

TACOMA AIKIKAI JOURNAL

OPENING

Volume 2, No. 1

January 2022



INSIDE

OPENING TO AN UNCERTAIN TIME, Liese Klein Sensei	3
WHEN CLOSING IS OPENING, Erin Joosse	4
WALKING IN OPEN, Ea Murphy	5
KANGEIKO 2021, Allison Muir	7
BEING OPEN TO WHO YOU TRAIN WITH, Kris Allott.	8
INTERVIEW WITH ERIC GILLET SENSEI	9
AIKIDO DEMONSTRATION, Olav Mergenthal	12
SUMMER CAMP REPORT, Leif Jorgensen	13
GASSHUKU REPORT, Vagrant Cascadian	13
THE TRAVEL EMAIL, A FAMILY TRADITION, Beth Kuwahara	14
GASSHUKU PORK ROAST, Chris Franks	17

Cover Art: Photograph from Tacoma Aikikai's Kagamibiraki celebration. Mochi courtesy of Rev. Koyama and the Tacoma Buddhist Temple. *Kagamibiraki ~ opening the mirror.*

EDITOR'S NOTE

ALLISON MUIR

My perception of openness keeps shifting between frustration and celebration, struggle and relief, uncertainty and hope. However, as I work on final edits for this issue, my attention has settled on "opening to grace," a central teaching of yoga introduced to me during my teacher training. Greeting each moment, no matter how difficult, with an open heart is a vulnerable place. Softening into that space despite the instinct to resist does not come easily. "Opening to grace" is a difficult teaching to grasp, yet the articles in this journal encourage us to keep reaching for it. A highlight in producing this issue was the opportunity to interview Eric Sensei, to see the sparkle in his eye as he spoke about his teachers and shared his joy in training. To me, his explanation of the transmission of Aikido through connection embodies the principle of "opening to grace."

Ea Sensei and I are deeply grateful for each contribution to this journal. Despite the complexity of our current lives, dojo members of all ages were open to sharing their experiences. We appreciate Vagrant Cascadian from Two Rivers Aikikai for sharing his reflection on Gasshuku. We are also honored and thankful to have the voices of Liese Klein Sensei, Chief Instructor of New Haven Aikikai, and Erin Joosse included. Beyond being a mentor yoga teacher to me, Erin and the Source Yoga community in North Tacoma, are a big source of inspiration and support for Tacoma Aikikai. With this journal comes heartfelt gratitude for our teachers and for our teachers' teachers. As we continue to navigate uncertain times, may we remain receptive to their teachings, open to learning over time with practice and grace. △

OPENING TO AN UNCERTAIN TIME

LIESE KLEIN SENSEI (NEW HAVEN AIKIKAI)

How can you open when you never closed? And how can you close when you never really opened? Those thoughts occur to me when I look out over the mat at my dojo, New Haven Aikikai.

I write this in the midst of a second Covid outbreak. Often, lately, the mat is empty as our classes switch to Zoom and students stay home.

We did have a few months of returning to near normal, but now in many ways, we are closed again.

Yet the training never stops. We are exploring different Aikido weapons traditions in Zoom class and new ways of moving in the dojo. We are practicing solo movements taken from Tai Chi and Original Strength and turning partner forms like Sansho into solo exercises. Iaido continues as usual, a small but dedicated crew practicing solo sword forms codified in other uncertain times. A group of kids are working toward their junior black belts, honing their technique on their siblings and pod-mates.

Together, me and a core of serious students are working to keep our community together.

....

Together and apart.

Open and closed.

Empty and full.

Solo and partnered.

Add these to the many dualities present in Aikido practice, the seeming opposites that make this practice so interesting.

In my training with Chiba Sensei in San Diego, the duality most familiar to me was relaxation and tension. Chiba Sensei would beautifully embody this duality when he would scream at the top of his lungs to a flustered student: "RELAX!"

How exactly was that relaxation supposed to work? Did Sensei realize how impossible it was to obey his command? Was that part of the koan?

Another was violence and nonviolence, seeming opposites that were present in nearly every moment of training. "Open" and "closed" were also present in a different form as students struggled to stay open to the training while keeping some things closed, their psychological core intact.

If I learned anything in San Diego, it was to embrace contradictions and dualities, to live with conflict rather than try to resolve everything or turn everything out into a compromise.

From clashing opposites come sparks.

....

For the past two years I kept printing out new signs for the door of New Haven Aikikai, a new schedule every month or so to reflect our increasing in-person class hours and decreasing Zoom class hours.

A few weeks ago, I took down the schedule and decided to wait a bit before posting a new one. That space on the door has remained empty into the New Year.

One thing I didn't stint on this year was holiday lights, string after string of LEDs draped across the windows in blue, orange, purple, red and white, all set on timers and smart plugs. Every evening they come on as it gets dark, beaming a riot of colors into the chilly darkness of a city block. I've decided to keep them up for a while.

The mat may be empty, but the windows are full of hope for the future.

We are mostly closed, but still open. Δ



Liese Klein Sensei is the Chief Instructor of New Haven Aikikai, who energized us with her classes when she visited Tacoma Aikikai this past summer and continually inspires us with her passionate dojo. She is the author of Demon Dojo: An Aikido Adventure and The Life-Giving Sword: Kazuo Chiba's Life in Aikido.

WHEN CLOSING IS OPENING

ERIN JOOSSE



This summer, as the world was beginning to open after more than a year in some degree of closure, I made the decision to close one of the two locations of my business.

I've been a small business owner for more than 16 years, opening Source Yoga in Tacoma's North End in 2005, the year before my son Liam came into the world. I opened a second studio in University Place in 2011, the same week my daughter was born.

For 15 years, my whole world was about growth. Growing a family, growing a fledgling business, growing myself, growing what I thought I was capable of. I was growing my capacity as a mom, of what I could hold, how I could build and grow and support my family. I was growing my capacity to hold the space for groups of people I was teaching – holding space for them to explore their inner world through yoga and meditation. I was growing my ability to hold the larger community of teachers, staff, and students at Source Yoga.

I made mistakes. I worked hard to learn from them. There were moments when I couldn't seem to hold it all. But I kept opening myself - expanding more of what I was able to do and hold and be. For years, I kept opening myself to hold more and more and more, kept widening my mind and my heart and my arms to support more than I thought I could.

Then a virus changed our world.

I have to be honest, the overnight shutdown of everything was a relief to me. It was like a big sigh, a cultural pause. Finally, I could set down some of what I was carrying. There was a part of me that felt like I could finally rest. I could have lived in that liminal space for a long time – that space in between life as we once knew it and the new world that hadn't yet emerged.

And blessedly, the vaccine came, protecting so many that were vulnerable, and the world began to open. We began to see friends and family we hadn't seen in so long, we started doing more, we shrugged off the constriction of a year and a half of our shrunken world and began to cautiously wonder if we were making our way past Covid-19, or at least finding our way into a "new normal." We didn't know then that we were just in the middle, not the end of this pandemic. But we celebrated - we opened our doors, our businesses, our homes, our hearts.

But I felt stuck.

For weeks, I felt a tight knot of anxiety in my belly. I felt restricted and closed. I didn't want to go back to the world as it was, but I couldn't see a clear path forward to a new one.

Then, the spark of an idea.

Maybe I didn't have to keep expanding. Perhaps I didn't have to keep widening my arms, my heart to hold it all. Perhaps I could hold less. Maybe I could put down some of the weight and find more space to hold myself. Maybe I could let myself be held.

There was something there that felt right.

And I chose. I chose to close half of my business. At the risk of disappointing people. At the risk of losing some of what I had built over many years. I chose myself. I chose things being simpler, being lighter.

I chose closing.

And what happened when I chose? The knot in my belly loosened immediately.

I felt spaciousness rush into the place that had felt constricted.

I felt an opening.

I felt held and loved and supported by the many people I had held and loved and supported. I felt their sadness,

but also their understanding.

And now, there are the doings of closing. Moving furniture and shutting off utilities and negotiating the end of a lease and communicating all the things that need to be said. It's work but there is ease and rightness in the work.

I don't know exactly what lies ahead – none of us do.

But I feel open. △

WALKING IN OPEN

EA MURPHY

Open your hand; open your chest; open to the encounter; open your heart.

When the Tacoma Aikikai Journal came out this past April, our collective spirits soared. After a long year of isolation and constant adaptation, we made it. At the confluence of the vaccines and warmer weather, every new-old moment felt like the first. There was elation in seeing each other's faces, grabbing a wrist, or hugging a friend. At the same time, it all felt so viscerally...weird.

Along with the physical opening of indoor spaces, another opening was taking place. Contracted lockdown muscles stretched and expanded. We remembered how to give and take. We learned again the balance of time and space. We left the house more often. We took long, deep (masked) breaths as we entered crowds and the frenzy of pre-post-pandemic schedules. Shedding our pandemic skins was so new, so exciting, and so...vulnerable.

In that ecstatic spring, what better choice for the theme of the next journal than, "opening".

With smoke threatening to thicken the air, we packed up for the unknown in late August. Transporting the dojo to the Gifford-Pinchot for the Gasshuku Retreat, we were transported as well. So many firsts as we cooked, ate, and unmasked outdoors. This communion together felt deep and healing. As bodies relaxed and hearts were soothed, the opening was palpable. More could come in and more could go out. Our aikido breathed and flexed into this expansion.

Guard your openings; don't be open; don't walk into the opening.

Erin Joosse is a yoga and meditation teacher, local business owner, and mom. She has been exploring mindful practices for almost 30 years. She is a part of the Tacoma Aikikai community through her child Liam, a 15-year old who has been practicing Aikido for 2 years. She is grateful to Ea Sensei and Eric Sensei for keeping the community of the dojo so vibrant throughout the pandemic

On the way home from the Gasshuku, we turned on the radio. Despite fearless optimism, uncertainty is really the only constant. Something like the Delta variant was bound to crop up. Once again, our expansion was tempered with guard and caution. Once again, we learned about dropping fear but staying practical. Could the dojo stay open? Could we see our families? What would come next? The feeling in the dojo mirrored that in the nation. After such an optimistic opening, the contraction felt like a hard fall. We were open to the hit.



I raise to strike yokomen, my foot steps in a fraction of time before my arm falls. Sensei's fist in my face a course correction back to the mat.

Openness is essential for aikido practice. Openings can be dangerous points of non-awareness. This year of re-opening has led us down the same knife-edge of receptivity and vulnerability that we walk in our aikido practice. The expansion of opening feels so promising, and so frightfully...open.

Why is this so uncomfortable?

This moment of awareness is a gift. One response to feeling this vulnerability is to contract. This happens reflexively. We close what opened and hunker down. We clench for the fight and tense for the punch. We might flee to close an opening with distance and isolation.

Aikido teaches a third approach. When we throw or take ukemi, opening is not an abstract concept. It's a conscious intention sent to every muscle, fiber, and bone. In opening our hands, we fill them with energy. In opening our chest or hips, we offer movement to shoulders, legs and all the joints beyond. In opening our minds, we drop what holds us fixed in place – our expectations, desires, and even this moment in time. In opening to this vulnerability, we can truly receive. In receiving, we can truly respond. This is a freedom worth touching.

Who is uke and who is nage? When the unexpected happens, we take ukemi. When the unexpected grabs, we redirect. We practice walking into danger with openness. We practice protecting our openings with movement. We practice and practice, because the conscious embodiment and awareness that is openness is just that hard.

We all have our own recipe to find and practice in this place. I breathe in. I breathe out. I drop my center. I drop my shoulders. I let my chest warm and grow, melting to the tips of my fingers and toes. Body relaxed, I extend through my hands. In my imagination, every movement is its own being, born exactly in the moment of its creation.

And so, we continue. As Covid and the variants further complicate our lives and fill our news feeds, we practice. Sometimes, I catch myself clenched in the moment – trying so hard to hold onto the course I planned to take. I long for the expansion and growth that comes with seminars and travel. I count the days until we can move regionally, nationally, and internationally to train without caution or protocols. I dearly wish for Tacoma

Aikikai members to experience the connection and evolution that comes with opening to new dojos, training partners, and experiences. And I can forget to see that this same opening is happening all around us, all the time.

If I can recognize a closed door, I can try to open it. Obviously, maintaining an open and responsive attitude towards this pandemic is impossible. There is frustration, anger, fear, and grief that all take us away from this present moment. But I can practice opening my hand. I can practice opening my shoulder. I can practice softening my knees and opening my hips. Sometimes, I am even open and vulnerable enough to truly see my partner. And when I'm done with this practice and go back to daily life, I find it much easier to breathe in and breathe out, to notice where I am, and to respond to what is. Δ



Wayfinding on Skyline Ridge in the Olympic National Forest



KANGEIKO 2021

ALLISON MUIR

"All the principles of heaven and earth are living inside you. Life itself is truth, and this will never change. Everything in heaven and earth breathes. Breath is the thread that ties creation together." - Morihei Ueshiba

Darker, colder days urge us to discover light and strength within. This is Winter's gift. Beneath snow-covered branches, Nature offers hope in the green needles of the Douglas fir and the second-by-second return of the sun after solstice. Low temperatures allow us to actually "see" our breath, to witness the continuous cycle of inhale and exhale, evidence of our interconnection. For many, winter is a season of generosity, reflection on the past year, and a time to sow seeds of aspiration for the year to come.

In Japanese martial arts traditions, Kangeiko is an intensive mid-winter training usually held in the early morning during the coldest part of the day. Practicing in extreme natural conditions is an opportunity to build mental discipline and set a powerful tone for our training throughout the year. It also reminds us that we are profoundly connected to the flow of seasons and to our environment.

Tacoma Aikikai's 2021 Kangeiko took place from January 25th to the 30th. Beyond our regular evening schedule, we met every morning virtually or in the dojo at 6 a.m. to sit zazen, followed by a 7 a.m. hour training at Franklin Park. Because of the pandemic and the need for social distancing, we focused our park practice on

weapons. Kangeiko concluded on Saturday with a two-hour weapons intensive at Point Defiance Park.

In her weekly dojo email, Ea Sensei encouraged dojo members to participate in Kangeiko 2021 in whatever capacity possible. "Wherever you are in training, Kangeiko is an opportunity to challenge yourself and set new patterns for the New Year of training. Can you train everyday, can you train morning and evening, can you commit to one new practice that you carry through the week?" I took this as an invitation to commit to deepening my training in the upcoming year. My goals for the week were to sit zazen every morning, attend the daily morning park sessions, and participate in the weapons intensive.

I live about 20 minutes from the dojo, so to make zazen, especially in potentially icy driving conditions, I had to leave my house no later than 5:30 a.m. The first morning was the most challenging. Despite the illusion of warmth presented by the candles near my zafu, it was freezing in the dojo, and I found it challenging to focus on anything but my numbed toes. I was relieved after our first sit when Ea Sensei informed me that it was acceptable to wear a scarf and gloves and bring a blanket to wrap around my bare feet.

Each morning my sit was different; sometimes it was peaceful and the forty-five minutes flew by, while other times my discomfort seemed to last an eternity. The only constant was the opportunity to be with my breath, and as the week went on, I noticed "being with my breath" carried me through the rest of my day.

The transition from zazen in the dojo to training in the park was joyous. I looked forward to moving my body and to discovering who would be present in class to share the sunrise over the trees. It made me happy to greet friends from the dojo in their colorful winter hats and mittens. We started each class with 108 suburi cuts, connecting our feet to the frozen earth, moving from our center to reach the sky, building heat from the inside out. Each cut acknowledged the thread between us and solidified our commitment to training. Whether we practiced with bokken or jyo, morning practices were full of enthusiasm, challenge, and celebration. By the time we met for the weapons intensive on Saturday, I felt focused and eager to go deeper into the techniques we worked on throughout the week. Surrounded by trees with a beautiful view of the Puget

Sound, the weapons intensive at Point Defiance Park was the perfect culmination to an invigorating and rewarding week.

Intensive mid-winter training helped me establish a routine and mindset that I carried with me through 2021. It showed me the positive impact of daily practice and of setting and meeting personal goals. Ultimately, the immersive experience of Kangeiko pushed me to discover my edges and to be open to exploring beyond them, reminding me that our training is as much an internal practice as it is an external one. △

BEING OPEN TO WHO YOU TRAIN WITH

KRIS ALLOTT

Since moving to the northwest in 1996, the practice of Aikido has filled my free time. Over the years, many people have asked me, "I want to do a martial art. How do I know which one to pick?" My response is generally to watch a couple of classes with the Sensei of the dojo. You have to really like the Sensei. The Sensei sets the tone for the dojo. Second, you want to look to see if anyone is over the age of 35 years old. If everybody is in their twenties and often men, they are probably using a lot of force and are prone to many injuries. By the time you're 35-years-old, you can no longer afford people not taking care of your body, and you move on. Third, are there any women on the mat? Is there more than one? For men and women to train together, they both have to shed some cultural norms. Often, women have to learn to hit someone, and men have to learn to "lose" to a woman. But sometimes, it is a lot more subtle and more complicated than that.

The last thing you want to consider before starting a martial art is, are you open to running into yourself? I ran into myself the first time I stepped on the mat.

"I am not doing it right"

"That is not what the Sensei showed"

"Focus! You need to do it, right"

How could I expect myself to know anything during that first day, first beginner series, first year? My inner critic was brutal. I tolerated her in life because I thought she was helping me. But on the mat, where my ability to do something 'correctly' was not attached to a grade, income, or love, I began to see that she was actually making all my attempts at tenkan, rolling, and, whatever ikkyo was, so much worse! She harped in my ear all the time,



"Why can't you do better?"

"You should quit because nobody wants to train with someone so bad."

.... Did you catch that last one? My inner critic wanted me to not try, not learn, not grow, not do something new. She believes whatever I do, it is not good enough. Now I know that the inner critic is a bi-product of neurobiology. However, learning the science, does not change the exhausting inner experience. The cool thing is as I ran into myself over and over again on the mat, the internal dialog became more familiar and almost funny as I moved through my life from starting a business, getting married, raising teenagers, and recovering from a traumatic brain injury. By learning to be open to all of me, I learned more about what I need to move forward in my life.

For me, training is being open to the experiences on the mat, which helps me be open to the experiences of life. This cannot happen in any dojo, and not all dojos are open to people learning about themselves. I feel blessed that my first Sensei, Kimberly Richardson at Two Cranes Aikido, gave me a place and a community to learn and grow while I was in Seattle.

I feel doubly blessed to train with Tacoma Aikikai. Ea Sensei and Eric Sensei are kind, are openly curious about their students, have an amazing weapons practice with classes filled with students that express the diversity of Tacoma. Additionally, I am grateful to have a place to practice running into myself over and over so that I can remain open to myself and the people I train with, on and off the mat. △

INTERVIEW WITH ERIC GILLET SENSEI

WITH ALLISON MUIR, NOVEMBER 2022

When did you first become interested in Aikido and how long have you been training?

I started training 30 years ago in Belgium. When I was a student at the university I wanted to start Kendo, but I was too poor to buy the armor. So, a friend of mine said that I should do Aikido, as it comes from the sword. I started there with Louis Van Thieghem Sensei. At the time in Belgium, if you were training, it was basically twice a week in a sports or community center or something like that, so to participate more than twice a week, you needed to go to another dojo. At the time, Louis Van Thieghem Sensei was also traveling to other places, so I was with him and I started to learn from different teachers. Sugano Sensei was in Belgium then as well. He didn't have a dojo but he visited every dojo from the ACBA Federation throughout the year. Tamura Sensei was in France, and Christian Tissier Sensei was just coming back to France after being at Hombu Dojo for many years.



So that's when I started. In Europe, we were pretty lucky, as we were seeing a lot of Japanese Shihan. When I started Aikido, Louis Van Thieghem Sensei was a yudansha, but at this time people who were kyu grade were also teaching because there was nobody else. Jean De Dobbeleer Sensei, who is considered as one of the main pioneers in Belgium, was the first person I practiced with. We saw people like Tamura Sensei, Asai Sensei, Kanetsuka Sensei. There were also international visitors, with

Doshu, Yamaguchi Sensei, Yamada Sensei, Kobayashi Sensei, Endo Sensei, Shibata Sensei, Yokota Sensei were coming to Europe. Saito Sensei even came one time for a seminar in Brussels. I wasn't able to go - what a missed opportunity!

When did you know that Aikido was a path you wanted to continue?

I don't know exactly. I enjoyed training and kept going more and more often. I took the initiative to go to different dojos. It came slowly, but I started training 4 or 5 times a week. So, I don't know if there was really a specific moment. I just was doing it more and more. I started to travel outside Europe, and I was doing interviews about Aikido when I visited other places. I interviewed Aikido teachers in the Ivory Coast, Mali, Morocco, Israel, Panama, Poland, and so on. It allowed me to blend travel and training. It was a way to meet other people in other countries.

In the nineties, I learned that Shibata Sensei was moving from Japan to Berkeley, California. At this time I decided that I would try to go to see him and train at his dojo. I had already met him during a seminar in Holland and when I visited Hombu Dojo. I was hitchhiking up from Central America to San Francisco, when I arrived in San Diego. I went to Chiba Sensei's dojo [in San Diego], and I asked if I could train, but they said the dojo was closed because of summer camp. I was like "oh no! how much will that cost?" Because, you know, the monthly fee to do Aikido in Europe was like \$10 or \$20, and in the US it was not the same. In Europe sports and arts are heavily funded by the state. It's a completely different system. In Europe, dojos can rent space inexpensively from the city. In some parts of Canada it is also like that. They just rent from the city and there are no overhead costs. I went to the summer camp and Shibata Sensei was there. I drove back with members from Berkeley Aikikai, and asked Shibata Sensei if I could stay there at the dojo. First, he said no, but later, he let me sleep at the dojo for a few weeks. I came back and stayed for a month, and then again for 3 months, and after that I stayed for more than a decade. The condi-

tions to stay were pretty simple. Do all of the classes and take care of the dojo. At the time, there was one other person staying there, and we stayed above the changing room in a storage space. We had sleeping bags, and that's where we slept. Later there was some remodeling and I had a room.

Who are your inspirations? Who have been your guides?

Shibata Sensei, of course. There is also Chiba Sensei and Yamaguchi Sensei, even though I saw Yamaguchi Sensei just a few times. There are other people who are inspiring. Someone like Osawa Sensei who is coming regularly to Victoria, Canada and is the son of the late Kisaburo Osawa. It's pretty amazing for this opportunity so close to us. And Endo Sensei...When he is practicing, he is in a position where he has so many options and the uke has so few. That's very inspiring. Sometimes you can be inspired by people who are very different from who you see regularly because they offer another perspective to Aikido. And, of course, I am inspired by Doshu.

Have you seen Tada Sensei and his demonstration at 92 years old? It is such a gift to be able to see his practice. Similarly, Gloria Nomura Sensei is in her 80s and still on the mat.

Recently, I've been able to train with Mike Flynn Sensei who teaches Aikido, as well as laido, and was kenshusei adviser during my time in Berkeley

I also get a lot of inspiration from Aikido Kyoto and the instruction of Yoko Okamoto Sensei and Chris Mulligan Sensei. The first time I met Yoko Sensei, I was still in Berkeley. A few years ago, she mentioned that the joy of practice is so important. She's able to spread that joy, and if there was not this pandemic, I would see her more often.

As a dojo, we want to be able to expose students to a variety of teachers. Seminars are good for different things.

As a dojo, we want to be able to expose students to a variety of teachers. Seminars are good for different things. On the one hand, you see other teachers, but you also see other students. You can practice with new people and see what they do; how they see and transmit Aikido.

On the one hand, you see other teachers, but you also see other students. You can practice with new people and see what they do; how they see and transmit Aikido. We want to bring a mix of teachers, both older and younger. We also want our students to go to seminars in other dojos because you get to experience the teacher, but also the students who have studied with that teacher, sometimes for a long time. We want to encourage students to visit these spaces.

Are there specific moments in your Aikido experience that you want to highlight?

My time at Berkeley Aikikai was very important. I am deeply thankful to Shibata Sensei and the students there, as well as to those Berkeley Aikikai teachers and students who made it possible for him to move to the USA.

The connection between the students in a dojo can be very strong. We hope for those kinds of connections to grow within the dojo here. It's awesome for us. We love it. We cannot speak for the students, but we hope that the students love it. It's a sacred or special place. A place where we want people to feel safe and a place where we can learn more about Aikido.

What keeps you training?

I enjoy it. I love to be on the mat and to throw and be thrown, as Isaac wrote in his poem in the last journal

How has teaching changed your practice or deepened your training?

It's difficult to say if it has deepened my training because I'm biased. Hopefully someone from the outside would see that. I'm lucky because Ea Sensei and I are still both training at the same time as we are teaching, which I

think is really good. It's always difficult to imagine what something is bringing you because you don't know if something else is correlated to it. That's the question with evolution: was there evolution only in one spot or was there evolution around the same time in different spots? It's the same idea. When you are a student you look at your teacher demonstrate, and you try to replicate it as best as you can. When you are teaching, you have to try to show a technique to other people. Because we are a young dojo, there are young students who are just starting, so you never know what they will be doing. For some reason, they don't always do what you want them to do (laughs). You have to be with them in that moment. It helps us to find the complements of different techniques. Some techniques will happen and some will not happen because you have to react differently because of the positioning of the student and ourselves. At this time, the technique shows up rather than me showing a technique.

Sometimes, there are things that are happening from seeds that were planted from the time I was at Berkeley Aikikai. Our actions are in the immediate moment, though we do not know if or when those seeds we are transmitting will take root.

Was there a specific moment when you knew you wanted to run your own dojo?

When I met Ea. Ea Sensei was starting a dojo from zero. It's not easy to do this. When you start from scratch you need to do everything, whether you like it or not, and to learn new skills. Like having to work with the city for permits, develop the space, recruit students, build the community and, for the past 2 years, blend to a pandemic.

What do you enjoy about running a dojo and teaching Aikido?

First, it's being able to practice. That's awesome. Watching the students enjoy the practice, too. The joy of the people and also sharing the skill and tradition of Aikido. We want to be able to take our students to Japan to practice, while understanding the culture of the place where Aikido is born.

Do you have advice for someone who wants to start their own dojo?

Speak to other people, because every dojo is so specific, depending on the situation, and because it takes so many different skills. That is one of our strengths - Ea Sensei and I (and the TA members) all bring different skills to the dojo. Communicate with your teacher and with other people who have opened a dojo. Love your students.

What are some of the things you are looking most forward to in the next few years for the dojo?

The next big step is really leaving our day jobs and running a full-time dojo. To be able to do Aikido and focus on growing the dojo and spreading Aikido. We want to be able to invite more teachers. We want to be able to go to different seminars because you transmit and learn Aikido through practice.

Do you have plans to travel in the next few years?

We had planned to go to Japan four times over the past year but it didn't happen (laughs). We have now to see where and when we can travel and also when seminars are back.

Did you start laido at the same time you started Aikido?

No, I started when I was traveling. I was in Montreal and training with Claude Berthiaume Sensei, and I started laido with him. When I came to Berkeley Aikikai, laido was part of the teaching there and I kept training. laido is the art of drawing the sword. Aikido



comes from the sword so that's the relationship. There is also the concept in Iaido that you have to draw with one hand, and you keep the other hand on your scabbard. The left hand really gives the direction of the sword, and the other is more relaxed. You can apply that concept to Aikido as well. Working with one hand that is softer and the other is more powerful is helpful in Aikido. The timing is also something you can apply in Aikido - to wait to move until you get contact.

Is there anything else you would like to add?

I see the technique in Aikido as $1 + 1 = 2$. So tori is one and uke is one. Both are doing an action and being one as best they can. The result of tori's action/behavior and uke makes two. The beauty is the connection between them.

I think it's very important to train thinking that your opponent is stronger than you, and also to train with people that are not only more powerful, but also very different. See what openings there are; see and respond to the openings presented in the moment. Sandoval Sensei was very powerful. One hit from him and that is pretty much it, but Sandoval Sensei was able to bring

fluidity and softness to his Aikido. We train our eyes and our sensitivity to feel the partner. It's not only important to look at the teacher demonstrating the technique, but also the person who is uke to see how they act and the situation they are in.

Aikido is about training the mind, too. At the dojo, there is a student in his sixties who 6 months ago couldn't sit in seiza and was getting stiffer. He has changed so much. He is now one of the most flexible students at the dojo not only physically speaking, but also in his mind. He sees the possibility. His posture is improving and he is able to take again some rolling ukemi. A lot of the time, flexibility is in our mind, being able to move and not be stuck. You have to feel the partner. In that connection there is something that makes more sense - that is more alive. As a teacher, we can see these changes in our students, but students can see changes in their teachers, too, because our understanding of Aikido is always evolving, and developing. Δ

AIKIDO DEMONSTRATION

OLAV MERGENTHAL

On September 2, 2021, there was an event at the Tacoma Historical Society to celebrate the opening of a new exhibit, "Bridging Cultures and Hidden Treasures: The History of Tacoma's Sister Cities and Ports." As part of the event, there was a focus on Kitakyushu, Japan, which was Tacoma's first sister city. The evening was an exploration of the history of the cities' connection and Japanese cultural links. After Mayor Victoria Woodards welcomed everyone, there were speakers who covered the history of Japanese immigrants in Tacoma and the current status of port relations. The evening also featured talks and demonstrations of Japanese culture, including Aikido.

I was honored to participate in Tacoma Aikikai's demonstration. Ea Sensei gave the audience descriptions and context for Aikido, and then several members of the dojo, myself included, performed different techniques for the audience to view. First, Liam [Joosse] and I did

ikkyo and a couple other basic techniques. Then, the adults showcased several more advanced techniques, as well as use of weaponry. The audience seemed very intrigued by our performance. At the end of the night there was a selection of Japanese snacks (very good, I might add!). Δ



SUMMER CAMP REPORT

LEIF JORGENSEN



Aikido Summer Camp was one of my favorite weeks of the summer. I loved playing lots of games with friends! My favorite game was smashing the watermelon. It was so satisfying. I loved learning new Aikido techniques from Ea and Eric Sensei. Each day there were different stations to practice techniques. It was fun but also hard work. Ea and Eric Sensei always make everyone feel welcome. They are fun but also have firm expectations of the students which makes learning easier. I can't wait for summer camp next year. I hope to make new friends, spend time with old ones, and learn new skills while having a blast.

This past summer I also attended Gasshuku Summer Retreat in Gifford-Pinchot Forest with my mom and members of the dojo. Some people slept in the dorms

but we slept in a tent. It felt peaceful with the crickets creaking. We had different training sessions each morning and afternoon. My favorite class was weapons! I was the youngest person at the retreat so I had a lot of opportunities to learn from the older kids and adults. I learned a lot of new techniques. It was very hot but there was a river nearby and everyone would go to the river in the afternoon to cool off. The water felt refreshing after training hard in the heat. For meals, everyone shared in the responsibility of cooking and cleaning and meals were eaten outside together. The meals were delicious and the company was even better. I'm looking forward to going there again next year!



GASSHUKU REPORT

VAGRANT CASCADIAN (TWO RIVERS AIKIKAI)

It felt really fortunate to be able to join Tacoma Aikikai's Gasshuku this summer and meet many of you to share our practice of Aikido. At Two Rivers Aikikai, we had just started "regular" practice at our dojo a bit earlier in the year, and I was eager to get back into a full practicing



schedule, including visiting with other dojo communities.

Yet... I personally always get a bit nervous about visiting a new dojo community. Will there be huge differences in style? Will I understand the names of the techniques? How will my ukemi hold up? Will the warm-ups leave me confused before class has even "really" started?

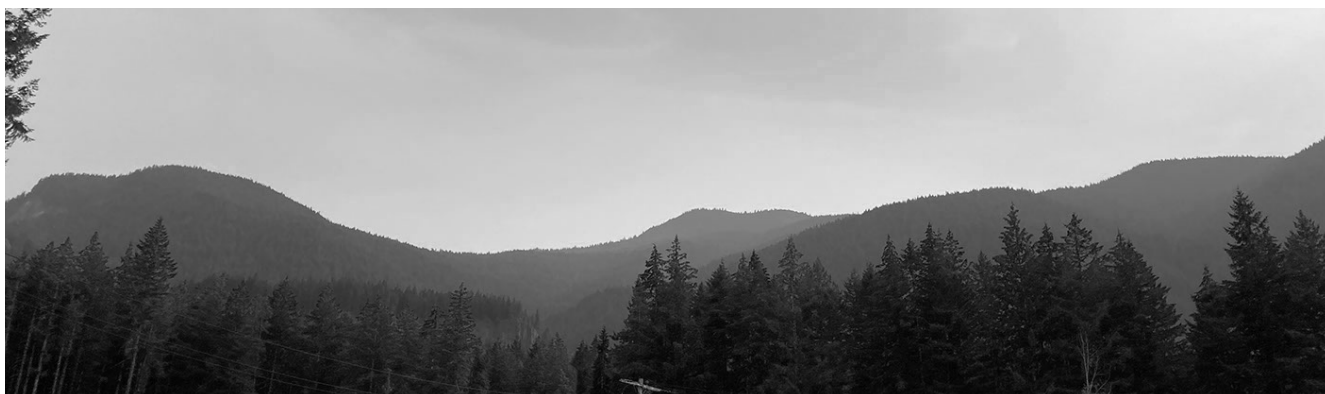
Practicing consistently with your own dojo community and building rapport with the individual community members is very important; a huge part of my progress has been due to showing up regularly and sticking with it. At the same time, there is great value in changing things up a bit and pushing the boundaries of your comfort zones. When you practice with different people, you get opportunities to explore, both literally and figuratively, different angles on your aikido. What works with one person may require adjustments with some-

one else; experimenting and playing with those differences can be more informing than demonstrating a technique solidly. Despite the challenges, this is what I love about visiting other dojos!

Of course, Tacoma Aikikai is a welcoming community, so despite my initial nervousness, it was a wonderful experience! Wonderful not just because we were practicing aikido outdoors in the fresh air... on some of the

hottest days on record... but because the community worked together to create a great space, making and sharing great food, coming together to share responsibilities and distribute the work. Building community can happen both on and off the mat, and this was a great example of both!

Thanks for welcoming me to the Gasshuku this past summer! Δ



GASSHUKU 2021

THE TRAVEL EMAIL, A FAMILY TRADITION

BETH KUWAHARA

Years ago, after my parents retired and began to travel for leisure my father would send emails to keep the family apprised of what they were doing and seeing. The email missives would arrive every day or two and were about what they ate or any unusual encounter they experienced that day. Sometimes, the emails would teach small lessons; when you each order a beer in Japan and they arrive at your table in 1L bottles, you don't have to drink it all; if you hear loud protesting and see smoke in Korea, you can duck into a local shop to avoid the tear gas; or my personal favorite, if someone tries to grab your bag in Spain, aim for the kneecap.

Once I began to travel, I started to send these emails home as well. For me, they are a great way to remember the small moments that can sometimes get lost during a long trip. They also remind me how much like my dad I've become and that makes me happy. Here's the "travel email" for Tacoma Aikikai Gasshuku 2021.

Day 1

We've been prepping for Gasshuku all week and have a pile of crates and bins ready to load into the car. Chris and I both worked for a few hours Friday morning but

headed over to the dojo to help load the mats into the big van that Ea Sensei and Eric Sensei rented. Thankfully there were several people helping, so we were able to get a good rhythm going and everything was packed up in no time. After getting back home and loading everything into our car, we were off to the foothills of Mt. Rainier.

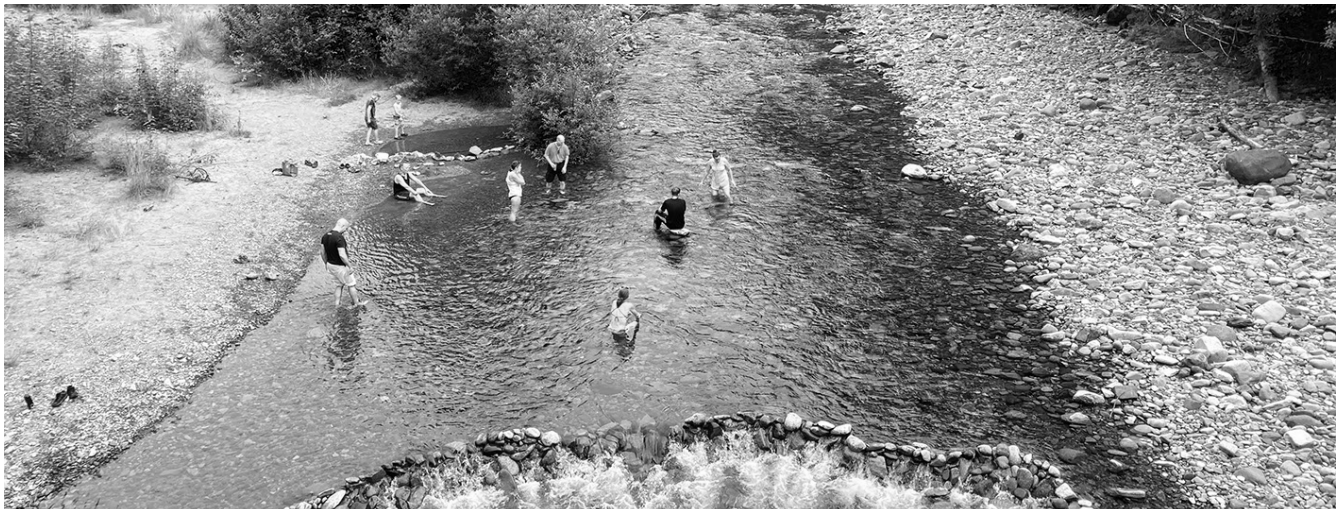
Randal is a tiny little blip on the map on highway 12 just past Morton, and the Cispus Learning Center is just beyond Randal. It's a former Civilian Conservation Corps camp that was established in the early 1930's as part of the New Deal. The 68-acre campus is out in the middle of the woods where instead of names the roads have numbers. Once we passed Morton and took a right on to Forest Road #23, our cell service started to cut out and the satellite radio got spotty (all those trees). This Gasshuku was going to be a chance to move from the digital world back into the analog one, and I for one was ready for it.

The drive out to Morton was beautiful. Chris and I stopped in Morton to get a quick lunch at the Morton Loggers Jubilee, which was just getting started; we missed the lawnmower races but did get a tasty corn dog and some ice cream. Just as we were pulling out of Morton, we spotted the rental van with Ea and Eric Senseis. This was a fortunate turn of events as the GPS gave up on us toward the end of the drive. I've neglect-

ed to mention one small detail that you should keep in mind for the entire Gasshuku weekend. IT WAS HOT! Temperatures for the weekend were forecast into the high 90s, and we were going to an old camp/learning center where there was no air conditioning. We arrived and along with several others helped unload the van. Again, there were enough of us that getting the mats unloaded was a simple task. Before you knew it, we had a mini dojo setup and ready in the covered pavilion.

Opening practice started at 6:00 PM. Holy cow was it hot! Since we are still in these pandemic times, masks were worn when practicing together. I think we were all sweating before we were even done warming up.

summer camp, a big rectangular building split at the middle with half a dozen shower stalls for either side (one male and the other female) and 4 sinks with bathrooms. Then on each end of the rectangle were large open rooms with bunk beds that would sleep maybe 24 on each side. There were also “counselor” rooms that had two beds and a desk. We had the forethought to bring a few room and window fans, which helped immeasurably once it was time to go to sleep. Sleeping away from home is difficult for me in general but when it’s 90 degrees at 9:30 at night, it’s even worse. Once the sun set and the air began to cool, the fans began to work their magic and sleep was achieved.



We had a large mixed group for practice, kids, teens, adults, a few people from Two Rivers Aikikai in Portland and Mallory Sensei from Seattle Aikikai arrived in time for dinner. After so many months of either weapons work, practicing at distance, or not practicing at all, it was fabulous to be able to work together again. The evening practice was a short one and then we set up for dinner. Meals were communal and everyone either helped prep, clean or brought food. Eric had prepped two wonderful chilis for the first night and there was corn bread, salad, and dessert. We still have late sunsets in August, so there was plenty of evening left after dinner to relax and chat. Small groups formed as they will, and kids ran around in the field next to the pavilion playing tag in the low light and setting out on the traditional Snipe hunt. Good meal, good people, good location, good evening.

Chris and I had opted for the dorms for our overnight accommodation. They were... rustic. Think middle school

Day 2

For the early risers in the group there was Zazen before breakfast. I've heard it is a lovely way to start the day. After tea and a light breakfast, it was time for morning practice. The air had cooled somewhat overnight, so it was wonderful for body work. The larger groups that we get during seminars or outings like these are such a gift. I appreciate the ability to practice with so many different skill levels and body types.

After morning practice and a quick lunch (soba and sandwiches), a big group ran off to the nearby Yellow-jacket Creek for a dip in the icy glacier run off. The creek was a refreshing break from the overbearing heat, and everyone came back cooled off and ready for an afternoon of weapons work. We managed to find some shade for weapons and with our youngest participant (8-years old) helping to demonstrate, everyone got some practice with the bokken.

We ended the day with a dinner of pork roast, Japanese curry, and ratatouille, with salad and sides. There were also more tasty desserts (that lemon cake was just the best?) and more late-night chatting by candlelight. We were again off to bed while it was still quite warm. During the night the winds changed, and Sunday morning was a cool respite from the heat of previous days.

Day 3

Zazen practice was held early for those who were so inclined. Another breakfast was quickly consumed, with thanks to Eric Sensei and Ea Sensei for all the eggs. Then, back to the mat.

With regard for all the aching muscles, Mallory Sensei started the day with yoga practice. The expansion of breath and body in the morning

was an enjoyable change from the more active aspects of the weekend. Once we all had a good stretch though, it was back to body work. Reminders during the practice of meeting your partner, keeping connection, and flowing down, back, and around, all called back to techniques from earlier in the weekend. I find echoes of these reminders in my practice even now, and I'm sure they will continue to resonate for years to come.

Time flies when you're practicing aikido, and before we knew it, we were making lunch. After a quick debate/

sniff test, it was decided that lunch would NOT include the pot of chili leftover from Friday evening that had somehow been left outside the coolers. Those who had not made the trek to Yellowjacket Creek on Saturday were sent off to experience the icy waters. Once the K.P. was completed though, almost everyone else followed down to the creek for a dip.

For some, it was time to clean up the dorms and pack

up cars for the journey home. For a small group of brave souls, however, the weekend's excitement wasn't over yet. Did I mention that there was a zipline? A ZIPLINE!! Once we put on our helmets, harnesses, and had a quick safety briefing, it was a quick hike to the 75-yard gravity zipline. In no time at all, we were running like lunatics off the edge of a very steep

hill, each participant showing off their unique grace and style. All too soon it was time to stop running around like a kid and head home. The weekend was a fantastic mix of activity, relaxation, and new experiences. For me Gasshuku was like an aikido seminar, but with the additional shared experiences of a mini summer camp. I never went to summer camp as a kid; it might be a good idea to start adding it to the calendar as an adult. Save the date: June 17-20, Gasshuku 2022. △



SAVE THE DATE

JUNE 17-20

GASSHUKU 2022

Randle, Washington

GASSHUKU PORK ROAST

CHRIS FRANKS

EQUIPMENT

- A sharp chef's knife
- Paper towels
- Large, disposable foil roasting pan or a large baking dish
- 2 small bowls
- Plastic wrap
- Traeger pellet grill - fruit or hickory wood pellets / Charcoal / Propane
- Oven / Crock Pot
- Probe meat thermometer
- A spray bottle
- Clean cutting board
- Aluminum foil
- 2 large forks for shredding or meat claws

INGREDIENTS

**Because we were a larger group, I nearly doubled this recipe*

- 8 pound bone-in pork shoulder roast, trimmed of most fat (leave about ¼ inch on for flavor)
- 5 TBS wet yellow mustard (enough to cover entire roast)
- 2 TBS blackstrap molasses

Dry Rub – You can substitute your favorite rub

- ¼ cup packed brown sugar
 - 3 TBS coarse sea salt
 - 2 TBS paprika
 - 1 TBS onion powder
 - 1 TBS garlic powder
 - 1 TBS freshly ground black pepper
 - ½ tsp ground cayenne pepper
- Unfiltered apple cider vinegar (ACV) in a spray bottle
 - 1 TBS liquid smoke (optional)

INSTRUCTIONS

Place the roast on a clean cutting board. If your butcher has not trimmed the fat cap, use your sharp knife to trim most of the fat off, leaving a ¼ inch thick layer. Rinse the trimmed roast under cold running water and pat completely dry with plenty of paper towels. Place the roast inside a roasting pan or large baking dish.

In a small bowl, whisk together the mustard and molasses.

In another bowl, combine all the dried spices.

Using your hands (use gloves if you want to keep your

hands clean), rub the entire roast well with the mustard and molasses to coat. Generously apply the dry rub, pressing it into the mustard and molasses, to completely cover the shoulder.

Cover the pan tightly with plastic wrap. Place the pan in the refrigerator for 8 to 12 hours, or overnight, up to a few days.

45 to 60 minutes before you preheat the grill, remove the roast from the refrigerator so that it can come to room temperature. After it has rested for an hour, remove the wrap and discard all the accumulated liquid in the bottom of the pan. Thoroughly wash or discard the pan after the roast goes on the grill.

(NEXT STEP IS SPECIFIC TO TRAEGER GRILL)

Fill the hopper with wood pellets. Line the drip tray with aluminum foil for easier cleanup. Turn the smoker on with the top open until a flame is established, approximately 5 minutes. Close the grill top and set the temperature to 225°F. Allow the grill to heat up for 10 to 15 minutes. Be mindful that you may have to put more pellets in the hopper throughout the day, so check for smoke approximately every 2 hours.

If using charcoal or gas grill, bring it up to 225°F

Place the roast on the largest rack of the smoker/grill. It is possible that you will have to remove the upper rack so it will fit.

Insert the attached probe thermometer in the thickest portion of the shoulder or use a standard food thermometer.

Close the top and cook slowly for approximately 8 hours.

Every 2 hours, spray some apple cider vinegar on the roast to moisten it. It is okay to rotate the roast to get at all sides.

At 8 hours, check the internal temperature of the meat with the thermometer. You are looking for 190°F or even a little higher. You also want a caramelized exterior or shell, fondly referred to as the bark.

Remove the cooked roast to a clean cutting board and cover with foil until it is cool enough to handle. This may take up to an hour. You want to be able to remove the bone without burning yourself. Once the pork has cooled enough to touch, remove the bone, and shred the meat into thin strands using meat shredding claws or forks to pull the meat apart. △

UPCOMING EVENTS

KANGEIKO WINTER INTENSIVE

JANUARY 18-22, 2022

DOJO MOVIE NIGHT

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 12, 2022 @7PM

LEAP NIGHT / PARENTS NIGHT OUT

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 26 @5-10PM

SEMINAR WITH CHRIS MULLIGAN SHIHAN AT TACOMA AIKIKAI

MARCH 11-13, 2022

GASSHUKU SUMMER RETREAT

JUNE 17-20, 2022 @CISPSUS LEARNING CENTER

YOUTH SUMMER CAMPS

SESSION I: SUPERHEROES - JULY 19-21, 2022 | SESSION 2: LIGHT SABERS - AUGUST 16-18, 2022

TEEN (12+) SUMMER CAMPS

JULY 12-14, 2022 (ADVANCED) | AUGUST 23-25, 2022 (BEGINNERS)



Tacoma Aikikai

2502 S. 12TH ST
TACOMA, WA 98405
www.tacomaaikikai.com

This Journal is Dedicated to

JUN KAWAGUCHI

SEPTEMBER 24, 1980 - SEPTEMBER 11, 2021

January 2022

OPENING
TACOMA AIKIKAI JOURNAL
(C) TACOMA AIKIKAI