Seminar

April 22-24, 2011



Special guest instructor Kei Izawa from Aikikai Tanshinjuku
General Secretary, International Aikido Federation



Friday April 22

5:30 PM: Ken Watanabe, 5th dan
6:30 PM: Ken Watanabe, 5th dan
8:00 PM: Welcome Dinner

Saturday April 23

9:00 AM: Gary Myers, 5th dan
10:00 AM: Kei Izawa, 6th dan
11:00 AM: Memorial Service
12:00 PM: Lunch
1:30 PM: Kei Izawa, 6th dan
2:30 PM: James Doi, 5th dan
6:00 PM: Dinner Party

Sunday April 24

8:00 AM: Gary Myers, 5th dan
9:00 AM: David Ito, 4th dan
10:00 AM: Kei Izawa, 6th dan
11:00 AM: Branch Chief Instructors
12:00 PM: Lunch
1:30 PM: Kei Izawa, 6th dan
2:30 PM: James Doi, 5th dan

Please check our website for details everyone is invited to attend!



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My L.A. Dad

by Dr. Helen Hsu, Psy.D.

In my elementary school years, Sensei was among the parade of martial arts masters from across the world who visited our home. All had passion for their practice, many were quite quirky – to put it mildly. Sensei’s martial arts kinship and friendship with my father, Sifu Adam Hsu, took root without my awareness. Eventually Sensei became family to us. And we, in turn, were honored to be welcomed into the ACLA family.

Sensei and I discovered we shared two intense interests: psychology and fine food. We shared correspondence about discipline (or the lack thereof with modern day monkey-minds), meditation, the similarities between Buddhism and cognitive behavioral therapy, intellectual stimulation, mental illness, and mind-body-spirit-health. We also tallied an impressive list of culinary outings ranging from late nights at the Jewish deli to Soul Food at Marina del Rey and every possible regional variation of Chinese food throughout California, with the occasional steak and organic vegetable thrown in for variety. Over the legions of cleared plates and un-

winding years, we fussed and fretted about one another’s families (biological and martial arts) and the delicate task of living in the City of Angels – without oneself becoming plastic.

When I moved to Los Angeles, Sensei and his students helped me secure a lovely apartment, and helped me move in. He treated my roommates to their very first dining experience in L.A. When I opened my first private practice office, the first package I received was a beautiful scroll from Sensei, which set the tone of décor to soothe patients. Whenever I needed help or protection – Sensei was the first to offer assistance. I introduced him to others as “My L.A. Dad.”

Oh sure, we’d be aghast at times when Sensei did things like publish a personal e-mail exchange in his newsletter, or cackle his way through truly awful Kung Fu movies – but his foibles and crack-ups ultimately enriched those who knew him. He could enlighten you for days on esoteric historical facts or antiques, pinpoint the weaknesses in your technique with a withering eye, and follow that up with a matzo ball or chocolate yellow cake outing.

I’m sort of a sensei in my field now. As I juggle the responsibilities of guiding future therapists, I frequently wish Sensei could still be my mentor. I strive to be a teacher that lives up to the model Sensei set: ethical, educated, sacrificing, and often grumbling, “try again, clear your head, again...” – yet remain humane, humorous, humble, and generous at heart. I remember him every time I sit down to a plate of risotto, and every time I face a daunting task (or a daunting student).

ACLA was his dream, one that contributes greatly to the entire community and touches the lives of so many. Sensei’s legacy in the form of the dojo and its students serves to remind us all of what persistence and heart can achieve.

“When the student grows, the teacher grows.” – Reverend Kensho Furuya

Growing Up (and Aikido) *continued from page 7...*

Sensei’s First Acknowledgement – Over a year had passed since I started Aikido. With a calm demeanor, Sensei commanded respect. I had been practicing through a number of classes and even got yelled at by Sensei for sitting inappropriately in the dojo and gotten some sarcastic comments from him when I wimped out in the middle of practice. I smiled and thought it was funny as I got up even when I was still sucking wind and about to pass out, that I didn’t hold any resentment at all for his comments. The comments felt almost endearing to me and always motivated me to tough it out. If he didn’t care he wouldn’t take the effort to make those comments in the first place, right? One time during practice when Sensei was teaching I happened to be practicing right in front of the chair where he would frequently sit and observe us. Much to my dread, he wandered over and sat down. What a nightmare; any shortcomings in my Aikido skill would be seen by Sensei close up! Adrenaline kicked in and I practiced extra hard. I don’t think I

really did anything better or if that helped but that was when one of my best experiences of Sensei came about. I finished my step with arms extended and glanced over at Sensei, who was sitting three feet away from me, and he looked at me and gave me a slight nod: a slight nod of acknowledgement. I knew that it was an acknowledgement of my dedication and desire to improve on my Aikido.

My first experiences of Sensei led me on a journey of development both physically and mentally. I found myself growing from a hot-headed boy to a level-headed adult who desired self-improvement. I learned from my experiences with Sensei that I should always strive to improve myself on all levels. Too often, people seem to stagnate and resist change even to their own detriment; they have the fear of looking at themselves in the mirror and being honest about what needs improvement. To me, the calmness that I first experienced from Sensei was an aura of confidence of accepting one’s self and acknowledging that one can always be better. Better today than yesterday, better tomorrow than today.



Lemonade

by Steven Shaw, Aikido 2nd Dan, Iaido 3rd Dan

Frankly, I don't remember the first time I met Sensei. I remember the first time I walked into the dojo, the first time I wrote to him via e-mail, the first response I got from him via e-mail, the first time I heard his name like the whispering of some secret password that would unlock a doorway to the rest of my life. I remember the first time he scolded me and the first time I heard his laugh. I will always remember the first time he truly made me feel Aikido. I have written about a number of these in the past because he is such a pivotal person in my life. Thinking about him opens up so much that I can't possibly express.

There is a first that Bill Allen remembers and thinks of fondly. He often retells it to me and I smile, but his memory is different than mine. . . . For me, Aikido is one of the most amazing things I've ever done. I have found myself enjoying life more on the mats of the dojo, or discussing Aikido with others, than I have in many other aspects of my life. I often find myself smiling while training, and what has been related to me by some of my training partners as a "demonic smile" before I attack them is really my way of checking to see if my partner is ready.

One Saturday morning intensive class, Sensei decided to separate the class into two groups. He had received some requests from some of the black belts to have an open "free practice" for the advanced students. I remember them being on their side of the mat, but my concentration was on Sensei, and the lessons he was imparting to the beginners.

"A student may eventually become a black belt and a teacher, but he never ceases to be a student of learning. . ."

– Reverend Kensho Furuya

Ukemi was always something with which I struggled, and still do. Sensei was always saying, "You're too stiff," and my *sempai* were always saying, "Relax," as they pounded me into the mat. I still work on relaxing. At the point in this story I had only seen Ken Watanabe, Mark Ty, or Mike Van Ruth take Sensei's *ukemi*. It seemed a foregone conclusion when class began that it would be the *uke* that could best help Sensei show the technique cleanly. There were many occasions when Sensei would have one *uke* and when the *uke*'s movements weren't what he wanted, he would dismiss that person and call on another. This wasn't because Sensei couldn't make it work; it was because Sensei had a very specific progression of movements he was trying to develop. If he altered the movement, it would alter his learners' development. Sensei always knew exactly what, how, and why he was going to teach a technique. As Sensei looked down the line of beginners his face puckered as if he had just gotten something really sour in his mouth. I could see him trying to figure out who to use. It was as though he reluctantly looked at each one of us, thinking *I can't use him, he's terrible*, but that is probably only my projection. He chose me. I couldn't stop smiling. When I bowed, when I attacked *shomenuchi*, during the technique, I had this huge grin on my face, and during *irimi nage*, Sensei turned his hand over and with just the flick of his wrist he slapped my face. The slap wasn't hard, nor did it hurt, but it the shock of it sent me straight to the ground as my balance was completely lost. I got up smiling because the experience was incredible. I had never before known that sudden loss of balance. I was amazed with Sensei's ability to alter a person's center just slightly in a way that could send him straight to the ground. I was awestruck. In that awe I stood there smiling, a huge toothy grin that elicited a "Why are you smiling?" from Sensei. In my awe I could only smile. The same hand that had sent me to the ground, again found its way to my face. I was then able to shake myself out of awe and get back to training.

Bill Allen tells it differently, of course. He always says, "You remember that day Sensei slapped you? You just stood there. It was hilarious!" For me it felt like so much more. It was the first time I understood *atemi* and how integral it is in creating openings, controlling the timing, and even shocking someone to his core in a way that would render him harmless. It was redefining. It was an epiphany. It was Aikido.



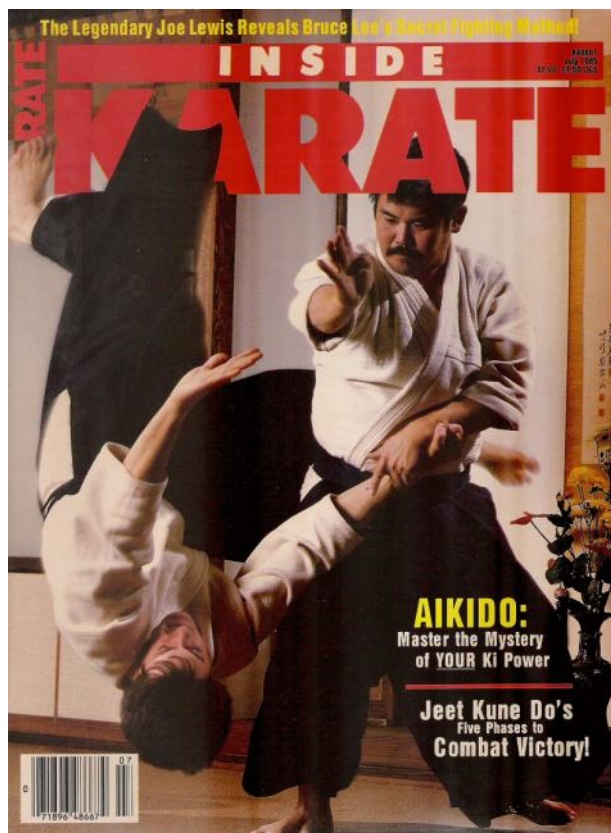
First Time . . . Last Time

by Heraldo Farrington, Aikido 3rd Dan
Aikido of Hilo, Hilo, Hawai'i

I knew Sensei for only a short time. I had maybe two-and-a-half years of communications with him via e-mail, during which I followed and participated in his daily Internet posts. And I visited ACLA just once, training for three days and enjoying two wonderful late-night dinners with him, one-on-one, and then sharing a farewell lunch with everyone after a Saturday morning class. Despite this remarkably short period of contact, Sensei managed to awaken in me the desire, as well as the drive, to change and extend – to hone – my Budo practice by *becoming aware* . . . on the mat, of course, but perhaps more importantly, off the mat as well – quite literally during every waking moment.

Everything changes, everything ends, and we each will pass from this life. When I first read the e-mail notification of Sensei's passing, it was late in the evening, and I was all alone in a large house located in a rural neighborhood at 4000 feet on the summit of an active volcano on the Big Island of Hawai'i. I remember feeling a great shock, and then a great sadness . . . but strangely, I did not feel a great isolation. I recall heading out to my meditation spot and sitting *zazen*, sometime after midnight, and I couldn't escape the feeling that while Sensei had just left my life – not to mention the lives of all of his students – in some strange way, he had also just entered it. It is not easy to explain, but somehow, I suddenly understood the deeper meaning of *ichi-go, ichi-e*, and this last lesson still teaches me, every day.

Thank you, Sensei – *Aloha pumehana!*



A Changed Mind

by William D'Angelo III, Esq., Aikido Nidan



Sensei with his Zen master
Bishop Kenko Yamashita

I can make only one person happy a day. Today is not your day. Tomorrow does not look good, either. Please be patient and just practice. For years Sensei had a sheet of paper with this ironic quote on it tacked to the dojo bulletin board by the entrance – challenging us to see Aikido and our own development as continual and unending, rather than some static and reachable, destination. I remember seeing it every time I walked in and every time I left the dojo, but didn't give it much thought until one day about 11 years ago.

I was going through a serious personal crisis – one I didn't feel comfortable discussing with my parents or friends. I distinctly remember one sunny but miserable afternoon calling Sensei from my house. Just as soon as I began to describe the purpose of my call, Sensei immediately cut me off. He said, "No. I am not going to discuss this. I am not a therapist or a psychiatrist, I am an Aikido teacher." His apparent lack of sympathy and coldness felt more than harsh. I was in real pain and sought comfort.

There was an awkward silence and it seemed like he was thinking and I was fuming. Suddenly he blurted out, "Read Dogen's *Shobogenzo Zuimonki*," (One of the books written by the founder of Japanese Soto Zen, the sect of Buddhism of which Sensei was a priest. The book is a compilation of *dharma* talks given by Dogen. At the time, I had never heard of it.) "and come to the dojo and practice." He said nothing else and hung up.

Realizing that it was not in fact Sensei's job to be my doctor, I found a good psychiatrist. I read and re-read *Shobogenzo* trying to understand Sensei's hint. I went to practice, trying to attend whether I felt well or badly – just doing my best to be there. Just like Sensei urged on that sign by the dojo entrance.

Although it may not have appeared to have done so at the time, Sensei's reaction and teaching changed my life for the better just as much as my medical treatment did – because he challenged me to change my mind.

Every Moment*by Maria Murakawa, Aikido 2nd Dan*

I was a sophomore in college when I discovered ACLA. After a Zen retreat I did at my uncle's dojo in Japan the year before, I was reading a book which mentioned Aikido, and, always interested in practicing a martial art, I decided – without ever seeing Aikido – that I should practice this art.

Sensei's dojo was the first entry in the phone book, and looking back, I was lucky that it was there that I met Aikido for the first time. Watching practice, I fell in love with the movement of Aikido and knew immediately that this was what I wanted to do. I was also attracted to the traditional atmosphere of the dojo, as I was also interested at that time in reconnecting to my Japanese roots. The etiquette in the dojo, the discipline of practice, and the structure itself all hearkened back to the old Japanese way I had caught a glimpse of while at *se shin* in my uncle's dojo. During the hectic years of school pulling all-nighters and making deadlines, I longed to find a different sort of meaning in my life, something that would open up another dimension to me besides the superficial world I had come to know. Sensei became that bridge between this world and the world of the past, the world I had come from but being *nisei*, one that had also become strange to me.

Sensei taught me the value of living in the moment. In class, every moment mattered: it sometimes literally felt like life or death hung in the balance of my attention and intention. I wanted to live my life in this intense way, or

at least strive to do so. Trying to catch his movement, trying to absorb his teaching, and then pushing beyond what I thought was physically possible on the mat became my way of being.

Looking back now, I think Sensei intended to serve as the means to his peculiar end: as a reminder to all of us to wake up, as a mirror reflecting the harsh realities of ourselves to us, and then finally as an inspiration to us to be the best we can possibly be, even if we improved just a tiny bit more. That small amount of improvement, and sometimes the promise of a breakthrough, kept me going. Actually, the harder the practice was and the more frustrating and painful I found it, the more I wanted to learn. I think Sensei brought that out in his students: this willingness to push beyond boundaries. And if we didn't understand something he taught, there was always tomorrow, when we would be on the mat again, ready to practice, ready to train and try to better ourselves under his watchful eye.

Then, when Sensei passed away, I think that was the biggest lesson I learned. I realized there would be no more tomorrows as his student, and with a mix of regret and sadness I wished I had paid more attention, had absorbed more of what he had to offer. Today his memory is slowly fading in my mind and I may have forgotten some things he said or did, but one thing I will never forget is the influence he has had over my life during those early years of training, and the way he has inspired me to keep crossing that bridge and to keep up my practice.

**Untitled**

Old, Lonely Teacher:

My eyes grow faint,

My words grow weak,

Students grow so far away,

Who will hold my hand when I am old?

Rest it there, they say,

On this old, cold stone

Of those long gone.

Waiting for God another day.

Editor's note: Sensei posted this poem to Aikiweb's Aikido Haiku forum on 10/14/2003.



Sensei demonstrating at the first annual Nisei week Aikido demonstration, 1979

Always On*by Eric Russell, Aikido 3rd Dan*

I remember the first time I said a Japanese word without proper Japanese pronunciation when speaking to Sensei. I remember it so vividly: I was fresh back from working in Japan for the summer and my Japanese was flowing *pera-pera*, so Sensei struck up a conversation with me on his way down the stairs from his office after practice one day.

I said the word *samurai* in such an English way that Sensei stopped in his tracks and gave me a look. I then remember him scolding me for mispronouncing this word, me of all people he said, and that I should know better.

Boy did he give me a scolding, and in front of many of the senior students, and boy did he have fun with it, but looking back at it I think there was a deeper meaning – at the same time he knew I could do better. I wasn't giving it my all and Sensei called me out on it.

Of course, this treatment was not exclusive to the stairway or pronunciation of Japanese words, but Sensei did this often on the mat, on the way to dinner, and just about anywhere. He knew our full potential and if we weren't in the present mind and performing at our best, he knew it right away. He was always on his game, so we had to be as well.

Sensei's Lighter Side

by Ken Watanabe, Aikido 5th Dan, Iaido 5th Dan

Training under Sensei could be very intimidating. When I started training at ACLA, he was not even 40 yet, and I remember feeling so sorry for some of people he called up to take his *ukemi*; they used to get absolutely trashed! I remember squeamishly thinking, "Ouch! I'm glad I'm not him. . . ."

Sensei, like any good teacher, also had a presence about him. When he walked down the stairs to teach class, you could feel everyone "wake up" just a little more than usual. He was that kind of person, and training was always in a no-nonsense type of atmosphere.

A few weeks after I started training at the dojo, I was going home after practice and I saw him standing, along with an assistant instructor, down by the entrance. Sensei was there to say good-bye to all of the students and was also giving out cookies he had baked earlier (Sensei also happened to be a very good cook.).



Sensei playfully explaining how a tsuitate is used to a group of elementary school children visiting the dojo

I, out of courtesy (and a little bit of fear), took a cookie. I forget what kind they were, but I remember it was good. Then, the assistant instructor asked Sensei what he put into the cookies, and I forget what he said exactly but his answer was, "A little flour, some sugar, and something from the ground in front of the dojo," which implied that one of his two dogs had made a "contribution" to the recipe. Then, he began giggling at his own joke.

When a lot of people think of Sensei, they usually think of all the information crammed into his brain, or the very hard physical and mental training. Some of us also remember being lectured or reprimanded by him, but I think a lot of people overlook the fact that Sensei had a very good sense of humor that ranged from outright silly to biting caustic, depending on the situation.

That day, after practice, was the first time I experienced Sensei's sense of humor, and the first time I heard him laugh. And in my naivety, I remember thinking, "He's not so mean, after all!"

A Series of Firsts

by Paul Major, Aikido Shodan, Iaido Shodan

Meeting Sensei for the first time was a curious experience for me. During the years I knew him he was a rotund man, and I must admit my first impression was a bit incredulous when I first saw him lumber down the stairs of the original dojo. However, at the same time, I distinctly remember feeling that he had a quiet confidence, and when I first saw him execute a technique I was both flummoxed and ashamed of my previous judgment.

Having joined ACLA and, cognizant of the dedicated atmosphere and having observed the behavior of the students, I knew not to be overly eager in gaining Sensei's attention. In keeping with perhaps a more traditional style between teacher and student, I assumed that there would be an automatic distance between us.

Gradually Sensei became more verbal towards me, and discernible in his attention to me as a student. One night, after many training sessions of his corrections (and his accompanying sighs of frustration), I was leaving the changing room when Sensei remarked off-handedly from his office, "Oh Paul, you should come to dinner sometime."

One or two nights later, after class, I found myself and two other students traveling to one of Sensei's favorite Chinese restaurants. I had no idea what to expect. I thought at first that, perhaps, the evening would be fully casual and I'd see a distinctly different side of Sensei.

Immediately after class there was an extra rush to get dressed and get ready, and the student driving had to have his car out and ready to pick the rest of us up immediately. Sensei, of course, entered the car before us, and we held the door for him whenever we could get to it first. Menus had to be passed out to everyone, waters for everyone, and Sensei had particular (and good) taste in food of which we had to be aware.

At first I assumed the evening would seem rather rigid, but by the end of that first dinner I came to think that perhaps this was the sort of etiquette I should offer anyone important to me. How many times had I hopped out of a car without regard to those with me, or walked through a door without concern about whether it smacked anyone else behind me as it closed? Although there was a protocol to the evening that took a moment to get used to, the challenge of thinking for the needs of others before my own was a vivid reminder of the lessons of my parents and other teachers. And, though Sensei was still very much Sensei, my first dinner out with him was also really my first exposure to his endearing laugh, sharp wit, and unpretentious humor.

Meeting Sensei and beginning my fleeting journey with him was, in hindsight, a sort of wake-up call to the many values that had begun to blur in my early adulthood. As the years (has it been years?) have passed, I've come to see each "first" I experienced with Sensei as a sort of learning experience that, intentionally or not, opened my eyes to try to see what's really before me.

Discovering Sensei

by Kevin Hoffer, *Aikido Ikkyu*

The very first time I met Sensei was after a talk he had given, as he did every year for Nisei Week, on *tsuba*, or the hand guard on certain Japanese swords. I had heard about ACLA while studying in West Los Angeles because my teacher at the time was leaving L.A. and he wanted to know where we planned to continue training. But even though I later moved downtown, I hesitated. I did not even visit the dojo for at least a year. A year after that, I was lamenting to a group of people that I had abandoned my Aikido training. I was reminded of the dojo by a friend I knew from elsewhere, Lucas, who had been practicing there. A few months later, I was in Little Tokyo one weekend, it happened to be the Nisei celebrations, and saw the poster detailing times for demonstrations by the dojo and talks given by Sensei. The only talk left was on *tsuba*. I really did not know what could possibly be so interesting about the hand guard of a sword, but at the same time recognized there must be depth to the study of martial arts that went way beyond my experiences and understanding.

I found the dojo to be exactly as foreign to me as I had hoped. It was sacred; that much I knew right away. I sat close to Sensei so

I could see, but not so close as to seem too eager. Sensei gave, of course, an excellent presentation of a tiny bit of his knowledge. It was clear he had studied aspects of Japanese culture, his own heritage, and martial arts in general well beyond most human beings. He was also very funny; his sense of comedic timing was perfect. He was also very humble and I started to think ACLA was where I should have been training all along. Afterwards, I approached Sensei, afraid to offend his sensibilities but secretly hoping he would recognize some deep talent in me and draw me into training. I said I had hopes of training again because I missed Aikido, told him who I had studied with (I found out later it was one of his former students), and he said I should visit a class and perhaps start training there. My response, for reasons I still do not understand, was to offer up all the excuses for why I had not, and how I had planned on training there before but did not, and that I wasn't sure if I could afford it. As far as I can tell, I was trying to manipulate him into convincing me to study there, like some kind of car salesman trying to get me to buy a car as I walk out the door. But Sensei simply waved his hand at me, "Fine, well you probably won't study here anyway, so forget it," and he packed up his things while I bowed, said *thank you*, and wandered away not knowing what to say for the first time in a long time.

Practicing at ACLA: Then and Now

by Mohammed Anwar, *Aikido Ikkyu*

On a Saturday morning in the summer of 2009, a little over two years after passing of ACLA's founder, Ito Sensei taught an open class outlining the proper ways to ease first-time students into practice. It was both insightful in details to consider when working with new students and indicative of how the dojo has evolved. "The old way . . ." Ito Sensei began one of his points, and the words that followed brought me back to the very strict era when I began Aikido. This era I could not imply was wrong considering the level of the man who lead it, but I can safely say it was a path which took more courage to follow than I ever dreamed.

"Culture shock" would be the best term to describe my first experiences with ACLA and with Sensei, despite having a little knowledge of Japanese culture when I started. In 2002, as a birthday present to myself, I began seeking out places to learn Aikido and found my way to the dojo. Although I considered myself mousey, fragile, and the type who got picked last in gym class, I had just made what felt like substantial growth in another martial art and felt up to this new experience.

Surveying a pocket of downtown L.A. that seemed an unlikely combination of quiet and rough, I found that uncharacteristic spot in the middle of the alleyway. Blocks after it seemed like Little Tokyo had ended, it began all over again, tucked away in a humble, well-cared for space. A narrow walkway snaked through a leafy garden and lead to the very Japanese dojo. After observing a couple of classes and thinking it over I joined. Everything seemed easy enough to understand so far. So, then I started practicing Aikido.

Before I began Aikido I had gotten promoted in another martial

art in college, which would return me twofold the culture shock. What seemed like a large transition physically, going from pure skin and bones to somebody who could at least take a fall some of the time, was now insignificant compared to the challenges I had to face in Aikido, and the more casual environments in which I studied other martial arts had not prepared me for the strict etiquette I now had to follow. *We have to clean the dojo every day?* I had my work cut out for me.

I always knew there would be challenges in martial arts, but those early days felt intimidating, even at times overwhelming. I felt like senior students constantly lurked nearby just waiting to correct me, and so I grew jumpy and tense trying to follow both the etiquette and the technique. During practice as I attempted the complex somatic steps of the techniques the instructors seemed to get on my case for every single flaw, grilling me over one thing or another. These same people also happened to be at the dojo every day I wanted to practice, so there seemed no escape. I grew very discouraged and spent my first several months locked in internal conflict as to whether I should continue or not. I planned to quit many times, but in the end, I really wanted to learn Aikido.

Yet there was so much ground to cover; Aikido is a long journey. The senior students, who could have practiced with their advanced counterparts, instead focused on me, someone new enough to have a long way to go and frail enough to be a danger to himself. I have no doubt I got some of them in trouble I don't even know about due to the particular challenge I posed. All the while, Sensei towered over both neophyte and senior alike in skill, something I would discover over time.

Continued on page 23...



“We emphasize practice not only because it is the only way to improve and develop one’s self, it is the only way all secrets are revealed.”

– Reverend Kensho Furuya

Practicing at ACLA: Then and Now *continued from page 22...*

Although I had begun reading the “Words From Sensei” posts on the ACLA website after I joined, I did not actually meet Sensei until perhaps a week or two into my training. I found it peculiar that he seemed so elusive (often we only heard him summoning another student up to his office), but in time I’d figure it out. I’d come to dread the sound of his footsteps descending the stairs at the beginning of a class because his very presence ramped up the intensity of our training. Black belts who overwhelmed me in other classes flew through the air and scrambled to keep up when Sensei taught. Senior instructors whose skill I admired and could only aspire to attain were “Mr. Lazy Back-Foot” to him. Often, Sensei would abscond from class, exasperated; the students of satisfactory skill to him were in the minority.

Outside of practice Sensei was friendly enough, but he grew extremely serious whenever the topic of discussion touched on one of his passions. The pattern only came together for me in hindsight however, and so at the time I often found him frightening and unpredictable; I think even a lot of the people who really knew him found him a little intimidating. Despite Sensei having a lot of philosophical thoughts and spiritual or historical insights to share, during class he kept practice purely concrete. Talk was minimal, and practice was only for honing technique.

Sometimes Sensei seemed amused by our blunders and sometimes he looked really frustrated. He didn’t make a lot of room for praise because he focused on how far we had to go to attain proper technique. However, it was this characteristic of Sensei’s that defined (perhaps crowned) my most memorable moment both in practice, and with Sensei. One fast-paced evening I was doing a technique with a senior student who was strong and skilled and big, and, lagging in all these areas, I struggled to force the movement against my partner’s strength and firmly rooted balance, with results that were futile and exhausting, with one alarming exception. A one-in-a-million circumstance occurred and, as I entered the technique without feeling any of my partner’s strength impeding me, he buckled under my effortless movement. Sensei pointed at me and excitedly exclaimed, “Yes! That was good!” and I could not believe it. Unfortunately, to this day, let alone during that class years ago when I captured Sensei’s attention, I have never been able to recreate the almost otherworldly fluke

that proved to me Aikido’s potential beyond a shadow of a doubt. In so many other classes taught by Sensei I could only disappoint him. To think that the era of practice before I joined, the one my seniors endured before me, was even more strict and challenging; I probably could not have stayed if my practice was like theirs.

That lonely thought leads me to this one. Sensei seemed lonely — nobody seemed quite as passionate about Aikido or the sword as he was, and this gap created a number of problems that would keep him from seeing eye-to-eye with very many people. Because he harbored that much more enthusiasm than anyone else, he had reached a level far above most others and this left him surrounded by people who, while they could benefit from his development, could not offer Sensei the same courtesy. This discrepancy would only compound the problem that his enthusiasm could scare away those who weren’t quite as dedicated, everyday people just not that into the Way. Where Sensei had immersed himself in the art as the founder of ACLA, his students had school, work, and other affairs to juggle alongside their training, which meant there was just no way any of us had as much time and attention for training as our teacher did.

Fast forward back to that class in 2009 again: Ito Sensei spoke about the way things used to be, and the familiar thoughts of first-time students attempting Aikido brought to my mind an intriguing contrast over the years. Students coming and going is not an uncommon thing; it is only through the hands-on experience that these students will understand the commitment required, let alone all the other factors that a beginner may consider. But how many of them get scared away by the difficulty? The stiff, choppy movement of the new student exerting his strength is ages away from the graceful control over motion that the veteran wields, and many who begin may not understand just what they are trying to grasp or what they would be experiencing were they to receive the true form of the technique being performed, leading to the open question among martial artists of all stripes as to whether Aikido “works” or not. Combine that with the pressure (or desire) to take in a lot of information at once, and we begin to see the downside to being too hard on newcomers taking their first steps upon the Way our teacher loved.

Aikido TRAINING SCHEDULE

Sundays

9:00-10:00 AM Children's Class
10:15-11:15 AM Open

Mondays

5:15-6:15 PM Fundamentals
6:30-7:30 PM Open

Tuesdays

6:30-7:30 PM Open

Wednesdays

5:15-6:15 PM Fundamentals
6:30-7:30 PM Open
7:45-8:45 PM Weapons*

Thursdays

6:30-7:30 PM Bokken

Fridays

6:30-7:30 PM Open

Saturdays

9:30-10:30 AM Open
10:45-11:45 AM Weapons*

6:30 AM Instructor's Intensive: last Saturday of the month
by invitation only.*

* These classes are not open for visitors to watch.

We are directly affiliated with:

AIKIDO WORLD HEADQUARTERS

Aikido Hombu Dojo - Aikikai

17-18 Wakamatsu-cho, Shinjuku-ku, Tokyo, JAPAN

We are committed to the study and practice of the teachings of the Founder of Aikido, Morihei Ueshiba and his legitimate successors, Kisshomaru Ueshiba and the present Doshu Moriteru Ueshiba.

The Furuya Foundation and the Aikido Center of Los Angeles admit students of any race, color, and national or ethnic origin to all the rights, privileges, programs, and activities generally accorded or made available to students at the school. The Furuya Foundation and the Aikido Center of Los Angeles do not discriminate on the basis of race, color, and national or ethnic origin in administration of their educational policies, admissions policies, scholarship and loan programs, and athletic and other school-administered programs.



Iaido TRAINING SCHEDULE

TRADITIONAL JAPANESE IAIDO SWORDSMANSHIP

Saturdays

7:15-8:15 AM Beginning
8:15-9:15 AM Intermediate/Advanced

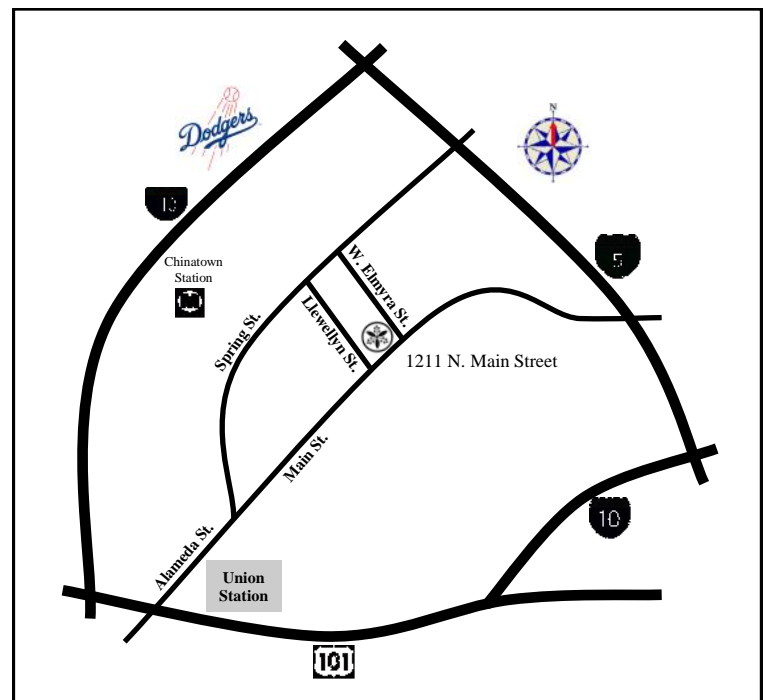
Sundays

7:45-8:45 AM

Thursdays

6:30-7:30 PM (Bokken Practice)
7:30-8:30 PM

No classes on the last weekend of the month.



Finding Our Dojo

We are located at

1211 N. Main Street

Los Angeles, CA 90012

Telephone: (323) 225-1424

E-mail: info@aikidocenterla.com

We are across the street and one block northwest from
the Chinatown Metro Station.

The entrance is on Elmyra Street.

No appointment necessary to watch classes or join:
You are welcome to visit us any time during any of our Open or Fundamentals classes. Please come early.