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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

Direct Affiliation: Aikido World Headquarters, 17-18 Wakamatsu-cho, Shinjuku-ku, Tokyo, Japan  
Los Angeles Sword and Swordsmanship Society Kenshinkai  
The Furuya Foundation

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### Sennichi no kingaku yori ichi nichi no meisho

*Better than a thousand days of diligent  
study is one day with a great teacher.*  
– Japanese Proverb



### Reverend Kensho Furuya

April 25, 1948 – March 6, 2007

#### Letter From the Editor

by Mark Ehrlich

Editor, The Aiki Dojo

The first months of 2010 have raced by, and we've arrived at the third anniversary of the death of Reverend Kensho Furuya Sensei, the founder of ACLA and this newsletter. He suffered a sudden heart attack while chatting with his students on the mat after practice on the evening of March 6, 2007. He died later that night at LAC+USC Medical Center, six weeks before his 59th birthday.

In the three years since that fateful day, I feel grateful that I can say the dojo has continued and even prospered. The first year seemed the hardest, as we who studied under Sensei and never knew dojo life without him struggled to find our own way. In doing so, we made some mistakes as well as some useful discoveries; we lost some students and found some others; we mourned and we moved to a temporary space not half a block away from Sensei's beloved dojo while builders prepared a new one for us. 2008 saw us settle into our new dojo and witnessed a shift in the way we do things at the leadership level, as our senior students took their first steps past modeling what they knew under Sensei's aegis, and began to reach a deeper understanding of what

he tried to teach off the mat as well as on it. Last year we weathered an economic crisis that touched almost all of our members, but we've emerged this year on decent financial footing, with a student body that shows a healthy mix of newer, developing, and senior students, and a leadership team that grows increasingly confident in its ability to lead us into the future with a solid grounding in the principles and teachings of that most remarkable person who made all of this possible in the first place. We are still standing, and we stand together.

I share this history with you not to gloat or tout ACLA, but to illuminate those readers who never knew Sensei or trained under him, or who come to this letter not having experienced directly the shifts that took place before today. We've taken great pains to ensure that everything looks much as it always did at Second and Vignes Streets, but believe me, the effort needed to keep things looking serene and calm has at times seemed barely tolerable. It stands as a testament to Sensei's commitment and singular ability that he did for years, all alone, what it takes a team of six nowadays to do to keep the doors open, the lights on, and the newsletter reaching you.

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Yet I think it stands as an even greater testament to ACLA's students that, despite our limitations, we nonetheless try time and again to do our best, to honor Sensei's legacy by teaching what he taught, by learning the way he would have us learn, by training as regularly as we can, and by helping each other along so that the group flourishes. I want to extend a heartfelt thank you to all of ACLA's students and friends for all you do. Each of you makes us strong, and your efforts give us the hope and heart to continue.

In this issue, many students and others who knew Sensei celebrate his life, recalling memorable episodes together, or lessons learned, or exploring some aspect of their relationship to him and how it still impacts them today. We've included letters from kind readers who only recently learned of Sensei's passing, and from those who still marvel at his book *Kodo: Ancient Ways* and share it with everyone they can. I believe Sensei would find this outpouring of affection and nostalgia pleasing, but that he'd still admonish us to keep our proper focus on training. For those of you who train with us, stay with it! For those who've wandered off for whatever reason, our doors are al-

ways open, and we welcome you to come back as best you can. Sensei never seemed happier than when we had a crowded mat.

I have so much feeling welling up in me as I remember my teacher, the times I had together with him and the times I've had since he departed, but no more words. So I think it best to let Sensei have the last word; he liked to get it anyway! The following excerpt originally appeared in the January 1992 newsletter (vol. 8, no. 1) as an insert, a special note from Sensei to his students. I take it to embody a kind of mission statement that Sensei intended to give his dojo, and I think its message bears repeating. I hope it inspires all of us to continue forward, come what may.

\* \* \*

*I am always grateful to see so many people practicing hard in the dojo and enjoying themselves and really coming to understand Aikido as a martial art and as a way of life.*

*In this fast-paced world of changing values and attitudes, it is difficult, but so important, to preserve the original form of Aikido and what it has to teach us. It is of vital importance to understand O Sensei's teachings within ourselves and pass this gift on to others. I firmly believe that we can only*

*make progress as those around us make progress. You only advance as you help your practice partner and those around you to advance.*

*We are each individuals with our own wants and needs, yet, we are so intricately co-dependent on those around us. It is within this contradiction that we can begin to understand the meaning of harmony and peace. Our training guides us to transcend the world of "you" and "me", "I like" or "I don't like", "yes" and "no." Peace is never a form of discrimination, accepting this and rejecting that according to our own folly.*

*There is an old saying among the samurai warriors of long ago: "Cry in the dojo and laugh on the battlefield." This means that our own self-discipline may be harsh and demanding but when we enter the battlefield or venture out into the world, we should always smile and take it lightly. If we make the mistake of becoming too self-indulgent in our training, we will assuredly be disappointed in the outside world. Please continue to practice hard and support our wonderful dojo.*

— Reverend Kensho Furuya

## Glimpses of Sensei

by Frances Yokota, Aikido 3rd Kyu



Nearly 20 years ago I first met the late Reverend Kensho Furuya Sensei. Walking toward the dojo, I entered the old railroad warehouse alley that would soon lead me to the Aikido Center of Los Angeles. As I approached the dojo landing, a short wooden staircase played entrance to something so out-of-place, yet something that just belonged. An aged wooden fence hid a secret Japanese garden which was still moist from a recent watering. As I entered the dojo, it was like walking through a portal that swept me back into ancient Japan. Students in their white keikogis were stretching on the tatami

mats. Others in black hakamas greeted me and let me sit and watch the class that was just about to begin. As I sat on a folded blue mat set against the wood paneled wall, a middle-aged stout man, also in hakama, began descending the long wooden staircase. It was Sensei.

As he taught each class thereafter, everything he said was clear, simple, and certain. He would teach with candor, humor, and wisdom. We, his students, treated him with the utmost respect. We moved at every order he gave, and tried to follow every correction he made. On a personal level, I had the opportunity to have Sensei over for family dinners. He was always humbled by any invitation, and truly appreciated such occasions. We felt honored that he would actually want to spend holidays with us.

Today, nearly three years after Sensei's passing, I still feel humbled that I had the opportunity to have been taught by him, and also to have known him. His teaching continues through his students, and not just through movements and techniques, but also with his principles and beliefs. Thank you Sensei.

## Sensei's Lessons

by Dr. Helen Hsu, Psy.D.

One hallmark of a true teacher is that as time passes, the student continues to gain understanding of past lessons. In this way, I feel that Sensei is still among us. His teachings, both the deliberate ones drilled repeatedly, and the inadvertent ones he modeled, continue forward. I am sure we all hear in our heads his admonitions for us to be more patient, to strive for quality, to practice more. In our hearts we hear the reminders to find joy in the present, with a loyal Akita, a corny martial arts movie, in the craftsmanship of an antique, or more frequently: over a delicious meal shared with like-minded souls.

In the United States, we seem culturally compelled to strive for happiness all the time. Mindless distractions abound, and it's a social faux pas to bring up "depressing" topics. Yet life in its round fullness blends all conditions and emotions. As a psychotherapist, it's my job and privilege to sit with people in pain, often in grief. Although it can be difficult, these glimpses into the harder parts of the human condition allow one to live the highs more fully. I often hear terrible and sad things, but I also witness a precious depth of human resiliency, compassion, and love.

To know love and devotion is eventually to face a parting. This is the natural way of things. I advise clients that a "successful" process of grief is when one can move from intense mourning to a more balanced place. I don't believe we ever stop missing a person. But we can attain a place of acceptance where we can enjoy the memories without an acute sense of loss.

Sensei knew plenty about sacrificing for his art and passions. He modeled diligence to his formal students. I'm not sure he was aware that he modeled humanity for us informal students as well. I will always admire Sensei for his accomplishments in the mar-

tial arts world, for building this beautiful dojo and community. But I remain grateful to Sensei for his well-rounded human heart. His deep loyalty to his parents, students, friends, and community are a lesson I still study.



Master Hsu, Dr. Hsu, and Sensei



Two friends

*“There is nothing worse than a bad teacher. But all good teachers admit that they are bad teachers.”*

*– Reverend Kensho Furuya*

### A Memorable Dinner With Sensei

by Gary Myers, Iaido Chief Instructor



By now, it's been fairly well documented that Sensei liked to dine out. He looked forward to dinners no matter if he was the host or was

treated. I have remarked many times that my dining experiences with Sensei were always enjoyable. It was a time when he could relax and enjoy the food and conversation without having to be sensei with a larger group of students. For those of us who experienced those moments with him, they are some of our most cherished.

Sensei always liked trying out new restaurants. If there was a new restaurant that I thought he might like, my wife Sami and I would take Sensei to check it out. Of course, traveling to the restaurant was sometimes interesting, because Sensei was, to put it diplomatically, a nervous passenger. He did not like to travel on freeways, due to an accident that had claimed the life of a relative. But sometimes I would have to use one because it was the quickest and most direct route. In those cases we would always try to keep his attention on the conservation and not on the road. Sensei was a better destination person than he was a traveler.

Without a doubt the most memorable dinner we had together wasn't in California, it was in Japan. Sensei and I went to Japan in 1992 specifically to help me set up my future business contacts. As I mentioned before, Sensei is not what you would call an easy traveling companion. The first part of our trip was arranged through a person who at the time had a relationship with the dojo. Let's just say that part of the trip was a disaster. The hotel he booked us was pretty seedy, as were the restaurants where he took us to eat. I was suffering from the flu, which didn't help matters. After we threatened to go to a better hotel down the street our "arranger" decided to "put us up" in his spare apartment. The accommodations and the part of town were marginally better. The first part of the trip aimed to establish antique-buying relationships in Tokyo, surrounding communities, and Kamakura. The second part of the trip was to go to Kyoto to do the same there. Once Sensei and I got on the Shinkansen to Kyoto our moods improved.

It was the first time Sensei had been to Kyoto, so it was my pleasure to show him points of interest, restaurants, and shops that I had experienced before in prior trips. Hiruki-san, a friend and coworker of Sensei's from Zenshuji, met us at the train station. From there we went to Sosen-ji Temple to meet with Mrs. Hosokawa, Hiruki's mother and manager of the temple. Mrs. Hosokawa was such a gracious host; we toured the temple and later we checked into rooms that had been reserved for us at the Royal Hotel. That evening she

arranged for the four of us to dine at one of Kyoto's famous *kaiseki ryori* restaurants, located in the Gion section of the city.

The path leading to the restaurant was through a teahouse garden and was designed like the path to a tea hut, with wetted stepping-stones lit by low lanterns. After removing our shoes at the doorway we were escorted to a private tatami room. The room was sparsely decorated with a low table, and a window with a snow-viewing sliding shoji panel. A tasteful scroll and flower arrangement adorned the small tokonoma. The surroundings could have not been more perfect. Our kaiseki meal consisted of about seven courses, each course using the vegetables of the season artfully displayed on exquisite pieces of ceramics. One course stands out because the vegetables and the dish had little beads of water sprinkled on them, which both recreated the dew and emphasized their freshness.

It was particularly challenging for the restaurant to prepare these foods in a timely manner because none of us were drinking sake. (Typically sake is served and enjoyed between each course, which provides preparation time and facilitates the timely delivery of each course.) It was an evening of great conversation and wonderful food; Sensei and I profusely thanked Mrs. Hosokawa for such a wonderful dining experience. For years after, Sensei and I would fondly relive that evening.



*Sensei with boxer Sugar Ray Leonard and Tae Kwon Do Master Jun Chong*



*Sensei with Sifu Richard Bustillo*



*Sensei with Karita Naoji Sensei*

臨 兵 鬪 者 皆 陣 烈 在 前  
 Rin Byo To Sha Kai Jin Retsu Zai Zen  
*The bravest warriors surpass all others at the front of the battle line.*

### Stealing and Giving

by Matt Seki, Aikido 4th Kyu

Several years ago, a friend of mine told me he was studying Iaido. Iaido was a martial art that I was interested in studying since I was at least eight years old. Although I did not know who Sensei was, upon my first step into the dojo, I realized I was in the presence of a great man. The dojo was an incredible space unlike anything I had ever seen. The attention to detail and design was amazing. Just being accepted to a school with such an environment excited me and when I finally had a chance to meet Sensei his character far exceeded my already high expectations.

In every sense, Sensei exuded the unmistakable presence of a man devoted to a martial arts tradition. The more I got to know him, the more depth and complexity he revealed. He had the best sense of humor and was known to crack jokes at any time. In spite of this, during training there was always a high degree of urgency and he stressed the importance of keeping the techniques' integrity. Sensei did not instruct every class, but when he did the class would buzz with a sense of anticipation and

excitement. He would help train our bodies, but more importantly he would help train our minds. He would often quote the masters of old in order to illustrate a lesson or prepare our minds to learn. One of my favorites was, "If you want to learn anything, you'll have to take it from me." I use this as a reminder that while learning I should be attentive to examples and corrections. It also illustrates that ultimately, any lesson is fully realized only when the student takes responsibility for understanding it himself.

Another important trait of Sensei's teaching style was his ability to bring out the most of every student. A doctor of Chinese medicine once explained to me that one of the fundamental differences in Eastern and Western treatment was that Western medicine often looks for a pill while traditional Eastern medicine looks for a means to strengthen one's body's own, inherent self-healing process. In an analogous manner Sensei had the ability to help us bring out the best in ourselves. He was concerned about fixing the superficial problems of technique, but even more concerned with teaching us how to correct and want to improve ourselves. I vividly remember him

remarking to the class, "The problem with you people is that you don't even realize what you are capable of, and that I have higher expectations of you than you do of yourselves! Why is that?"

Three years have gone by now since Sensei passed away and to many of us it feels like it was just the other day. I can still hear his voice every day, like a friendly reminder that chimes in periodically, always of course with perfect comedic timing. Although we miss him in many ways, I feel that those of us who had the opportunity to train and learn from him have been truly blessed to experience martial arts from one of the greatest teachers of our time. For those who did not have this opportunity, they may rest assured that they are learning the same traditions in the same fashion as Sensei once taught. His legacy runs strongly through his students. Like many of those before him, Sensei often spoke of the fact that after his generation's passing the true essence of martial arts would be lost. I like to hope that through his students' diligent training and teaching of tradition, we may parry this thrust of inevitable decline, if only even for one more generation.

### My Memories of Sensei

by Alvaro Rodolfo Hernández Meza  
 Co-Chief Instructor, Veracruz Aikikai

It's been six years since I first met Sensei, when I attended my first O'Sensei memorial seminar as a dojo affiliated to ACLA through the efforts of my friend Magallanes Sensei, who had had the opportunity to meet Sensei on an earlier visit to California and, being impressed by what he saw, asked Sensei to give us the honor of being his students, since we sought an organization that was truly guided by the principles of Aikido and where there was a feeling of brotherhood among its members, mutual support for the common good, and the development of all. We saw this immediately when we were received by Sensei's students; they showered us with attention and instructed us on the dojo protocol (In doing so, they assuaged one of our greatest fears;

we did not want to offend Sensei with any incorrect behavior.).

That visit was like traveling back in time and space to the days of the samurais and the dojo made it seem like we practiced inside a samurai mansion. It amazed me to see Sensei downstairs and start the class, which was characterized by a very didactic, deep exploration of the true practice of Aikido. At the end of practice we telephoned our group in Veracruz and discussed what Sensei expected from our school if he were to allow us to join his organization. He always, in a friendly and polite way, showed by example what a true Sensei was.

As the years went by our relationship with Sensei blossomed into a friendship, and we became interested not only on our technical development as Aikidoists but also in be-

coming better human beings. I felt that Sensei became the spiritual guide I had always wanted and I would model my actions on his daily message posts, as well as whatever advice he would give to us directly. To me Sensei was a man always willing to give others unconditional support to succeed in life. Whenever we needed a word of encouragement it was given to us. Sensei was and is a guide for us and, thanks to all that we received from him and his lingering influence through his videos, I think he is still with us. I feel like a guardian angel continues to guide us down the road of life as we try to become better human beings, one who, like Sensei, is willing to help others regardless of their ideologies, with respect, and in a disinterested manner. Thank you, Sensei, for the opportunity to know you and to feel every day that in some way you remain with us.

## The Slow Road to Enlightenment

by Ken Watanabe,

Aikido 5th Dan, Iaido 5th Dan

Traffic lights. I remember the traffic lights and trying my best to catch their timing.

I used to drive Sensei around town a lot, and it was a job that required strategy, sensitivity, timing, thoughtfulness, and awareness, not to mention the ability to operate an automobile competently.

Being Sensei's driver meant this: driving too fast was no good; driving too slow was also no good; martial artists never take the same route twice so I had to know several routes to and from our destination; stopping to gas up the car because you didn't do so beforehand was also frowned upon; you had to park in the correct place, et cetera. . . .

There were many other considerations when performing this duty, but performing all of them correctly added up to one thing: a smooth, relatively stress-free trip.

You might think it's odd to include a story about driving in an article about Sensei and martial arts. Usually, when we think of martial arts, images of acrobatic wirework might fill some people's heads. Others might think of cage matches and bloody noses. However, there is more to martial arts than winning a match, cutting down the enemy, or incapacitating an opponent with a strike or throw. Yes, learning the techniques is an important part of practice, but it is only one part of mastery.

They say that practice extends off the mat and beyond the dojo walls, and if you were a senior student training under Sensei, you were well aware of this. I, along with other senior students, performed duties seemingly unrelated to any sort of martial arts technique. Maybe we had to pick up coffee and a doughnut before an early morning practice, be Sensei's driver, or vacuum the floor. I, along with other senior assistants, used to water the garden and wash down the front of the dojo before the students arrived for practice.

Cleaning the main entrance of the dojo, or *genkan*, may not seem like "training," but when Sensei served as an *uchi-deshi* in Japan, he cleaned the front of Hombu Dojo every day. I remember him telling me how difficult it was. If the *genkan* was cleaned too early it would get dirty again, which gave the appearance that it wasn't cleaned at all. Not only were students coming in for practice, but high-ranking instructors also used the entrance. And that entrance had to look perfect.

Likewise, cleaning the front of our little dojo was an important job reserved for the most senior students. If done correctly, the entrance should appear clean and welcoming; refreshing, as if it had just rained. If done haphazardly, the dojo entrance would be a complete mess. Using too much water



was wasteful, and would flood the entrance; not enough water, the plants would dry out and the air would feel too dry. Thoughtlessly using the water pressure from the hose incorrectly would thrash the plants and the pavement would not be swept of debris. Washing down too early was no good, as the entrance would dry out and get dirty again; starting too late was no good as the front would be too wet. Washing down the front had to be done at the right time, with the right amount of water and the correct amount of water pressure. As simple as watering plants and hosing down the pavement seemed, washing down the front of the dojo involved a lot of thoughtfulness, concentration, and sensitivity.

I remember a comment made by a visitor from Japan. This aikidoist witnessed one of the students putting the hose away after washing down, and seeing the manner in which this student performed this chore, complimented Sensei on the level of training at our dojo. A layperson wouldn't give this sort of thing much thought, but a well-trained martial artist can see the student's training level reflected in even the simplest, unrelated details.

With a first-rate teacher like Sensei, practice did not end after an hour-long class in the evening. One day he told me about his training while, of all things, working on his computer. There was a stack of letter-sized paper next to his desk and every time he went to grab some paper, he tried to get exactly five sheets. This sounds ridiculous, since the difference between four, five, and six sheets of photocopy paper is negligible to normal people, but to martial artists it matters: this is the level of sensitivity they train to develop.

Sensei was strict during class, but he was equally strict regarding all the "extra-curricular" activities outside of practice. Whether cleaning, hanging up a picture frame, buying flowers for the dojo, or driving him to the airport, everything was training.

I drove Sensei around town for years and got pretty good at it, but being his driver was not an easy job. He was not a huge fan of freeways; many times I'd end up taking the surface streets back to the dojo. More often than not, that meant traffic signals. Whenever we'd get caught at a red light, Sensei would mention the subject of timing; i.e., if I could catch the traffic signal's timing, we'd hit all the green lights. Of course, it isn't the end of the world when you are sitting at a stoplight, forget to buy his coffee, or do a slipshod job of vacuuming, but there is a saying in Japanese: *shugyo ga tarinai*, which translates to "not enough training."

It's been a while since our teacher passed away, but sometimes, I still get a tiny bit anxious around traffic signals.



*Sensei with Suzuki Kajo Sensei and his wife*

### Sensei's Genius

*by David Ito, Aikido Chief Instructor*

Sensei was a great teacher with a seemingly inexhaustible intellect. From an outsider's point of view he probably seemed like a virtuoso who flashed with genius. I once witnessed a moment of this brilliance when I took him to the Pacific Palisades to meet a woman who wanted some swords appraised. Her late husband was a sword collector and he had about 10 different Japanese swords in his collection. Sensei carefully examined each one as she brought them out and delicately took each one of them apart with the precision of a museum curator. One by one, he spent about 10 minutes examining them in silence. He laid them all out and began to grade each one. Without any hesitation he said, "This one is fake, this one has a questionable signature, this one has been modified, this one is a forgery, and the rest are real." Then he assigned values to each one. The widow appeared insulted by Sensei's claims and stumped off to get the paperwork for each sword. Sensei told me to go to the car and get the only thing he brought with him, a tattered old dictionary of sword maker signatures. His copy was worn with the kind of use that only comes with someone who has meticulously toiled over each one of the pages persistently over many years. When she returned with the papers, her face looked as white as a ghost's. She read her husband's notes out loud and said, "You are right, this one is fake, this one does have a forged signature, this one has been altered and those values are exactly right." Sensei laughed and continued talking about each one of the swords, their makers, and their dates and values. Awe-

struck, I just sat there listening to Sensei talk about these swords. We spent about three hours there and in typical Sensei style, he didn't charge her for his appraisal. Still in amazement, once we left I asked him if he had ever before seen those swords. He said, "No." I then asked how he knew those signatures were fake or real. He said, "Because I study and I have memorized almost

every one of those signatures in that book." I was blown away; I would have found this story almost impossible to believe had I not just seen it with my own eyes and heard it with my own ears. Sensei looked at me and said, "David, you have to study, there is no way around it." The expression on his face was dead serious.

*"You have to study, there is no way around it."*

During the whole astonishing episode I forgot to look at my directions on how to get home and prepare for our departure. As we started for home, I realized I was going the wrong way and made a quick U-turn. Sensei said in his loud chiding voice, "Don't you know how to get home? I should have asked [Ken] Watanabe to drive me!" He rebuked me for not preparing myself and knowing the way home before we left, saying, "You have to pay attention, don't be so lazy all the time."

Ever since then, I always research detailed directions and do my homework about where I am going and how to get there and back. I look at them and memorize the map so if I lose the map, I can still get back. I once took an out-of-town friend to the new Getty museum and he complimented me on my preparations. He marveled, "You are so organized!" I could only smile and think of the time when I drove Sensei to the Pacific Palisades.

I truly believe that when you study under a great teacher,

you become changed forever. Sensei often said that if a teacher could find one or two good students in his lifetime, he could consider himself blessed. I believe that the reciprocal applies to students. Three years after his death, Sensei continues to inspire many people around the world. To his many students, he was first and foremost an excellent teacher of Aikido, Iaido, and Japanese culture, and produced many fine students over the years. To others, he stood as a beacon of light in a rough ocean of counterfeits, who came into their lives through his numerous TV and radio interviews, magazine articles, his successful book *Kodo: Ancient Ways*, and his countless writings on the Internet. Sensei seemed like a walking encyclopedia of the martial arts and Japanese culture. Yet although Sensei appeared to be brilliant, he was just an ordinary guy with one philosophy: Work hard. He lived this dictum on a daily basis, whether he was studying calligraphy, Japanese language, tea ceremony,

swords, tsukas, or Japanese culture. A moment of brilliance for Sensei merely represented the culmination of countless hours and days of relentless studying. The Spanish violinist Pablo de Sarasante put it best when he quipped, "For 37 years I have practiced 14 hours a day and now they call me a genius." I will always remember that trip to the Pacific Palisades and how Sensei showed me that there is no substitute for hard work. The look on Sensei's face and what he said forever lives on in my mind and informs how I live my life. Even now, I constantly hear his voice whispering to me, "There is no substitute for hard work." I hope I find the strength and wisdom to listen to his guidance.



*Sensei teaching his Iaido students about the sword*

## A Bridge

by Paul Major, Aikido Shodan

As Sensei's memorial nears I find myself reminiscing about my days in the old dojo. To be a student of Kensho Furuya Sensei was like being given entrance to a different world, one where the absorbing stress of Los Angeles melted away and the challenging process of learning began. I came to feel that the dojo formed a bridge between the wisdom of a simpler time and the hectic world that surrounded me.

But taking the lessons learned on the mat and knowing how to integrate them into daily life seemed an impossible task (and, indeed, continues to present many challenges). For the first year of my training I felt at a complete loss. But bit by bit, in observing Sensei and listening to his words, I started to feel that the key I sought to my riddle was not a concrete answer to be found through a technique, but through a subtle process of development that Sensei embodied.

One day, while going to lunch with Sensei and one other student, I was exiting the car on the street side when we had parked curbside, and I immediately heard Sensei chastise me, "Don't go around that way!" At first I thought he was being unreasonable; I felt like a child being scolded by his parent. But then I stopped and realized that Sensei had wanted to prevent me from walking around on the side of the street with heavy traffic. He was concerned over my safety and wanted me to be more aware of my own surroundings.

I think that one small, seemingly insignificant moment became a catalyst for seeing how I might connect the dots in my training, martial and otherwise. That encouragement to stay constantly aware of people and environment falls directly in line with the awareness we must practice on the mats with our partners.

Rather than finding this direction in the techniques in and of themselves, I discovered that Sensei himself, as a man, bridged the gap between where I was and what I was seeking. The daily examples of his life held lessons for me. This is not to deify or idolize Sensei – he was, after all, a human being the same as the rest of us. But after decades of practice and very rigorous study, Sensei had learned how to integrate his martial training into his daily life.

So many people knew Sensei, or knew of him, and could tell he was special. Although a man whose appearance off the mats and in his regular clothes you might think unassuming and even silly on occasion, everyone who got to know him at all came to admire a fierce and dedicated teacher who always tried to do the best he could.

I was fortunate to have many breakfasts and a few lunches with Sensei, and in seeing his moments of levity layered through serious introspection and outward analysis, I came to feel he was someone that was always trying to practice what he taught. For a student to find such a teacher, one who can practice what he preaches, I felt and still feel incredibly lucky and grateful.

If I could express anything about Sensei to any of our new students who have not had a chance to train with him, I would say that he was the sort of man that showed you, directly, that it is possible to live your ideals, and that it is possible to take a traditionally taught martial art and make it applicable in your own modern life off the mats.



## FAR AWAY

The beautiful sail upon the sea,  
Sailing away from you and me,  
The setting sun above the ocean,  
Disappearing without emotion,  
Soon, I will go to somewhere far,  
A place somewhere beyond the stars,  
But I will still be someplace near,  
Still my heart so filled with care.

– Reverend Kensho Furuya





## Holding the Course

by Mike Van Ruth

Chief Instructor, Aikido Renbukai

It has been three years since Sensei's passing. It doesn't seem like that long ago. I think the trials of moving and establishing the new dojo space may have had something to do with that perception. Although many things have changed since his passing, many things have also stayed the same.

The dojo may not be in the same location, but when one walks into the new dojo, it looks very much the same in its appearance as the old one. A reverence can still be felt, knowing that space is devoted to diligent and sincere training. The conduct and manner of the students still reflects that.

Sensei always demanded that the dojo observe a high level of etiquette and protocol. The measure of that level can still be seen in his students. It could have been very easy for the level of discipline to slip. It could have been just as easy for the students to say, "Well, Sensei's gone. We don't have to do that anymore." But it didn't and they didn't. This consistency, this dedication, stands as a testament to the power of Sensei's teachings and to the students who have become the embodiment of those teachings.

Yes, it is very important to remember Sensei, especially on the anniversary of his passing. But it will mean nothing if his students don't remain mindful of our responsibility to continue and uphold his vision for us, the dojo, and the future of Aikido. I can't think of a more fitting honor to a man who gave so much to the art and to his students but to continue his vision.

## Sensei and the Art of Conversation

by Kevin Hoffer, Aikido Ikkyu

Sensei was so knowledgeable about so many things that it felt quite daunting to try to engage him in conversation. I always thought, "What could I possibly cover, that he doesn't already know or hasn't already heard?" I also knew that were I to let my mouth blabber on about whatever thought popped into my head, he would more than likely challenge my assumptions, question my motives, and test the strength of my intention. Once I learned to quit blabbing around senior students, I also learned it was beneficial to wait until it seemed like the right time before speaking on a new subject or asking a question that wasn't training-related. But around Sensei, I was simply afraid to speak. This was quite a new feeling for me; in other circumstances I have

no problem sharing my opinions and thoughts, whether solicited or not. (It can be very oppressive around me, to be sure.)

But I started spending time around Sensei when he asked me to help him run some errands. We would most often either have breakfast or lunch along with the errands, and in that time, there were often long periods without speaking. It was terrifying for me. Initially I had to learn to wait for him to speak first. Thought after thought raced through my head, but I kept them to myself. I desperately wanted to break the silence of the car ride, or waiting for the waitress, but would hold my tongue, knowing it just wasn't really that important. I eventually got to see how meaningless many of the things I wanted to say were. It was frequently just "filler" to keep me from feeling uncomfortable.

## Our Teacher Is Always With Us

by Mike Hatfield, Aikido 2nd Kyu

*Bad artists copy. Good artists steal.* – Pablo Picasso

My first direct teaching from Sensei came soon after I had joined the dojo. I had been practicing for a couple of months and felt that I was just beginning to understand the dojo protocol. At the end of each class, after we were lined up and ready to bow out, Sensei would usually have a few words for the students, maybe a critique of our energy level or an admonition to work harder. Sometimes he would pass on a little story from one of his teachers, such as *I will not give you anything. If you want it, you will have to steal it from me. Try if you can!*

Then one day Sensei looked directly at me and said in a demanding tone, "You need to relax and pay more attention!" I can still hear his voice. Being called out in front of the class was uncomfortable and his message was intimidating, but he had given me a road map to improve my Aikido and I felt grateful for that. Each day thereafter I tried harder to listen to his every word, watch every little detail, and memorize every technique.

Maybe a year later, I was upstairs in the changing room next to Sensei's private quarters. While I was dressing after class he had come out of his office and was standing at the top of the stairs talking to someone down on the mats. As I exited the changing room there was Sensei, with his back to me, partially blocking the path down the stairs. I stood quietly behind him for several moments wondering if maybe I should try and squeeze behind him or just wait for him to finish his conversation. Although he never turned around and never said a word to me, I noticed one of Sensei's hands came behind his back and subtly waved, like a leaf in the wind. I squeezed behind him. He was always teaching.

Now this is not to say Sensei had nothing to say. At times he had long explanations for me. Other times we had humorous discussions about nothing all that important. But I had to learn that just because I could not sit with my own silence did not mean everyone else had to suffer my chatter.

It is a tool that has become important to me as I spend time with my father-in-law. He too likes silence at times, and because we do not always cross the language barrier all that well, it is often more important just to sit quietly than to force a conversation. Like many of the tools I have learned from Sensei, I still have much practice to truly know how to utilize it. But I know I must honor his dedication with my own.

## Sensei in the '80s

by Louis Lee, Aikido Shodan

In his late 40s, Sensei was most dedicated in developing his Aikido theory and education, and in putting them into practice. In any given session, he spoke no more than a handful of sentences of instruction, and even then only if he was in a talkative mood. He would demonstrate a few times slowly, shift into high gear, and throw the heck out of uke, then sit zazen at the right-hand corner of the mat and watch his students go at it. Nobody spoke; no verbal instruction was given from senior students either, except to fresh victims who were still rolling around and could not tell up from down. If he saw what he did not want to see in your technique, he picked you out at the spot you were practicing and tossed you around until he saw your level of alertness increase to the desired level. Throughout the whole class all you heard was bodies hitting the mats, and the occasional gushing sound of someone getting the wind knocked out of them. There was no moment when you allowed your mind to drift off, submerged in mental construction of techniques, or to dream of yourself as an Aikido virtuoso. All your attention was fully dedicated to your sensory receptacles: watching, listening, more watching, seeing where Sensei is, where uke is, where you are throwing uke, and who is doing what around the spot where uke will land.

It came to me much later why this was such a valuable training. At any given moment, a sensory activity (watching and being aware), and a mental activity (thinking and feeling lost) cannot coexist simultaneously. Therefore, as we were deprived of the freedom to daydream, our awareness of the moment was sharpened, like the instinctive awareness of animals. Bumping into others, or throwing your uke into a crowded spot was a rare blunder indeed, and such action brought Sensei's immediate intervention, until the transgressor was completely exhausted yet alert as ever. On the surface, it seems difficult to tell whether the students are indeed alert, because one can still appear to be alert during the practice while being totally on a different plane altogether. However, you can tell this easily by looking at his eyes. Where his focus is throughout the practice tells

where his spirit is; eyes cannot hide the truth.

To keep us honest, Sensei would admonish the class as follows:

*Do you know exactly where you are throwing your uke?*

*Do you continuously adjust ma-ai between you and uke, as well as that of you and the pair practicing next to you?*

*Are you aware when someone is being thrown at you while you are going about your business?*

*If not, if you are not aware of any of these, you are not paying attention, you are not aware enough.*



I think Sensei drove home a simple but essential point: one can, and should, think about Aikido technique, especially during the learning process, but it should not be done on the mats. Everything must be dedicated to sensory learning; watching, mimicking, and more watching, of everyone and everything.

I leave you with a few bits and pieces of Sensei's words I have accumulated over the years. I hope this grab bag of recollections helps all of you as much as it helped me on my journey as an Aikido practitioner. Since he never said much on Aikido techniques, these words may feel rather random at best:

### **Uke, make attacks as real as possible.**

A thrust or punch must come at the precise moment, aiming directly at the target. Ukes should avoid simply raising their hands and charging. Uke's stance must be

in balance at all times as a real attacker's would, and uke should never turn passive during the technique. This does not mean uke must always try to bash in nage's head. Speed is irrelevant; intention and dedication matters.

### **Watch and mimic your teacher.**

There will be plenty of time for you to rehearse, sharpen, develop, and invent your own techniques once your Aikido becomes proficient. Until then, watch and mimic your instructor as best as you can. Any thinking or even a mental regurgitation of what the instructor is doing means that, if there is a verbal activity inside of your brain, you are not paying attention, you are doing your own thing. You have gone off somewhere else, and that makes you a liability to other students.

### **Aikido training should extend through everyday life.**

Be alert, attentive, and watchful of your surroundings. When you clean the dojo, pay attention to the area you are cleaning and see if you are indeed cleaning properly. Are you simply going through the ritual of mindlessly wiping? Are you thinking about your wonderful Aikido skills while you are cleaning, or are you really cleaning with full attention?

### **Be sensitive to everything.**

When performing a technique, if you feel uke preventing you from carrying out a waza, it is likely you have telegraphed your movement and uke read it. When your movement is telegraphed and thus you run into a resistance, know you have caused this.

### **Postscript From Two Masters**

Once, Sensei and a group of senior students had a discussion on where one should look while carrying out a technique, and Sensei used Musashi's instruction as a good example. *When faced with an opponent, close the eyelids slightly and gaze at the whole body in a hazy focus, so you can see the entire body movement. If you stare at the hand that holds the weapon, or the weapon itself, fearful thoughts will seep in and paralyze you. Stare at your opponent's eyes, and you could be mesmerized if your opponent's will and determination are fiercer than yours.*

## Chosen Path

by Reverend Kensho Furuya

Although we have a penchant for making comparisons and deciding which is better and which is not, deciding on the path of Aikido is a choice. We choose Aikido because it seems to fit our personality and our ideals. I don't think it can be a matter of which seems the best bargain, like buying groceries. For some people, Karate, or grappling, may better fit their needs. For others, Taiji or boxing feels more satisfying. And then again, some people search for the one martial art with the most flash or, perhaps, more body contact. Some people prefer something more inner or spiritual. Some prefer more competitive. Some are looking for exercise. A long time ago, I turned away a student who only wanted to do Aikido because he thought he would look "cool" in a hakama. Whether our goals are high and not so high, we make a choice. Hopefully, we choose Aikido for what Aikido offers and not for the fantasies of our minds. It is usually the one who lives in a dream-world who becomes, from my experience, quickly disappointed.

One shouldn't look for Aikido as a quick fix for all one's personal problems, nor does it contain a miracle cure for one's ailments. Aikido harbors no magic wand nor a winning ticket for the lottery. We will find no magic potion in Aikido that makes all sadness and suffering vanish in a flash. More often than not, Aikido as an art, inherently dictates that we will get out of it exactly and only what we put into it. Aspire to something more than mere gain: in Aikido, we must think in terms of trans-

formation, growth, and change. While working in the Zenshuji Temple and taking care of our Zen meditation group, I was amazed to find that so many came to gain a miracle cure. Some even came thinking



*"Deciding on the path of Aikido is a choice."*

that sitting would cure their medical diseases. Of course, there is something potentially miraculous about one's faith, but clinging to the expectation of a miracle misses what Zen is all about. In the same light, we should not look to Aikido as a medical or miracle cure.

Sawaki Kodo once said about Zen practice, "The only reason to do Zen sitting is because you love Zen sitting." The meaning here: for any other motive or idea of personal gain or profit, we will eventually fail. In the same light, we should practice Aikido for no other reason than because we love Aikido. Perhaps this love does not come in a flash as in the movies, but one can gradually learn to love Aikido very much as a way of life and as something that, in the long run, becomes very fulfill-

ing – not in the sense of material gain, but in how we live our lives and view this world. As for myself, I cannot live my life pounding and kicking another person; that way works for some but not for me. As for myself, I cannot struggle on the ground wrestling closely with a sweaty body; that way is not my nature. Aikido is ideal for me and after almost 50 years, I find it still very fulfilling. This is a fact which I can pass on to my students. Aikido has lasting qualities which you can carry with you all your life. When I practiced Judo, we all knew our competitive careers would end after 25 or 26 and by 30 we would be considered "seniors." Although a great sport, this knowledge held no fulfillment for me personally.

It might seem like a nice pastime to conjecture about which martial art looks better and what works more effectively and why this or that technique is not good and on and on as I usually see. Of course, my life is not perfect by any means; I don't make much money so I am not successful; my life is still a struggle and hard work. Many others enjoy more success and more fame and on and on. They drive better cars, live in better homes, wear better clothes, and so forth. But I still have something in my Aikido life that I would refuse to exchange with any other. For this reason, I recommend Aikido wholeheartedly to you and this is why I am here.

**Editor's Note:** Sensei originally posted this article, in slightly different form, to his "Aikido-KODO-Iaido" message board on February 1, 2005.



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## Growing Up With Sensei

by Maria Murakawa, Aikido 2nd Dan

I was lucky enough to be a student of Sensei for about 11 years. Despite training under him for so long, I did not grow close to him as others may have, was never entrusted to pick up his dinner or run errands for him, and was never reprimanded for any sins of commission or omission. In that respect, I may not have had the fullest experience of being a student of Sensei as I could have. What I do know is that during those years Sensei impacted me more than I had realized; I only became fully aware of this impact once he passed away.

There are so many things I remember about Sensei. Classes were very intense when he taught, and I felt, as others may have as well, that it was going to be serious once we heard the swishing of his hakama down the stairs as we warmed up. Very soon someone would get yelled at, or we would have to perform the same tenshin nage for 20 minutes straight, or watch as one of Sensei's ukes would be hurled countless times across the mat while taking his ukemi. Despite the fear which would pervade the dojo while he taught, there were moments of serene concentration on our part, as we watched Sensei breaking down each movement to its simplest explanation, and very often these demonstrations of movement would lead to the most fascinating stories of martial arts history, and a whole world would open up from

a bygone era. The old dojo surrounded by antiques, with our sweat and blood soaking the mats, and Sensei's style of strict and rigorous teaching, all inspired me during those formative years inside and outside of class, to become a better person.



*Sensei at Iwama Dojo in 1969*

I looked forward to his daily messages every day as I took my lunch at work, a short respite from the hectic days as an assistant in the garment industry. I remember reading and re-reading *Kodo* and feeling inspired by the stories passed down through the ages. No matter how tough things got at work, I think I was always able to overcome it, in large part due to what I learned from Sensei, and the world of Aikido he opened up to

me. I admired how easily he was able to share his knowledge with others, especially during the open houses which we would have at the dojo. While he demonstrated the movements, he would communicate how they worked in an entertaining way so anybody could easily understand. Then he would allude to some fascinating historical reference that would relate to what he was demonstrating, and the audience would become immersed, if only for that moment, in a different way of life. He was generous with his knowledge, and was able to touch people through his love of martial arts and Japanese culture, and they in turn would leave our dojo feeling uplifted (and maybe even inspired) by the beauty of the stories he told.

Sensei once said that during the old days, students would treasure their teacher above all others, even their own parents. When I first heard this, I couldn't really understand it. Then when Sensei passed away, I understood. My parents gave me life and gave me the tools to live this life independently, but it was Sensei who had guided me through a big part of my life with his teachings. I grew up with my parents during childhood, and during my 20s, grew up with Sensei through Aikido. So his passing affected me almost as much as if a close relative had passed away. Sensei taught me what it feels like to miss someone deeply, and made me aware what an irreplaceable entity he remains in my life.



### Untitled

The old teacher never knows,  
When a student comes  
And when he goes.  
He cannot reap what he cannot sow  
It's all he can do, I suppose.  
Like the warm summer breeze,  
Blowing by so quickly,  
The flower continually grows,  
On the lonely old, crooked bough.

— Reverend Kensho Furuya

**Editor's note:** Sensei posted this poem to Aikiweb on October 30, 2003.



## Reflection on the Way

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



Sensei was hard to get to know. Many barriers existed to fostering a relationship with him, some of them literal. Coming into the dojo itself presented a challenge. If one didn't know where the dojo was, it was difficult to find. It's true, there was a sign, but the entrance was completely obscured by the fence and bamboo garden. The indirect steps, the multiple gates with offset stones that had to be navigated as part of the training, and the black metal door that had to be turned

just right in order to enter all presented physical deterrents to accessing Sensei and his teachings.

Once inside, it got no easier. I trained for nearly two years in the dojo before I peeked past Sensei's door and into his office where I could glimpse him busily typing. By the time I was dressed and ready to leave the changing room, the door to his office had been closed. The dojo and Sensei himself seemed like a Japanese feudal castle. The outer walls, the designed walkways defensible from an inner wall, the courtyard overlooked by the keep, and finally the ascent of the keep to reach the interior were all present in the layout of the dojo and in the behavior of the steward of the students.

Most of my interactions with Sensei occurred on the mats of the dojo. I am thankful for every second under his watchful eye. One day when I was training, a senior student threw me and I rolled out of his throw twice in the same place. There was a leak in this student's control of my body within the technique, and I flowed to that opening. Sensei asked me, "What are you doing?" In my immaturity I responded with, "Nothing good." I thought I had been doing something wrong and I thought I would relate that I understood that I needed to flow with my partner. Sensei walked around for a minute as we continued to train. I could tell he was thinking. *If you ever answer like that again, I will kick you out of here. Talk to Ken Watanabe if you want to learn how to respond properly.*

The lesson from this wasn't that there was one response that I should have said even though I talked with Ken Watanabe about it. The lesson was that I needed to be fully present mentally and physically during training. This moment could have allowed me to articulate a hole in the student's technique and help him find how to close that hole to have total control and force my mind to think about why my body was doing something naturally on its own. Instead of taking the time to be reflective and serious in my training, I was immature and dismissive. This dismissive attitude is what Sensei saw and used to shape me as an individual.

Reflection is an integral part of life. Being able to change our actions based upon reflection on our past experiences is what enables us to grow and develop into more productive workers, more articulate leaders, and better people. This is ultimately the goal of Aikido and our training in it. Sensei taught that Aikido was more than a martial art, it is a way of life. For me, it's the way.

*"When the student grows, the teacher grows."*

*— Reverend Kensho Furuya*

## To Emulate a Teacher

by Dr. Roberto Magallanes Molina  
Chief Instructor, Veracruz Aikikai

In *The Hagakure*, there is a bit of advice about how to emulate a samurai, or I should say a teacher. When I was doing my gynecological training in Canada, I met a gifted surgeon who became my mentor. And when I visited ACLA for the first time, I felt transported to a 16th Century samurai palace; after having the honor of meeting Sensei, I immediately wished to practice under his wing and in that beautiful, traditional dojo.

Being a shodan from Mexico, I knew it was not going to be easy; I'd faced a similar challenge in Canada as a foreign medical graduate, so I decided to do with Sensei what I did in Canada: work the hardest I could in order to deserve such a place and privilege. For five straight years, I exchanged e-mails with Sensei, assisted at his annual seminars, and met his top students and his shihan guests of honor. After Sensei's unexpected death, I kept visiting ACLA every year, hoping to be accepted as a student and have the honor to train under their wing.

Now that I am a part of the ACLA family, I've invited some of your senior students to visit my dojo in Veracruz, which aspires to follow the traditional spirit and form of Sensei's old dojo by teaching sound Aikido as he taught it and by paying respect to the Japanese culture and traditions which gave birth to all we learned from Sensei. I know I am still very far from my goals, but I keep practicing and learning from Ito Sensei and the ACLA students. Ito Sensei has done an outstanding job keeping ACLA together and accomplishing Sensei's wishes.

During my years of medical practice, I trained several new surgeons whose development made me proud of my job. I try now to do the same thing with my Aikido students by following Sensei's ideas of being a good teacher, so that maybe they will try to emulate me when my time comes as I now try to emulate Sensei. I feel very proud of being an ACLA student and will make sure I honor the trust your dojo has placed in me. Thank you, Ito Sensei; I will do my best to make you feel proud of me. And thank you, Sensei – God bless you!

### Sensei's Humor

by Leonard Manoukian, Aikido Ikkyu

Ever wonder how a man can dedicate a lifetime to teaching a handful of people an esoteric martial art, or at least a martial art that when done correctly is esoteric? Ever wonder how a man can live a singularly anachronistic existence – the life of a Zen Buddhist monk studying samurai swords, in late 20th century LA? Well, I have. And that's when Sensei taught me the most important lesson I ever learned from him.

All who have read *Kodo: Ancient Ways*, or looked around the dojo or have been curious enough to look into the provenance of our dojo symbol know Sensei's admiration for the bamboo. For him, the bamboo represented the core values of a warrior. I won't waste your time when you can get the water directly from the source, so read *Kodo*. The one property of bamboo that relates to the current topic is its ability to

bend but not break. So how does one bend but not break? What facility must one develop? That's where Sensei's last, most important, lesson comes in: humor is the skill that we must develop.

Every time we talk of Sensei around the dojo, or around a table at some restaurant, we are reminded of a funny event, something he said, a look he gave, that exasperated sigh. But if we think about it, how long did he stay in a dark mood? In reality, not very long. Don't get me wrong, he did have dark days, who doesn't? But, he was a really funny man! Have I told you about the time my uke and I made a mistake and Sensei corrected us? We bowed after the instructive tongue lashing and he deadpanned, "Don't bow. Whatever I put in your head will fall out!" Now that's funny! Or the time he used drinking cola as an analogy for correct Aikido, where every move is distinct: "You first open the can, then you lift it towards your mouth, then

pour it in. You wouldn't do all three things at the same time, would you? No. It would be a mess!" Or the time that I told him that I considered *Shogun* to be a great piece of film-making. I knew he hated it, and he knew I knew. So he spent the next half hour expressing his shock at my opinion and I defended it, even raising the stakes. Back and forth. That was fun.

But fun isn't the end all and be all for us. Humor is a means to an end. The end? That brings me to Sensei's constant exhortation: "Keep training!" If we try to imbue what we do with a bit of humor, if we take nothing but the training we do too seriously, we'll keep at it, year after year. In January, it was five years for me. Maybe someday, younger people will write something about me, about how much they wish they could talk to me instead of writing about me. But by that time I'll be training with Sensei again. I do miss him.

*"Excel in the ordinary by bringing everything to its most excellent level."*

– Reverend Kensho Furuya

### "You Are Not Him!"

by Jim Bassett, Aikido Ikkyu

One morning, at an especially intense practice, I happened into the space on the mat in front of Sensei. I was training with a senior student and really felt that I was moving with him, fluidly, quickly, when Sensei shouted, "You are not him!" It so took me by surprise; "After all," I thought, "I'm really flowing here, doing what he is doing and keeping up . . . aren't I?" And yet, deep down, I knew, if not completely, what he meant. When I reflect on this moment, how true I find it, and how clarifying I find it in all areas of my life, even if perhaps it sets up something of a paradox. It is more than this, but it goes something like this: the challenge developing oneself without placing too much attention on oneself.

The paradox arises when we ask, what is meant by "You are not him!" and what is the relationship between individuality and the art? As was the case with many of Sensei's teachings, the path to understanding was not always obvious or direct. For it is best related through another important

teaching, and a basic truth in the teaching is part of what has enabled ACLA to continue to flourish. Transcending the pressures of popularity and enrollment or appeasing a culture that demands immediate gratification, the dojo remains anchored in its core traditions of teaching and learning the Aikido that Sensei learned at the hands of his teachers. In Sensei's teaching, and what has been passed down through his senior students, the fundamentals not only provide a ground, but provide a seemingly infinite cascade of lessons and insight, while for the impatient, the fundamentals seem tedious, even monotonous, and limit creative freedom.

Sensei often spoke of students who had gone on to ostensibly higher levels of training, practicing hybrid and freeform techniques, only to find themselves suddenly lost. Detached and floating far away from the fundamentals, one has only a limited idea of "self." For Sensei, the fundamentals provided reference, and through the absolute and total focus on the art, one's Aikido would develop naturally, far beyond ideas of having or attaining. Urging

us to leave our superficial selves at the door, Sensei invited us to focus only on practice. Free from ideas of "ki," or even of throwing, he urged us to see and listen carefully; to catch the art is slightly different than merely to imitate it.

Still, something happens through the training. Just as everyone speaks with a different voice, our differences clearly exist, and are inevitable. Surpassing their superficial nature, however, Sensei implores us, "Move in close!" Our art develops, and is able to respond to any condition that arises. In this sense there is not a singular, immutable art, but one that is pliant, and moreover, with a common foundation. Our ground is the dojo, the practice, generosity towards our partners, and the fundamentals. Through these, and others for sure, we are offered a chance to discover the art: not one that we are proud of or attached to, but one that grows through practice. Like the fundamentals, Sensei's teachings linger and underpin our experience, coming back to challenge, and generously help show all of us the way.



## Letters

Dear Aikido Center of Los Angeles,

Recently someone where I now work in Utah asked me about Aikido. It got me to start thinking about it again. I did some Google searches and came across the news of Sensei's passing.

I wish I had known at the time as I would have done anything to attend his funeral.

I started training in Aikido with Daiwa Dojo under Jack Arnold Sensei. I then moved to Sensei's Hollywood Dojo and studied with him for several years.

I always admired Sensei in all ways and I am very sorry at his passing. The world is a little less brighter than before.

I send my condolences and heartfelt thanks to Sensei for all that he taught me. I always sent him a Christmas/New Year's card to the dojo. I think the one I sent last year was returned. Now I know why. I will miss him.

Sincerely,

Bruce Webb

Dear Aikido Center of Los Angeles,

Sensei was a wonderful friend of Masatake Dojo. Many budoka in Israel remember him. So many loved him, learned from him, and will never forget him.

Sensei graciously allowed me to interview him twice for *Hebrew Aikido Magazine*. The interviews, conducted in English, were translated into Hebrew together with some of his articles. I remember how glad he was when I sent him the printed edition that contained his articles and interview. Later on, Sensei kindly sent three calligraphy scrolls to our dojo. We hang them on special events and when we commemorate his memorial day.

Although I never had the chance to meet Sensei in person, we enjoyed many, many conversations over the phone. I remember especially the long talks we had every year on New Year's Day. Eventually, he invited me to Los Angeles to take part in ACLA's annual O'Sensei memorial seminar. Tragically, Sensei passed away not long before the seminar, but with financial help from many of his students and friends, I was able to visit and participate in that seminar. I miss Sensei so much. We all miss him so much.

My heart is with you, and I am glad to see how wonderfully you continue along the path he paved.

Ze'ev Erlich

Hello,

Although I am not an Aikidoka, but a Kyokushin practitioner, I am a big fan of the late Reverend Kensho Furuya's book, *Kodo: Ancient Ways*. I thought I would share with you my appreciation of this fine work which I have read many times and from which I constantly draw much inspiration.

I have purchased about 30 copies so far to send them to friends and clients as a benchmark of inspiration in one's daily life, at work and at play.

Bless the man.

Regards,

Trevor Gilbert

P.S. - Here is an example of the responses I have received:

*Trevor,*

*I just thought I would drop you a line to thank you so much for sending through this truly wonderful book.*

*I have just finished reading Kodo: Ancient Ways for the first time. Usually I devour books very quickly, but this was different. I found a few pages a night more than enough to challenge and inspire me in equal measure. Although I have never before had any interest in martial arts, this book has opened up a new world.*

*I feel very privileged that you should share this with me. I know I will be revisiting it time and again in forthcoming years.*



*The front of the Aikido Center of Los Angeles in the mid-1980s*

Special thanks to Larry Armstrong and Paul Major for scanning all the photos and to Mark Ehrlich for editing and proof-reading all the articles.

**ACLA: Then and Now**

by William Allen, Aikido 2nd Dan

Sensei passed away nearly three years ago. It seems longer to me. There are so many former students that no longer train regularly, so many new students now attending classes, the dojo is in a different neighborhood, and it has heat in the winter and air conditioning in the summer. Things are different, to be sure, but not as different as one might have guessed.

Students who never had the opportunity to meet Sensei sometimes ask about him. I think they come away with the impression that he was a very hard teacher who didn't tolerate mistakes. That is a bit of a misperception that I, and other senior students, may inadvertently perpetuate through our "If Sensei were here" stories. It is more correct to say that he was a perfectionist with respect to martial arts, and anything that related to martial arts. For Sensei, the martial arts permeated his entire life so thoroughly that "anything related to martial arts" implies a much wider scope of things than most people can cram into a single lifetime. He never married, which he claimed was one price of his devotion to Aikido. He wrote, more than once, that he sacrificed making his own family to make the dojo and its membership his family. He poured all of his heart and effort

into nearly everything that he did; this was, perhaps, especially true of teaching. He was very serious about it, and researched many different methods and styles of teaching, experimenting with them and hybridizing, always searching for a better synthesis to convey his knowledge and the benefits of his



A rare glimpse of a meal from Sensei's point of view

experience. He often mentioned one of the sayings of Confucius, "Achieving a connection between teacher and student is harder than having each shoot arrows into the air in the hopes that the arrow tips will meet each other halfway."

So, what were Sensei's Aikido classes like? They were actually not so different from the classes taught in the dojo today. Every class started with the warm up, followed by forward and backward ukemi. The first exer-

cise was usually tenkan, the turning exercise usually followed by the complete technique. Toward the end of the class we would almost always practice irimi-nage in one form or another, followed by ryote mochi kokyu nage, followed by kokyu dosa, followed by clean up. The concentration of most classes was "the basics": footwork, movement, and attitude. In one class Sensei joked, "O'Sensei said that if you understand irimi, you understand 60% of Aikido. Then he said that if you understand tenkan, you understand another 60% of Aikido. Finally, he said that if you understand kokyu dosa, you understand the remaining 60%." The point of the joke, of course, is that to understand Aikido, you have to understand the basics, and that, once you understand the basics, you understand Aikido. There is nothing else. I have found this to be literally true: move in deeply and cut down, blend movement and timing with those of your

opponents, master ma-ai and kamae (spacing and stance), and so on.

If you never got to meet Sensei, perhaps you feel that you missed something. However, if you think that in never meeting Sensei you missed the chance to study the real Aikido, then you should re-evaluate that thought. Sensei was a great teacher, and because he was he passed on much of what he knew directly to his students. In a very real sense, he is still teaching in the dojo today.

**April 23-25, 2010***Everyone is invited!***O'Sensei Memorial Seminar****Schedule**Friday April 23<sup>rd</sup>**6:30 PM:** David Ito, Aikido 4th Dan**8:00 PM:** Welcome party in the dojoSaturday April 24<sup>th</sup>**9:15-10:00 AM:** David Ito, Aikido 4th Dan**10:10-11:00 AM:** TBA**11:10 AM-12:00 PM:** TBA**12:00-2:00 PM:** LUNCH**2:00-2:50 PM:** Santiago Almaraz, Aikido 4th Dan**3:00-3:50 PM:** James Doi, Aikido 5th Dan**6:00 PM:** Seminar socialSunday April 25<sup>th</sup>**8:00-9:00 AM:** David Ito, Aikido 4th Dan**9:15-10:00 AM:** TBA**10:00-11:00 AM:** TBA**11:00 AM-12:30 PM:** LUNCH**12:30-1:00 PM:** Alvaro Hernandez, Aikido 2nd Dan**1:00-1:30 PM:** Mike Van Ruth, Aikido 2nd Dan**1:30-2:00 PM:** Roberto Magallanes, Aikido 2nd Dan**2:00-3:00 PM:** O'Sensei memorial Service**3:00-4:00 PM:** Ken Watanabe, Aikido 5th Dan**3:00-4:00 PM:** Branch dojo meeting*\*Schedule is subject to change without notice*



## Just One Moment

by Shaun Menashe, Aikido 3rd Kyu, Iaido Shodan

Three years or so ago, I left California for Nevada, on a whim, for a job that turned out to be absolutely horrible. Every day I thought how wrong this was for me and my decision to move was definitely a mistake. I constantly thought up creative ways to quit and still retain my pride. Despite my ridiculous work load, I managed to peek in on a small Aikido school and when the time finally came to move back to Southern California I thought I must find a dojo! The first stop in my search was an Aikido school tucked away in an unassuming alley in Little Tokyo and there I found a great teacher. On the surface, carting myself off to Nevada and finding Aikido are two events which are causally unrelated, but nevertheless occurred in a meaningful manner which altered the course of my life.

My interaction with Sensei was full of this type of fortune. One particular Saturday before class as we were lined up on the stairs waiting to change, I thrust myself into a conversation and offered my assistance in bringing a guest from overseas. I am not sure why Sensei agreed to let me help out or why I was so brazen on this particular morning, but this chance moment allowed me to grow closer to my teacher during the last months of his life.

I had outlined so many e-mails in an attempt to accomplish this task for Sensei. I spent hours drafting

messages, staring at the screen attempting to avoid the words "Sensei said" or "you" or "him." One day Sensei jokingly remarked that soon I would be the dojo's official letter writer! Of course, as a newly minted student, I was filled with pride at the time, but the most important part of my efforts was developing a relationship with Sensei. Had I not opened my mouth and thrust myself into the potentially ego-destroying eye of my teacher, I would never have gotten to interact with Sensei on this level before he passed away. Unfortunately, he was unable to make it to that particular year's seminar, one of the many he worked so diligently to create; however, my efforts led to a number of conversations, lunch on two occasions, and more leisurely exchanges which meant a great deal to me.

Shortly after Sensei's death, I watched one of his many appearances on the History Channel. I realized that I had seen that very program three years before coming to ACLA and never even noticed that I had been training in that very dojo. Meeting Sensei was a moment years in the making and it is these moments, memories, and seeds of interest that I am left with in Sensei's passing. I have come a long way in my belief that what we experience in life is pure chance. Over time, I have learned to keep one eye open for any "nugget" the universe may leave for me to discover. I feel so grateful that my apparent misfortunes and bad decisions were my life's way of setting me on the right track.

## Yaki-tachi wo saya ni osamete, masumasu masurao no kokoro wo togari keru

*Before you draw your tempered blade, keep it in its saya and polish your soul first.*

**Editor's note:** Sensei posted this poem to Aikiweb on November 6, 2003. It is an inscription found on the tang of swords made by Arikoto, a swordsmith in Kyoto around 1840, which Sensei found inspirational.





*Michiko and Kuma*

### **Saying Thank You**

*by Jacob Sisk, Aikido Shodan*

For this month's newsletter, I wanted to write down some memories of Sensei for those newer students who didn't have the privilege of knowing him. It is trite to say "the most important lessons were off of the mat" but it truly was that way for me. On the mat, mostly I learned from Sensei through his fantastic senior students – James Doi, Ken Watanabe, David Ito, Mark Ty, and many others, some of whom are still around and some of whom have gone on. Like every excellent teacher, Sensei's real job in life was to create more teachers, and in this he was a wild success.

Sensei had a knack for being who you needed him to be off of the mat, even if you didn't know you needed it. My whole life I've looked for fathers, and so Sensei gave that to me, and his behavior and my interactions with him taught me the basics of human decency and how to relate to others. We call it "etiquette" to give it a fancy name but really it's just putting others ahead of yourself, and doing what you can to show people that you care about them and are listening to them. What follows are some of the ways Sensei taught me these lessons.

Sensei had a network of friends and colleagues, including Aikido teachers, other martial arts teachers, a little school in Tibet, people around the world . . . a far-flung crowd. Sensei was constantly sending

them gifts, and sometimes I would help him send them. The gifts were trifling: a coffee cup, a tee shirt, some pencils or maybe some hard candy, but the way he sent them was extraordinary. First, they had to be packed a special way, wrapped in brown paper. The paper had to be taped shut with a special brown paper tape. This tape was hard to find; Staples often only sells a cheap plastic copy of it, but this wasn't good enough for Sensei. The package had to be sent by US Mail, even if FedEx or UPS would be cheaper or faster. Since these packages often traveled around the world it would often cost 50 dollars or more to send one of these gifts. In the end, the package resembled a birthday present. Every aspect of it, in some quiet way, said, "I am thinking about you. I care about you. Even though you are far away, I remember and honor you." Later I've had to send gifts to people far away, and I've tried to copy Sensei's method, since his lesson here was how to care about people from afar using only coffee cups, pencils, paper tape, and postage.

For those who never saw the old dojo, Sensei lived in a tiny, cluttered bachelor apartment above the mats with almost nowhere to cook and only an easy chair in which to sleep (No kidding!). Consequently it was difficult for Sensei to eat unless he went out. Sometimes if my wife cooked something especially delicious, she would send Sensei a bit of it packed in a Tupperware container if she thought he would enjoy it. Inevitably, the container would come back the next day perfectly clean with some sort of a small gift or snack in it. There was never a more careful "thank you" than those clean Tupperware with crackers or tea in them. They told my wife how much Sensei appreciated the food as a gift as well as how much he appreciated the food for its own sake, but they did so in a way that preserved his dignity. It is easy to feel belittled if you live alone and are given bits of dinner. Sensei made sure that he didn't end up feeling that way, and more importantly, found a way to tell us so. From this, I learned about reciprocity and equality and good will, and how to really say "thank you".

Sensei was always happy to be taken out. This is no surprise since he lived alone that tiny apartment, sleeping in that horrible

easy chair. There was pretty much no time of the day or night that Sensei wasn't delighted to go out, usually to have a meal. On these expeditions, Sensei liked both giving and receiving surprises. He had an inexhaustible collection of places to go; after all, he grew up in Los Angeles and was an Angelino through and through. If he was to choose the restaurant (we'd alternate, in friendly competition for who could surprise the other more), he wouldn't say the name, or the directions, or even the cuisine. We'd get in the car and he would say give directions, one by one: "Go left here, now right, left at the stoplight. . . ." He did this purely to delight his companions on the trip. Sensei knew a surprise gift was better than a gift talked about. Of course, it would have been fun to boast about esoteric knowledge of pie shops and 1950s Chinese cuisine (I have been guilty of similar sins many times.), but Sensei preferred to let those who came with him have their own delight in the newness of a new place. He taught me always to put the guest before the host and to dig deep when doing so.

Like all of us who knew him, I have and cherish many more memories of Sensei. When I look back on those days (and I look back on them as the best days of my life), I remember long conversations about swords, sitting till odd hours in Koreatown coffee shops, Sensei saying "hellooooooo!" to my young dog as she licked his nose (a surprise, since Sensei was very sensitive about his personal space), a million tiny things. . . . Mostly I remember how much he loved and talked about his students, especially his seniors, and his hopes and dreams for his dojo and for all of us.

### **Aikido Center of Los Angeles:**

*We are a not-for-profit, traditional Aikido Dojo dedicated to preserving the honored values and traditions of the arts of Aikido and Iaido. With your continued understanding and support, we hope that you also will dedicate yourself to your training and to enjoying all the benefits that Aikido and Iaido can offer.*

#### **The Aiki Dojo Newsletter**

Publisher: David Ito

Editor-in-Chief: Mark Ehrlich

Photographer: Larry Armstrong

## Learning and Doing

by Santiago Garcia Almaraz  
Chief Instructor, Aikido Kodokai



I want to highlight a period when I could enjoy Sensei's company every day, a special time which gave me a new experience and an opportunity to learn.

I come from Salamanca, Spain, a city of 150,000 people, and most every desirable destination lies

within an easy 25 minute walk. Perhaps the first thing I learned about Los Angeles is that I needed to get to 99% of places by car: shopping, cinema, post office, etc. Maybe that's why I remember that when traveling to Los Angeles, I most enjoyed spending time with Sensei doing everyday things like getting the mail, running to the bank, going out for breakfast or lunch. I had to drive Sensei on these occasions, and in doing so I learned many lessons in etiquette and protocol: how to park the car, open the door for Sensei, drive at the appropriate speed, how to choose the proper travel route. It was an experience I remember fondly.

On the other hand, I must admit that at first when I started driving in LA, I felt a mixture of responsibility and nerves, like I did years before when I was a student driver. I remember trying not to

think do this or don't do that, now open the door or wait a bit, and so on as I went through every action. But with time and with practice, as with all things, I eventually stopped thinking and trying, and a way of doing naturally emerged without forcing the situation, which is what Sensei wanted. To me, the challenge of opening doors for Sensei at the right time was one of the more complicated skills to master: if I anticipated too much and walked too far ahead it gave the impression that I was in a hurry and out of synch with my teacher, but if instead Sensei had to wait outside the door that was not right either. Ideally, Aikido training allows us not to lose motion or fluidity; the door is not a barrier, and we can learn to conduct ourselves and our charges through it as if it wasn't even there. For some this has probably started to sound a little strange, all this talk of opening doors, but this little slice of experience certainly lead me to develop into a good driver such that I began to understand Sensei more fully. Those experiences and situations helped me learn from Sensei that Aikido concepts and opportunities to further my training lie hidden in the most mundane actions.

Although my time spent with Sensei was little moments like these, I remember them fondly. When I met Sensei my knowledge of Aikido was scarce, but my knowledge of Aikido etiquette was practically zero. He opened a door to a part of martial arts that is fundamental to Aikido and that marks and defines a dojo, its students, and its teacher, and I think Sensei's insistence upon this aspect of martial training makes ACLA unique among Aikido dojos. Thank you, Sensei; I will always remember you.

## Untitled

after graduation

still the test

goes on

6th Dan

what do I know now?

step

fall

circle turn throw

fall

get up

fall again

I'll sleep

when I can't

get up again

— Reverend Kensho Furuya

**Editor's note:** Sensei posted this poem to Aikiweb on October 29, 2003.



Three studies of teacher and student in the old dojo. Above: Sensei with Ken Watanabe. Left: Sensei and Don Diamant. Top: Sensei and Santiago Garcia Almaraz.

# 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**

9:30-11:00 AM Open

6:30 AM Instructor's Intensive: last Saturday of the month.\*

\* This class is not open for visitors to watch.

# Iaido TRAINING SCHEDULE

## TRADITIONAL JAPANESE IAIDO SWORDSMANSHIP

**Saturdays**

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

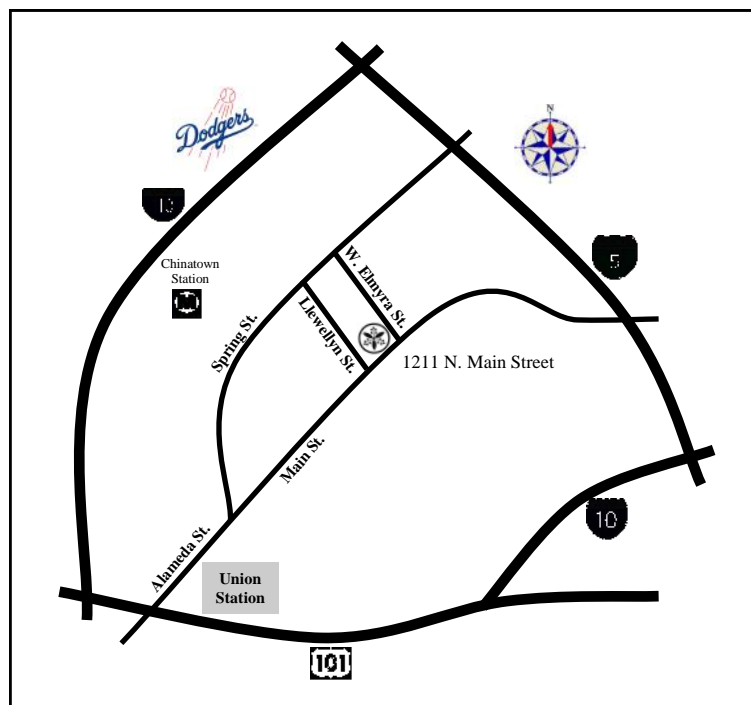
**Sundays**

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](mailto:info@aikidocenterla.com)

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

**The entrance is on Elmyra Street.**

*We are directly affiliated with:*  
**AIKIDO WORLD HEADQUARTERS**

Aikido So-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.

**SAVE THE DATE:**

*O'Sensei Memorial Seminar*  
April 24-25, 2010

**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.