

The Aikido Eye

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As I See It

By Sensei Frank Mc Gouirk



Aikido-Ai Vision Statement:

Quality Students-

Quality Instruction"

Aikido-Ai will provide quality instruction to students seeking personal security, physical well being and enlightenment through the disciplines of Aikido, Tai Chi, Qi Gong and Zen Meditation

Aikido Teaching Committee:

Frank Mc Gouirk Sensei
Joann Garner - Sandan
Michael Castro Sandan
Louis Celaya Nidan
Jason Oxman - Nidan
John Wong - Nidan

Tai Chi Teaching committee:

Frank Mc Gouirk - Sensei
Nancy O'Brien -
Shodan
Diane Globerman - Shodan
Marilyn Omieczynski Shodan
Akiko Heurich- Shodan

Zen:

Robert Moore- Zen Master- Tai Chi
Sifu
Frank Mc Gouirk - Abbot



First and foremost I want to thank everyone who attended our first seminar of the New Year. I had the honor and privilege of instructing the Dui Lian combat Tai Chi class. I was impressed by how fast the Aikido students grasped the technical and subliminal aspects of the training. The Tai Chi Students later agreed that what had taken them years to polish was quickly understood by the advanced Aiki students. Also impressive was a genuine sharing and partnering of common and not so common abilities and insights of how the forms engaged, integrated and were dispersed. Thank you Tai Chi students for your patience and thank you Aikido Students for your willingness to be open to a different system of connection.

On many occasions I have been asked how our dojo name was chosen. Some

would call Aikido-ai redundant, as AI is already inherent in the name Aikido. Why then the additional AI? The term Aikido can be translated in many ways. AI means harmony, agreement, blending and coming together (confluence). Ki (chi) means personal energy, life force or spirit. Do (Tao) means the great way, path or vast unknown. Aikido then can be interpreted as the students coming together to share and explore the possibilities of a spirited path and dissolution of conflict. AI also means love. Great AI is unconditional, clear and without agenda and beyond personal prejudice. Simply translated: We came, we danced, everyone was on time to the universal music and we all loved it! Again thank you for coming to our first seminar and now we look forward to the next one with guest Sifu Peter Ralston the weekend of January 20th. Sorry and happy at the same time to report that this seminar filled up very fast and is completely sold out. Sign ups are under way for our next guest seminar the weekend of February 10th with Sifu Jonathan Russell from San Francisco. This is His second visit to Aikido-Ai and he will

expand on last year's workshop and again present the Two Person San Shou of the great T. T. Liang. This also is sure to sell out, so sign up early.

Aikido-Ai is a network of simple rules. Besides common etiquette after 25 years we have only three rules: #1 no injuries, #2 have fun, #3 find a need and fill it. Have you noticed that shoes are migrating out of the rack and into the dojo lobby? Someone trips on them and we have broken rule #1 and that is no fun and #2 rule is broken! Next time you are in the dojo notice the new shoe rack that has appeared. Rule #3 actualized. Informed sources tell me that J. W. are these generous students initials. Thank You J. W. Now how about that!..... Habit about that?? See you on the mat and remember:

Out of the Mud grows the lotus.



Cross Training in Aikido: You Never Know Until You Try

By Suzette Hodnett

I'm 52. I've been run over by a car, in 2 major auto accidents and have some neck and back challenges. I'm training in tai chi and it will take me lifetimes to even begin to understand that beautiful art. I certainly already have a full plate of a life. So, why cross-train in Aikido?

Aikido is overwhelming. Always it is totally humbling. My body feels battered, bruised, tight, and sore. I feel like a stranger in a strange land. Arms twist and turn and moves never seem to be repeated. It is sometimes exhausting to go down and come up from the mat, time after time. People who have trained for a few weeks do standing rolls while I still grope on one knee and awkwardly try to fling my legs over my body. Each time I try to roll a little higher I'm sidelined with a hurt back. So, really, what am I doing cross-training in Aikido?

When I first walked into the dojo I saw a flowing, elegant circular art of connection, balance and internal strength painting itself in swirls on the mat. It was then that I fell in love with Aikido. But know your strengths and know your weaknesses. The falls and rolls seemed to align with my spirit but not my body. Besides, tai chi was my first love and after wanting to train for countless years, I was finally able to dive in and give it my all.

It's seven years and a black belt later. I'm irresistibly drawn to all the 2 person forms in tai chi that offer connection, balance, and understanding of applications/principles while working with another person. It is one thing to feel calm, rooted, and soft on a solo flight, but yet another to embrace it all with a partner. And so Aikido began enticing me once again.

We are blessed with a dojo that offers the arts of both aikido and tai chi. We are blessed with a Sensei that knows how to blend both arts. I often wonder why we don't have a better mix of both arts in the Tai Chi Combat class. There is a gift right under our noses. I could no longer ignore this ticket to deeper and wider training. There were plenty of reasons why not to train, but one overwhelming one why to -- how do I really know until I try?

So, I put my considerations, expectations and situation (and my embarrassment) aside and decided to train moment to moment in Aikido. I would let it be okay to be where I'm at. Want what I want (a 20 year-old rubber ball of a body) but take what I

“Cross training, especially at an older age, reminds me that age and physical limitations are important considerations but also ones that we use to put ourselves in a box”.

have (52 years of life's bumps and bruises). But, as Sensei says, “simple, but not easy.”

I started in the kid's class. It felt odd to be so nervous surrounded by a bunch of 7-11 year olds.

I was the tallest person sitting in seiza, looking like the empire state building among the masses. What was I doing there? Starting where I was at - an infant being spoon-fed and hoping to learn how to crawl before I walked. I was soon to realize that even those little tumbleweeds rolling down the mat were too much for me.

If the truth be told, my several

months experience with Aikido hasn't been easy. Quite honestly, Aikido has been frustrating. I've never even done a somersault or cartwheel before in my life. My beautiful elegant vessel that I am suppose to imagine I'm holding when I roll keeps getting smashed into a million tiny pieces. And so does my back. The moves continue to look like a foreign language. Sometimes Sensei comes over and shows me how to do a move 3-4 times. He leaves and I still don't have a clue.

Cross training in Aikido can be embarrassing. The old gray mare ain't what she used to be. I often feel like the most awkward person on the mat. I imagine others on the mat saying, “Why doesn't she just stick to Tai Chi instead of trying to roll around the floor like a broken top?” I've thought, “Maybe I should just quit. Maybe just do the soothing moves of tai chi.”

So, honestly, why do I keep coming back? What am I learning?

Cross training, especially at an older age, reminds me that age and physical limitations are important considerations but also ones that we use to put ourselves in a box. The mind can easily convince the body to shut down, contract and give up. Learning Aikido at 52 reveals the power of the human body to heal, open, adapt and get stronger if greeted with persistence, care and a measured pace. My forward rolls may be pitiful but there was a time I never thought I could do one. Besides, the spiritual and philosophical principles of a martial art know no age limits.

The rolls, as frustrating and painful as they can be, are also a wonderful

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teacher. A teacher than hits me with a stick. But the person who is holding the stick is me! When I am in a hurry, when my body needs to go slow but my spirit decides to fly ... OUCH! Aikido teaches me Sensei's lesson of "Slow down, I'm in a hurry." Also to be where I'm at... not others. John has me practicing rolling with a pillow under my knee so I can gradually raise my rolling elevation with less chance of injury. One baby step at a time. What a wimp, eh? It is all compared to what. A willing spirit and perseverance can go along way.

We have so much to learn from each other's art and it is right here under our own roof! Training in Aikido has given more internal strength to the softness of my tai chi form. I have developed a stronger root and a better sense of connectedness and calm while in motion. I now look for more applications and how to make a move work. Cross training can sometimes give us what we lack in our own training. It can take us out of our comfort zone (perhaps the most difficult part!) and allow us to experience martial arts principles from a new perspective.

Aikido reminds me to continue to confront my fears. Cross training can be scary. But, heck, if I stayed away from everything that felt awkward or I feared I'd probably still be in my mom's womb afraid of the rocky road into a strange new world.

Then there are the other benefits of cross training in Aikido. It's great having men on the mat! And it is wonderful getting to know the other half of the dojo. The compassion and expertise of my Aikido sempies has been heartwarming and more than helpful. All the Aikido teachers have been patient, willing and welcoming.

Cross-training reminds me, as in life, to just enjoy the ride, not knowing where it will take me. And so I laugh at my awkwardness, enjoy the bumps, savor the small victories

(hey, I might not be able to do the wrist grab yet but at least I can say it's name now) and know that my only defeat is to stop trying. And always to keep the faith. Progress can be happening but often invisible until the moment of its arrival.

Besides, cross training in Aikido could eventually save my life. If I could learn how to roll, I might someday save myself from a broken hip or a crunched skull.

So, I try, try again. I may never "get it." I may go kerplunk. It may take years for my body to build up the strength and the flexibility to really roll. Or maybe it will play out that it is too much for me, too late. No matter. How many people won't even try? And already Aikido has given me so much.

Either way, this is where I'm at in the moment. Somehow I keep coming back. Somehow I keep ending up sitting seiza, ready to clap my hands, bow and train. If the truth really be told, I love Aikido. What a fun ride! Want to join me? Onegai Shimasu.

Holiday Pot Luck Brings The End to 2005

By Louis Celaya



It is funny how fast a year goes by. In the blink of an eye, December signals the holiday's and conclusion of another year's worth of training.

The one event I can also look forward to is Aikido Ai's Annual Holiday Pot Luck. With the hustle and bustle of the holiday, this is one place a truly "relax and unwind". The patio area gets prepared, and the food is laid out



in manner that is fit for king. With so many talented people, the dishes demonstrate a variety of influence and ethnic cultures in our dojo. I am always amazed at the amount of food we have. Many people spend a lot of time in their kitchens personally preparing food for the dojo family to enjoy. You can

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WHAT'S HAPPENING WITH OUR DOJO FAMILY?



Nancy Parker - Nancy will be leaving California on January 23rd to move to Pennsylvania. For over 20 years she has been a bright light in our dojo and we will all miss her tremendously. Her big heart, unwavering spirit, and quiet humility have been a blessing to all of us. Nancy will be missed by the Aikido Ai Family. She is a testament to dedication, hard training and commitment to her teach and dojo.

Louis & Alisa Celaya - On March 5, 2006, Louis and Alisa will celebrate their daughter Alanna's fourth birthday. Rumor has it being a princess party with Dad and Mom dressing up.

Adriana Caldera - got a 4.0 GPA and is on the Principal's List for the first trimester of Middle School (6th Grade). She is in 3 Honors classes: Math, Reading and Language Arts. Not to be outshined by her sister, Gabriel Caldera, also brought home an excellent Report Card (they do not give out GPA in elementary school). Gabriel is Student of the Month for November (2nd Grade) and has surpassed 50 points in Reading Counts."

Received a promotion? Changed Jobs? Family Special Event? Do not forget to share them with our dojo family. Place these in the next What's Happening section!

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tell the amount of love that is taken as the food is always very tasty.

2005 was no different. With the influences of mexican, italian, japanese and american dishes, they was much to choose from and enjoy. Of course we cannot forget the great deserts. One of the big hits in the desert department was the spell cup cakes prepared by one the children's parents. If my memory serves me well, it was a snow man creation with cup cakes, marshmallow and lot of great goodies. When the cup cakes arrived, the kids came out of the woodworks to get their spell cup cake.



As usual Sensei spoke on the direction of the dojo and talked with much enthusiasm about the 2006 celebration year. He thanked all the student and dojo members for their commitment to the dojo in 2005 and their generosity and support for the coming 2006 year. With the sounds of light jazz and tango music in the background, Sensei announced that the follies were running in 2006, and asked everyone to prepare. He also took the opportunity to announce next year's honoree MC's Wayne and ?



Their job will be to coordinate the acts and run the show. A task no so easy with our bunch (just kidding).

As I reflect on 2005 and our Holiday Pot Luck, I can recall the many accomplishments our dojo and student have made. A couple of new Shodans in both the Aikido and Tai Chi ranks, and the many other students who continue their road to finding what they are looking for. I can assure you as someone who still travels this road, you will be surprised at what you find. It ends up being something completely different that what you first came to the dojo for.

My Quest For a Hakama

Shodan Essay by
Jose Colon



My interest in the martial arts began at the age of 10 when I started training in karate at the Academy of Koeikan Karate in Clifton, New Jersey. The school was traditionally Japanese and I became enveloped not only by the culture and the art form, but by the self-discipline that seemingly had been missing from my life. I continued training in the art up through my college years but stopped when I moved to Los Angeles to study law. While in law school, I taught self-defense classes at UCLA but my individual training was sporadic at best and I often longed for the regimented training that I had once received.

Several years ago, I went on a quest looking for a dojo to continue my study of martial arts. After

visiting several karate dojos in the greater Los Angeles area, I became increasingly disillusioned by what I found - tradition and discipline had given way to the all-mighty dollar. It seemed as promotions bore a strong correlation to the size of an individual's contractual commitment to a school. Ostensibly, senseis were no longer interested in teaching for the love of the art as they freely dispensed black belts to undeserving individuals who lauded the color of their obi more than the art itself.

Just as I was about to give up my pursuit for the model dojo, I came across Aikido-Ai by pure happenstance. I had decided to take up kick boxing just to get the exercise I needed when I spotted the Aikido Ai sign through the schools back door. It must have been fate. Immediately upon entering the dojo for the very first time, I knew that I had found what I had been looking for. I sat and observed in silence while Roger Shannon taught what I thought was a magical class. This was my introduction to the art of aikido. On February 25, 1999, I became a member of the Aikido Ai family and began my training in earnest.

Even though I have been studying aikido for almost seven years now, I still have difficulty in explaining it to someone who has never experienced it. I use to find myself summarily defining it as the art practiced by Steven Segal. Everyone seems to grasp this. However, aikido is so much more. I no longer see aikido as merely a martial art but as an examination of human form and

existence. It is a study of life itself. Physically, it is the study of the intricate movements of the human body-the relative effect of one's body against other bodies in motion. To the serious practitioner, he IS the center of the universe and, thus metaphysically and spiritually, aikido becomes the study of human existence in relation to nature and to the world around us. As a practical matter, aikido is often a refuge from the grind and stresses of daily life.

Today, I am a 1st kyu or shodan ho. My search for the perfect dojo has ended and rank has become less important to me--almost an afterthought. My goal in aikido has become divergent-it is to earn the privilege to wear a hakama. I bear no illusions that the hakama will exponentially increase my abilities to move or perform with perfect fluidity. To me, the hakama embodies the heart and spirit of aikido as well as its strength, and its elegance. Indeed, my quest for the hakama signifies the search for the true meaning and understanding of aikido.

Currently, I am training for my black-belt exam to be held this coming Saturday. While I am nervous at the thought of being at center stage, I approach my promotional test as each day passes with less trepidation because I know

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2005: The Year

In Review

The Aikido Ai Holiday Arts & Crafts Show

By Suzette Hodnett



The Aikido Ai Holiday Arts and Crafts Show is yet another example of the true meaning of Aikido Ai in action -- a community of people uniting together in the path of love and harmony! Jason and Suzette conducted the orchestra, but it took each and everyone in the dojo to make the show a symphony of enthusiasm and success.

The planning had been happening for months. The artists of Aikido Ai were at home letting their creative juices flow. The children were attending weekly art sessions to create items to sell. Posters were taped to the windows of countless agreeable businesses uptown. Silent auction items were received from dojo members, their family and friends, and local businesses. Elegant pedestals were borrowed from Hillcrest Community Church, sanded and painted. Signs were made. A blueprint for the evening was created and many "to do" lists were written.

The night before volunteers began the show set up and turned the deck into an intimate and enticing amphitheater. The next morning classes were canceled but people appeared and, without hesitation, helped with all -- balloons, signs, prices, food, lifting, and cleaning. Enthusiasm and excitement filled the air. When the doors opened at 4pm, Sat., November 12th, the dojo had been transformed into a lively

and elegant arts and craft show.

Fine arts and crafts - paintings, photography, jewelry, stained glass, mixed media, homemade candles/soap, and more - graced over half the mat. Many customers commented on how surprised and impressed they were with the quality of the art.

The kids sold their creations. Their beaming and enthusiastic smiles melted the hearts and pocketbooks of the crowds. When the night was over their booth alone had raised more than \$1200.

A red runner down the side of the mat marked the Silent Auction. Throughout the night people perused a wide array of art, massage



certificates, clothing and holiday gifts. Bids as high as \$1400 were made and some items had people lightheartedly "warring" for the highest amount.

Music filled the deck. George Wheeler and his soothing saxophone quartet began the evening. A drumming group then uplifted the crowds and young and old played along with extra instruments. Sal Crachiolla and his trio, including dojo member and wife, Melanie, won the audience over with their blend of Latin jazz.

There indeed was a smorgasbord for everyone's pleasure. The dojo came through once again on its reputation for providing an amazing array of food and desserts. The smell of the

barbecue lured people into the food tent and Wayne, with a smile on his face, kept those burgers grilling all night long.

There was something for everyone. Kids could have their faces painted



with many designs and Japanese kanji's. In a separate room, Erika Rose supervised as they created their own place mats, hats, and banners.

The ambiance was upbeat, warm and inviting. Many customers commented on what a friendly and welcoming group we were and how they felt right at home. What more could we ask for?

When the night was over and the money counted we had cleared six thousand two hundred and four dollars! More than our greatest expectation.

Thanks to everyone who contributed to the show's overwhelming success. It took all of us giving in our own special way to pull off such a big event. A special thanks to the children of Aikido Ai whose enthusiasm, hard work, and contagious energy added so much to the show.

We are off to a grand start. 2006 here we come. Bring on the seminars, the training, the fun and the memories.

And the 2nd Annual Aikido Ai Holiday Arts & Crafts Fair?

The Children of Aikido Ai

By Erika Rose

The Little Drummer Boy traveled a long way to pay homage to the newborn baby. But he could not afford to buy a gift as splendid as those carried by the three wise men.

However, the gift he gave was worthy of kings. He played his drum. He demonstrated his love and dedication with his talent and his art. It was in this tradition that the children of Aikido Ai contributed to the success of our first fundraiser. So often the children are overlooked, well, because they are little. We do not look to them for monetary donations, we do not look to them to carry the heavy stuff, and we do not look to them for ideas, even though sometimes, they have the most brilliant ideas.

Three different nights the children stayed after class to make the arts and crafts. They designed beautiful pots disguised as penholders that had pens blooming like flowers. Grandiose ornaments were colored for the traditional Christmas tree. Our biggest success, however, were the fantastic holiday cards. These surpassed any design that I saw this year at any greeting card store. Everyone at the dojo had a favorite. I could not decide between the smiley reindeer holding a candy cane or the various snowmen that graced the snowy scenes.

The children worked hard in demonstrating their love and dedication to Aikido Ai. The dojo gives us all so much. This was their opportunity to give back to the dojo with their talent and their art. Many of our members will have magnificent souvenirs from that night. I know that I will bear with me the pride of having worked with such marvelous children. Their month long efforts raised over \$1000. Perhaps we should look more to the children of Aikido Ai.

Paul Mendez: I liked being able to make stuff out of my own imagination. My art was good! It was cool that I was selling my own artwork and people were buying it.

Daniel: It was fun to work with watercolors. I'd never done that before. It was fun doing art with my friends from the aikido class. People were actually buying a bunch of the stuff that we made!

Elizabeth: I liked seeing the creativity in everybody. It was cool raising \$ \$ for the dojo. I sold a lot that night. It surprised me how great all the artwork was.

Piff: It was just fun to be creative. And fun to do it with my friends. I was jealous of some of their artwork I was a good saleswoman the night of the show. We made a lot of money for the dojo.

Anselm: It was great helping earn 1200 for Aikido Ai. I liked being able to lie down, relax and draw whatever I wanted as long as it wasn't violent. I was surprised. I didn't think the artwork would get that much attention from the buyers. I'd like to do the sessions again.

Sophie: What I liked best was everyone's enthusiasm and wanting to help and wanting to make it a really good art show. It was really fun because there were a lot of people that really liked the art and paid a lot of money to buy it. Let's definitely have more arts session. It made me feel very talented that people wanted to buy my art!

Emilie: I liked making the bookmarks and using the glitter. It was fun selling all our art at the show and cool that so many people bought our stuff.

Anthony: I was proud. I was excited.

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I was happy. I liked making the art. I felt so good that people wanted to buy it!

Allen: I like making art. I liked best that we got to do it however we wanted. It was cool that it sold. It made me feel like I did a good job.

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w that I am only a beginner and that the future holds a vast array of new techniques and knowledge. I look forward to the next forty years as I begin to understand this gentle art.

Interview with Jose Colon—Shodan

Questions by Sensei Frank Mc Gouirk



1) You have been active in Martial Arts for over 30 years. How does it feel to be a beginning student after seven years of Aiki training?

If one would have asked me this question 25 years ago, I believe that my answer would have been wrapped in arrogance, believing that a “black belt” made me an expert. This arrogance has given way to humility now knowing that Aikido, like any other martial art, should be viewed and experienced as a life-long journey without an end.

When I was actively training in Karate, I was good at techniques, *katas* (forms) and *kumite* (sparring) but I never really understood or gave much thought to the intricate movements that made Karate an effective martial art. As strange as it may sound, it wasn't until I started training in Aikido that I began to grasp an understanding of the movements in Karate—an art form that while different from Aikido is, in a basic sense, the same. I believe that

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Recent Dan & Kyu Promotions



Jose Colon—Shodan



Lin-Su - 2nd Kyu



Juanita Guterrez - 6th Kyu-

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this was the first time that, even though I had formally studied Karate for 10 years and had practiced it for many years thereafter, I realized that I was merely a beginner.

This realization has given way to a new-founded resolve that no matter how long I train in Aikido, I will always be a beginner—never mastering the art and always learning not only from Senseis but from white belts alike. Throughout my training in Aikido, I've been humbled into learning that while I know a lot, I really know nothing. This is a dichotomy can seemingly only be understood by one going the same training.

2) *Aikido is a wide and vast art. What aspect of it is most important to you?*

This is a rather difficult question to answer because I often have a hard time separating Aikido from Aikido Ai. Certainly, the relationships that I have formed with other students have added to my Aikido training. To this end, Aikido for me is as much taking *ukemi* from Sensei as it is enjoying a cup of coffee at Mimos with John and Wayne after a Friday night class. If one accepts the premise that Aikido is a life-long journey, then one would have to agree that a dojo and its members become an integral part of that journey – a factor that cannot be easily isolated from the art form itself. My interaction with others both on and off the mat is most important to me.

3) *What advice do you have for a beginning student?*

Be patient! Aikido can be very frustrating at times. Some days I get on the mat and I am full of energy and seem to have an ability to flow effortlessly. More often than not, however, I feel like a square peg taking simple *ukemi*. This is true even after seven years of training!

If one consistently trains in Aikido and gives it time to develop, one will “get it”. The caveat of course is that after one “gets it” frustration soon

thereafter sets in again when one discovers that “one really knows nothing”! Be patient!

4) *What advice do you have for the advanced students and for Aikido Senseis?*

When I started to advance from 2nd to 1st *kyu*, I began to realize that, short of seeing one or two black belts on the mat, I was one of the highest ranking students in the dojo left. It seemed like we had lost a lot of upper ranking students over the last several years. For a while, my training felt stagnant because I could not consistently get the “advanced” training that I thought I needed. During this past year, however, we have had several black belts join the dojo and Sensei has returned to the mat with much determination and vigor. As a consequence, the dynamic of the dojo has changed exponentially. There is a lot more energy and excitement on the mat.

I don't know whether I can offer any real advice to others who have trained decades more than I but, given the above, I would like to see more of the advance students training consistently and sharing all that they have learned with the rest of us. To this end I offer my two cents worth: “Get back on the mat and help us train.”

5) *I know you to be a man of humble beginnings and big accomplishments. You are an Ivy League graduate, a professional public defender, pilot, skier, world traveler, sportsman, a great Salsa Dancer and now an Aikido Yodan-sha. What is the secret of your success and tell us one thing that we don't know about you?*

As the saying goes, “No man is an Island” and when I look back at my youth, growing up in the East Coast, and I look at myself today, I recognize that the environment that my parents created for me which fostered a strong education ethic and a great sense of self-worth has been the single greatest factor in my life

or, as you put it, the secret to my success. Everything else stems from a belief that life is wonderful and that every minute has to be lived as if it were going to be the last. I believe that as long as there are places to visit, people to meet, and things to accomplish, there will always be a reason to live. Success cannot be quantified and should not be defined monetarily. Living life to the fullest without regrets is how I define success. It's no secret. It's a choice.

As for that one thing that you don't know about me – it's a secret!

Up Against the Wall of “Don’t Know”

By Lin Su



The audience was sitting on the edge of their seats... er, cushions... during the fascinating talks presented by Zen Master Jibong and Senior Dharma Teacher Bridget Duff on Tuesday evening, November 8. The dojo was transformed into a Zen dharma room with stacks of cushions on the mat, and the overflow of guests sat on benches around the edges. Sensei Frank and some long-time students know Zen Master Jibong from his years of teaching aikido, tai chi and Zen at the dojo. But this was the first time most of the audience got to bring their questions to a true Zen master’s dharma talk.

The first talk was by Senior Dharma Teacher Bridget Duff. She is one of Zen Master Jibong’s senior students with nearly 20 years of practice, and before that she studied with and served other great teachers, including J. Krishnamurti and the great Zen Master Seung Sahn.

Bridget asked the audience, “What is love?” She suggested that one way to answer the question is to identify all the things it is not. To guide listeners’ understanding, Bridget told true, dramatic stories that sounded like award-winning Hollywood movies. The entire audience followed every plot turn and surprise. She involved everyone’s hearts and minds to find their own ideas about love and living.

Zen Master Jibong offered another approach to Zen. Jibong-sonsa spoke calmly, looking and sounding like the university professor that he is. He began by asking if anyone had any questions. Rather than a canned presentation, Jibong-sonsa addressed whatever was on people’s minds in that very moment.

Jibong-sonsa is a master at helping listeners learn Zen mind. He guided their questions and answers by drawing comparisons between the martial arts of aikido and tai chi with the discipline of Zen. He told classic Zen stories that demonstrated how people throughout the centuries have had the same problems with confusing their thinking and the real world. The question always comes back to, “Who am I?” At some point, no more words come to mind with a ready, rote answer.

While Bridget’s talk evoked the audience’s emotions and amazement to help them with Zen questions, Zen Master Jibong’s talk led us with examples and illustrations to bring us around, again and again, to the point of “don’t know.” As always, his Zen talk planted the seeds for more contemplation, questions and learning.

The evening provided plenty of entertainment as well as education. Before the Zen talks, Sensei Frank spoke about the dojo’s disciplines of aikido, tai chi and Zen, using combat tai chi demos by senior tai chi students as illustrations of nonverbal connection and communication. And after the talks, volunteers invited everyone to enjoy cheese, crackers, cookies and other snacks and drinks. Of course, nothing gets people talking like free food – and the conversations and laughter continued for a long time into the evening.

Are you interested in learning more? Zen Master Jibong and Sensei Frank started the Aikido Ai Zen group years ago, and dojo members and outside guests are invited to attend the weekly one-hour sessions on Wednesdays at 4:30 p.m.

Sensei Frank and the entire dojo membership once again thank Zen Master Jibong and Bridget Duff for graciously taking time on Election night to come talk with us. We look forward to our next opportunity to sit with you again.

25th Anniversary Kick-Off Seminar and Potluck Enjoyed By All

By Suzette Hodnett



It was only fitting that our own beloved Sensei Mc Gouirk baptized our 2006 Seminar-A-Month Series by teaching a two-hour Tai Chi Combat Workshop on Saturday, January 7th. There was great energy and camaraderie on the mat as both Aikido and Tai Chi students trained together. We are blessed with a dojo that offers the arts of Aikido, Tai Chi, Zen and Qigong. We are also blessed with a Sensei who is a master at blending the principles of both arts in his teaching.

During the first hour McGouirk Sensei focused on Push Hands, a two-person cooperative exercise working with the Tai Chi principles of yin and yang. Sensei showed the

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application of the movements, making them come to life using the principles of both Tai Chi and Aikido. While Tai Chi students are used to moving from empty to full, Aikido's main principle is the extension of ki. Nevertheless, many of the Aikido students seemed to easily connect with slowness, softness and flexibility, looking like naturals on the mat. Tai Chi students watched in amazement as the Aikido students seemed to quickly learn what it had taken them months to absorb.

During the 2nd hour Sensei introduced the Dui Lien, a two-person kata using many of the moves from the Tai Chi form. Again he demonstrated the applications of each move.

Aikido and Tai Chi students had another opportunity to connect and move with each other.

Mc Gouirk Sensei introduced the first half of the form. This was a huge amount to swallow but, again, the Aikido students learned quickly and with great understanding of the moves.

After the seminar many Tai chi students shared how they had great respect for the Aikido students who emptied themselves of their past training in order to fill their cups with some Tai Chi. Everyone seemed to agree that it would be fun to have more of a mix of students in the Tai Chi Combat class on Tuesday nights. A special guest for the seminar was Nancy Parker. On the mend from a few falls this year, Nancy will soon be leaving us to live closer to family in Pennsylvania. Although Nancy needed to sit in her wheelchair on the

sidelines during the seminar, her spirit was as strong as ever. Nancy Parker has been an integral and inspirational part of our dojo for over 20 years. She is a Certified Second Level Chi-lel Instructor and her commitment to Qigong is unwavering. Her humility, strength, grace and generosity of spirit has been a blessing to all of us at the dojo.

After class, Sensei invited her onto the mat and she spoke about the many gifts that Aikido Ai has given her throughout the years. Sensei led us in a healing circle and the entire group sent their loving energy to her. An appreciation dinner is scheduled for Thursday, January 19th, at 7pm



honor her before she leaves for Pennsylvania. It is only "good-bye for now" though as we expect her to come visit!



Following the seminar, everyone joined together out on the deck for a potluck and barbecue. Once again we all enjoyed an amazing smorgasbord of food and a lot of laughs.

Next seminar is Peter Ralston on January 20-22nd. SOLD OUT!

Peter will introduce us to the principles of Cheng Hsin and the art of effortless power.

2006 here we come!



Something to Share?



Submit articles or questions to The Aikido Eye (MS Word/handwritten). Send to:

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Thanks!

COMMENTS FROM THE COORDINATOR

2006 is a very special year for Aikido Ai. Twenty Five Years in Whittier and to celebrate this great event, we are hosting a number of great seminars with Sifu, Sensei's and Shihans from Aikido and the Tai Chi arts.

What make this great is the seminars with well known high ranking sensei's and sifu's are, via the generous efforts and hard work of the committee and students, free! You just need to come to the dojo, train and help us celebrate. When this vision began, Sensei stated his goal was to have a year to celebrate this event and not impact the Tai Chi and Aikido community. He wanted free seminars and it happened.

So check the seminar calendar, block out the dates and help us celebrate and honor Sensei and Aikido Ai for 25 years of generous teaching and sharing.

Louis Celaya