

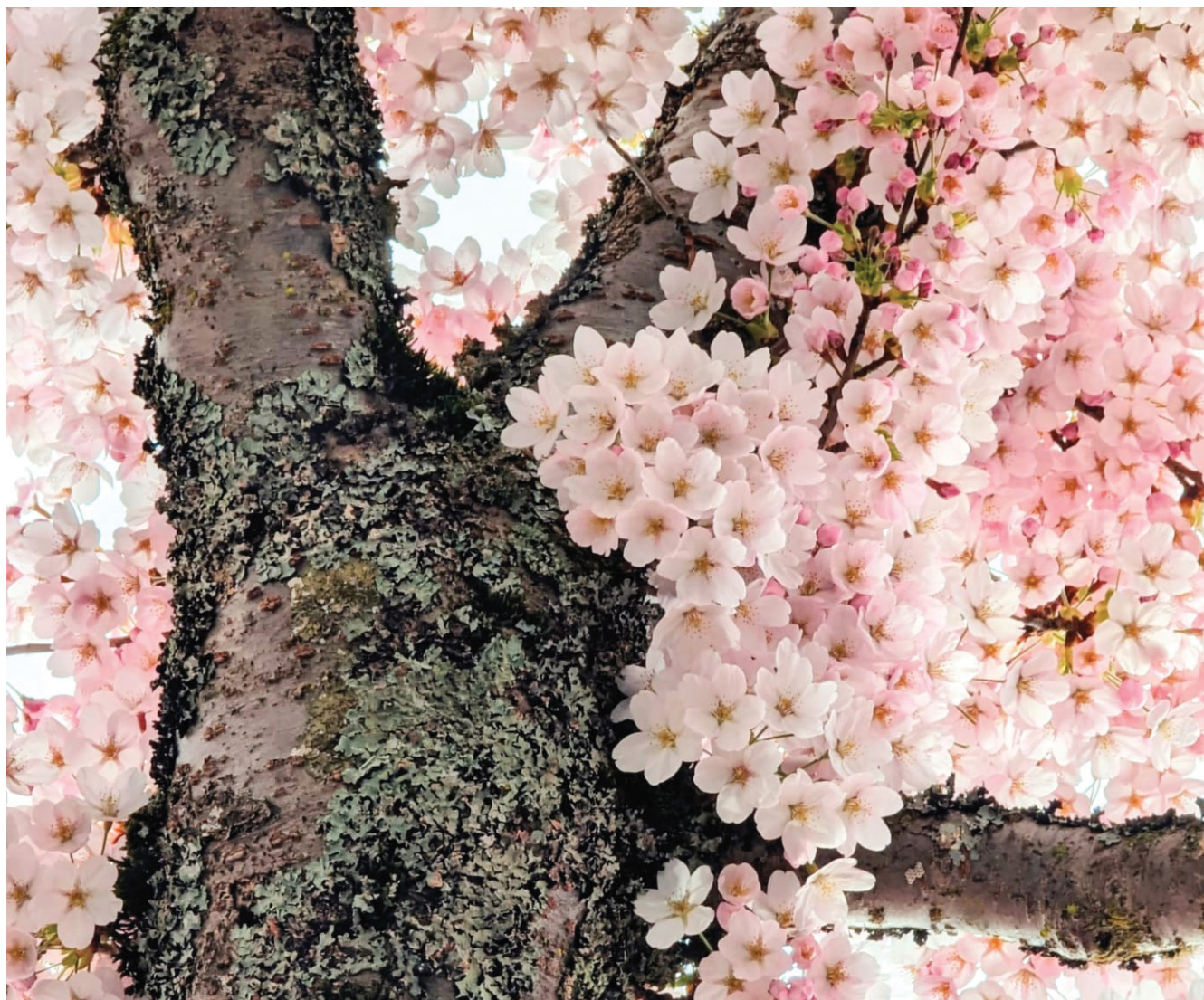
TACOMA AIKIKAI JOURNAL

# COMMUNITY

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**Cover Art:** Cherry blossoms photograph by Tatiana Makovkin of Victoria, Canada

## EDITOR'S NOTE

**ALLISON MUIR**

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Although selecting a theme for our annual journal usually takes some searching, this year's theme, "Community," emerged easily. No other word so perfectly encapsulates 2023, a year when Tacoma Aikikai witnessed many of our collective goals manifest into reality. Through community vision and action, we increased dojo membership, launched a teen leadership program, drafted Tacoma Aikikai's Code of Conduct, expanded Gasshuku, and hosted the first All-Dojo weapons intensive. Beyond celebrating our home dojo's development, articles in this issue describe threads of connection that extend across distance and time, and are shared from person to person, one generation to the next. In these pages, Ea and Diane Deskin Sensei remind us that we are not separate. As we learn to open our eyes in new ways, we "see" that the fire in each of us is fueled by our community. △

## MY FATHER'S AIKIDO

NEIL HORIBE

Tacoma Aikikai introduced Gasshuku as “an intimate setting where we can focus on our training and our relationships, while drawing inspiration from the natural world.” As a new Aikido student, the idea of a full weekend of intensive training with unfamiliar practitioners from around the country was a bit intimidating. I would like to say I would have enthusiastically attended nonetheless, but my participation was guaranteed when I learned a particular black belt was going to travel from his home dojo in Denver to train at Camp Indianola- Nobu Horibe, my father.

I have trained in a few different martial disciplines during my life, but not aikido. I cannot definitively say why; I can only guess that it was some combination of the availability of dojos and an obstinate desire to be “tougher” than my gentle father. Regardless of the reason, it is only now, in my mid-forties, that I begin my training at Tacoma Aikikai. After only a few months of training I heard about Gasshuku and told my father, and he immediately started making plans. I am so very, very, glad he did.

Growing up, my father, like many other fathers, loomed large in the minds of his sons regardless of his physical stature. I remember him being a solid and unmovable figure, quick to smile and slow to anger. As a boy, when I asked about his uncanny balance, he would grin and say that Chicago had made him “tough.” While this is undoubtedly true, I later learned it was perhaps an oversimplification. After being interned by the US government in Arkansas during World War II, my grandparents moved their new family to Chicago and my father was born shortly thereafter. The center of their burgeoning Japanese community was the Buddhist temple, where he began aikido as part of a youth program. My father eventually left Chicago and his study of

aikido went on a long hiatus, but retirement has given him an opportunity to return to his practice with dedicated vigor.

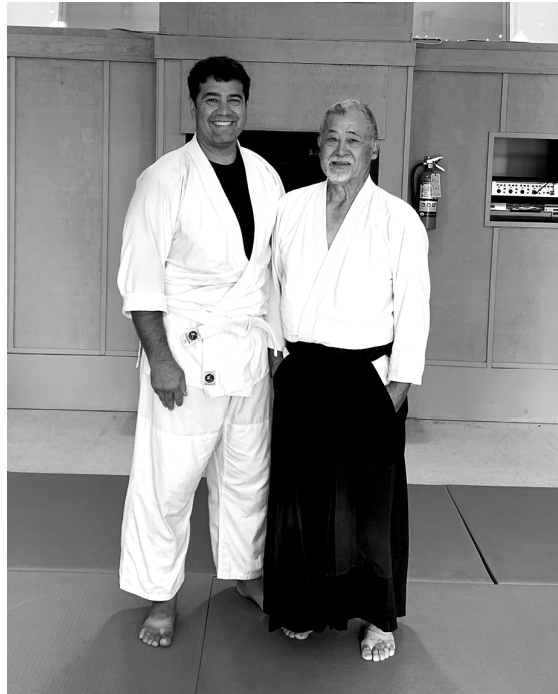
After I entered adulthood, my affection for my father never changed but my perception of him did. The childlike awe evolved into companionable chats about movies, television shows, or sports when I would see him on holidays a couple of times a year. I would ask my mother over the phone how he was doing, and she would tell me how much he loves watching Korean soap operas on a streaming service and listening to books on tape over his Bluetooth hearing aid. In my mind, he became a kind old man quietly smiling while he slowly moved about the humdrum activities of his simple life.

On August 18, 2023, the first day of Gasshuku, my father walked onto the training mat and transformed. Clad in a white gi and black hakama he entered his element. He was no longer quiet, he was focused; he was no longer slow, he was graceful; he was no longer old, he was wise. Over the next few days

I had the pleasure of learning

how he practices aikido, and I will treasure the experience for the rest of my life. The teachers and students from Tacoma Aikikai and the aikido community in attendance welcomed him with warmth and respect, and even after the Gasshuku ended my fellow Tacoma Aikikai students would approach me and tell me how it was an honor to train with him.

Gasshuku, Tacoma Aikikai, and the Birankai community gave me a gift beyond measure. They gave me a chance to view my father through their eyes. They gave me a chance to correct my perceptions and experience awe once again. They gave me a chance to connect with my father as part of an amazing, worldwide community of like-minded martial practitioners. He is an aikidoka, and I am an aikidoka, and now we can journey as students of aikido together.△



*Neil and Nobu on the mat at Gasshuku*

## TRADITION IN A YOUNG ART

FRANCESCO ORTENZO

Jiu-jitsu dates back to the 1530s and Karate came to Okinawa in the 1300s, but Aikido is less than a century old. The Doshu is O Sensei's grandson, putting us in Aikido's third generation. When my daughter joined the kid's class, she ushered in the third generation of Aikido practitioners in my family, as well. Here's our story:

My uncle, Ezio (Ace) Gagliardi, was an 11-year-old in San Francisco when the Green Hornet aired. Bruce Lee (as Kato) impressed Ace with his flashy moves, and so it began. Ace would walk to a nearby Kenpo school and watch classes through the window for as long as his friends would let him. Sadly, there was no room in the budget for classes. It wasn't until his 20's that Ace started Wado-Ryu karate at the Y. He convinced the whole family to join, including my parents. There, he was introduced to Aikido and Judo as well. Later, as his work moved him around the Bay Area, Ace began training with Ki Society schools, and then with Aikikai dojos.

By the late 80's, Ace encouraged me to go to kid's classes. I started and stopped a few times with different programs, but got really interested in high school. I really enjoyed training with the adults, and I absolutely loved the community at the "Skid Row Dojo." To give you some idea, the uchi-deshi would play April Fool's pranks on Jimmy-Sensei, and the toilet had a sticker on it that read "thank you for your deposit." I continued to train over the summers with Ace and Jimmy-Sensei in San Francisco while studying at the University of Puget Sound. After college, I was uchi-deshi for a year, culminating in my shodan test.

## RECONNECTING WITH AIKIDO PAST

CHARLEY EMLET

I began my Aikido journey in January of 1983. I found a flier on the doorstep of my home advertising a new dojo in the town of Benicia, California. The dojo was rented space in an upstairs section of a business building. The dojo was run by Kayla Feder, Sensei. At that point in time, she was quite young (under 20) but already a highly skilled aikidoka. I remember the first month or so considering quitting multiple times as there were so many bumps (square edges) in my rolls. With her help, I persevered and took care of the square

Life then took me to Federal Way, away from a convenient dojo, and the years passed. It was about the start of the pandemic when I first heard about Tacoma Aikikai. Eventually, I joined the outdoor weapons classes, and there was no looking back!

Last January, my oldest daughter, Alessandra, joined me on the mat to continue the tradition. In her own



words, "My Dad inspired me to get into Aikido. When I started to do it, I realized it was really fun! I definitely really like to play Fireball. Besides the games, I really just like the classes. It's like the whole class is a game because you never know what's going to happen next! One other thing is that I like to watch the grownups after the kid's class (when they're not boring)."

Aikido is young, but born of tradition. Ace and I both tested under Hiroshi Kato Sensei, one of O Sensei's pupils. This means my 8-year-old daughter is 3 degrees separated from the founder! And through her, Aikido has truly become a tradition in our family as well. △

parts of my rolls.

Not too long after I began my aikido training, we moved the dojo to the Benicia Arsenal which was a military installation from 1851 to 1964. We reconstructed the inside of the building (if I remember correctly it was the mess hall). We framed the mat area and brought in rubber dust, shoveling it into place and then placing a canvas mat over the top. Aikido of Benicia was Kayla Sensei's first dojo and my aikido home for approximately seven years from 1983-1990, receiving my Shodan from her in 1988. Kayla Sensei has always had a joyousness concerning training and aikido in general,

which helped me develop a wonderful attitude about aikido training. That joyfulness and sense of wonderment in training still exists within her. I kept in contact with Kayla Sensei over the years and when I considered going back to aikido in 2018, I asked for her advice. She encouraged me to go for it, remembering I was older than when I left training and probably needed to make some adjustments. In 2018 I joined Tacoma Aikikai and returned to the mat after nearly 28 years.

This past April, Two Cranes Aikido of Seattle, sponsored a seminar featuring Kayla Sensei, and I was fortunate enough to attend. This event was approximately 40 years after I first stepped on the mat at her dojo in 1983. I had not seen her for more than three decades. In some ways it felt very familiar, comfortable, with her teaching style similar to what I had experienced during most of the 1980s. Yet still, time and training has probably changed us both. She is now a 7th Dan, Shihan and the Dojo Cho of Aikido of Berkeley. Although I have been with Tacoma Aikikai since 2018, my 70 years has affected how I take ukemi and

other ways that I train. It is important to acknowledge that adjustments are always necessary throughout life. Author Jane Hirshfield said that one of the main tenets

of Zen is the understanding that “everything changes”.

This is certainly true of aikido training. Kayla Sensei has evolved in her training and refined her style of teaching and techniques in obvious and not so obvious ways. Still she remains steadfast in her love for aikido and her dedication to the art and sharing her knowledge through her dojo and international seminars. My aikido has evolved

as well and is changing with my aging. She recognized this in the seminar, and we talked about how aikido must evolve within the individual student over time, including physical limitations.

It was a tremendous opportunity to see Kayla Sensei after more than 30 years. We spent some time reminiscing about the old dojo and people, but talked more about training in the here and now and what that entails. It was a wonderful opportunity to

meet her again after all this time and continue to learn from her. △

**Top:** Kayla Sensei and Charley at Aikido of Benicia in the 1980s. **Bottom:** Kayla Sensei, Charley, and Amy in 2023



## KANGEIKO - FIRE IN WINTER

LIANE SPERLICH

It was a week of commitment, a week to set the tone for the new year, 2023. The last time I observed Kangeiko the dojo had outdoor classes, during the early days of the pandemic. It was dark, there was sometimes snow, and all the pleasure of a challenge achieved. This year my overambitious mind called forth an epic samurai's journey, the crucible of warrior training under a winter's waterfall. Of course, Kangeiko was better than expected, unexpected, and beyond expectations.

Each day started with Zazen in the candlelit, January-dark dojo. Ea Sensei had us chant the Heart Sutra,

filling the room with a sonorous swirl of voices. As we began training, the colors of dawn lit up the windows. Movement, building Ki, practice, and intention gave me a deep sense of satisfaction as well as an abundance of energy as I went off to work.

Is Kangeiko a furnace to create raku beauty, or is it simply rubbing two sticks together? Some days, I felt the challenge of even finding those two sticks. One day my epic journey was interrupted by my staff calling in sick, necessitating an early departure from class. My slumbering household had to tend for itself in the morning after my best effort to get everything organized. Leaving my house at 6am and going from the dojo to a ten-hour shift at work was no joke, and I was often scram-

## KANGEIKO, CONTINUED

bling to keep up. Saturday's celebration brought a sincere sense of pride as well as a bit of relief!

As the year rolls on, life is still throwing its punches, and adult life crowds in to throw me off balance at times. I am grateful for the time I spent in January, stoking my spirit in readiness. My intention for the year is set, a candle has been lit, and another year of training continues. △.

## CALLING YOUTH LEADERS 2024 Session

**New Member Orientation  
January 20th**

Contact Ea Sensei to apply

## AIKIDO YOUTH LEADERSHIP PROGRAM - 2023 YEAR IN REVIEW

DANIEL HASSELL, QUINN SLAGLE, RACHEL HASSELL

In 2022 on one dark December night, Ea sensei announced that there was going to be a new program for teens called the Aikido Youth Leadership Program. In the beginning of January a weekly Friday meeting was held. Liam, Quinn, Daniel, Rachel, Drew, Cyrus, Sasha and Ezra attended the meetings. This was the entire leadership group. The group's mission was to learn how to teach new students, lead the class, learn the ways other dojos teach through seminars, and help the community.

In February, the group went on their first seminar field trip to Portland Aikikai. We learned how to train in a small area with 45 people. The trip also brought the group closer together. We also held the first mentoring workshop that month. Around the end of April, Ea and Eric held a Leap Night Party. Few leaders showed up, but it taught the few mentors that patience is key in out-of-control moments.

During the month of May, there was a break in events that allowed the teen leaders to plan their community service project. After some consideration, the group settled on Project Linus. Project Linus is an organization that gives homemade blankets to children in need. In the month of May, the group had created a game plan. The game plan was to find the requirements for the blankets, collect materials,



*Making Blankets to donate at the Project Linus Work Party*



*Teacher training in Calgary*

have a work party, and turn the blankets in at the end of the year. On the second Wednesday of September the leadership group hosted the Project Linus work party after the 4:30 teens class, using materials donated by dojo members. It went from 6:00 to 8:00pm. In total 10 people attended the work party, there was sewing, knitting, and crocheting. We totaled 15 blankets made and donated by the end of December. This project was a success for the group's first service project.

Between Project Linus and the end of the year, there was the 3rd annual Gasshuku, one of the final retreats of the year. The leaders took charge in the kitchen by managing the cooking and cleaning duties. The other main event that the leaders took care of was a surprise party for Eric Sensei's 60th birthday. The final retreat for the youth leaders was the Calgary retreat. The retreat was a unique experience. The days were long and tiring, with not much downtime. This experience taught the mentors who went, Liam, Cyrus, Olav, and Quinn, that teaching is a skill that requires training.

This group really developed people's understanding of the Aikido culture and how deep Aikido can become. It was a great opportunity to get to know the other students, and we all have high hopes for the leadership group in the future. Thank you to all the leadership members and contributors to Project Linus, seminar planners and hosters, and a large thank you to Big Rock Aikikai for inviting Tacoma Aikikai to the Calgary Retreat. △

## FIELD TRIP TO PORTLAND AIKIKAI

LIAM JOOSSE

In March of this year, those of us in the youth leadership program were invited to a conference at Portland Aikikai, and attending it was a wonderful experience. We left Tacoma at 11 AM, and after 3 hours on the road, we arrived in Portland. We took a break for a quick lunch, then started the body arts class.

Portland Aikikai is a slightly smaller space than we have here in Tacoma, and with almost 40 people, (the majority of them sensei) there was not much room. It was led by Chris Mulligan Sensei, who is a Sensei at Aikido Kyoto, in Japan. His teaching style worked well with the cramped room, with him focusing on details in the techniques. Training under him helped me really understand the specifics of several techniques, and how they work, especially Nikyo.

Training with people who were much higher rank than me was a great experience, and I learned not only how



*The Youth Leadership Crew at the Portland Aikikai seminar with Mulligan Sensei.*

to better do techniques, but also good practices to do in aikido in general. The main thing that I got better at doing was responding immediately, as well as doing a technique to its completion, even if it was not the one that I meant to do. The main theme of the conference was self-confidence, which is a skill that is useful in all areas of life, not just aikido.

We trained body arts for 2 hours, although it felt like 30 minutes. I was ready to train more, but after the short break, we got to watch 2 Shodan tests, the first degree of black belt. The people taking the tests were truly very skilled. It was evident in their techniques that they had been training for a very long time. In the end, they both passed their tests, and I could see the re-

lief and happiness on their faces.

And with that, the conference was over. We changed out of our uniforms, we had dinner, and we were back on the road heading home. With the sun setting as we drove, a new era in our aikido training was rising. △

## COMMUNITY FROM THE SIDELINES

ERIN JOOSSE

I'm only peripherally connected to the Tacoma Aikikai community - through my teen, Liam, who has been practicing at the dojo for almost 4 years. It was a bit easier to feel like I, too, was a part of things when I held the role of mom/chauffeur, transporting them to and from, watching some of the classes, going for walks in the neighborhood during the youth sessions, connecting with other parents.

But this summer - as things should be - Liam got their license and has been doing the driving without me. There's some bittersweetness to the loss of that (mostly quiet) time in the car together, and the time I got to greet people in the dojo, but it also feels right, and right on time, that Liam should be experiencing a new level of independence. This independence has coincided with a deepening of their Aikido practice and commit-

ment, which has been beautiful to witness (plus I won't complain about the extra time I got back after letting go of my carpool duty).

I did, however, wrangle my way into joining this August's Gasshuku. I was technically there for my kid, not the Aikido classes, and for a pleasant, summery weekend away. There was resting and reading, hopping in the Puget Sound a couple of times, chatting with some folks I knew, and meeting some genuine and thoughtful new-to-me people. It was dreamy, that quiet spot on the Salish Sea, with a lovely group of people.

Turns out, my kid didn't need me at all, but I delighted in the trueness of the feeling of community that was evident. I came away so in awe of how Ea Sensei and Eric Sensei not just masterfully and patiently teach students in classes, but how dedicated they are to nurturing what Aikido is as an expression of community. From my outsider's eye - one that is welcoming, cooperative, and generous. It left me so grateful that my 17 year old

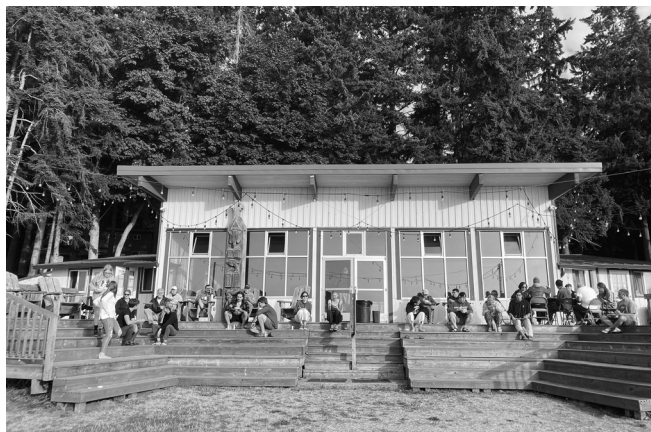
gets to be a part of a group that is so kind, inclusive and joyful. All parents should be so lucky to have their teenager in such a supportive environment.

I was also invited by Ea Sensei to teach a yoga class that weekend (my actual vocation). It was on the morning of the last day, and everyone was quite tired by that point, so I promised those that showed up that we would mostly stay on the ground. It was a gentle, stretchy class, focused on slowing down, breathing fully, bringing awareness to worked muscles and exploring some easy, slow movements.

Here is what I was aware of while I was teaching – how deeply present everyone was in their bodies – how healthy and mobile and strong Aikido has made them. I looked out at the group of students, and I saw a beautiful range of ages, from teens to septuagenarians. Every single student on the mat was present, strong, and deeply embodied. It made me think that Aikido is an art that one can practice one's whole life, and which offers strength and stability as one ages, as well as

fullness of mobility, vitality, connection to others, and a tangible structure of support in the connection with others within the dojo.

Who knows, maybe next year, you will see me on the mat with you? Either way, I feel like I am a part of a beautiful community, even if a bit on the periphery. It was an honor to guide you in some yoga practice, and a true pleasure to connect off the mat. △



*Community meals on the porch at Gasshuku*

## HOLDING MY GROUND

### *Thoughts on the 2023 Self Defense Workshop*

LIANE SPERLICH

I sat with the others in a circle on the floor of the dojo on a Sunday afternoon. Stories rose in the air, one after the other, of people's reasons for attending the self-defense event. Tacoma Aikikai Dojo felt infused with expectation, curiosity, and some trepidation. There were nervous laughs and serious faces, and I acknowledged recognition. I have felt fear when alone on a street, uncertainty when faced with a stranger, and I remember being new to martial arts, when ideas of blows and grabs were so foreign to this piano-playing, ballerina-science major. On this September afternoon we were all going to have some new experiences on the mat.

Our instructors had us practicing with our voices, gestures, and our movements. We trained in breaking free from a grab, shifting weight, and throwing others off balance. We practiced moving with deliberation and making noise, occupying more space and being louder than one might be in average life. The most difficult exercise for me was facing a partner who approached speaking loudly, encroaching on my space. With my gestures and words, I enforced a distance and stopped

the threat. Why was this so hard? I think my society expects me to be understanding and accommodating and does not encourage my voice to be louder than any other. This exercise gave me much to consider. Our instructors advised us that we are worth defending!

I always learn something when I spend time at Tacoma Aikikai. During another exercise involving breaking free of a throttle, I was reminded that every moment can be an aikido moment. I carefully placed my hands on my partner's neck, a very sobering attack for both of us. She successfully broke my hold, taking my balance at the same time. As I catapulted toward the ground, I simultaneously wondered how I could have avoided tripping over her leg, while turning my face to one side and greeting the approaching mat with my forearms. That was one hard, fast fall, and all I could do was laugh. This day's training, along with my aikido journey, has taught me to make noise, to move offline, and to hold my center – or, failing that, to fall safely.

With thanks to my instructors and classmates at the Self Defense Workshop...△

**Coming in 2024**

**SELF-DEFENSE SUNDAYS**

*Last Sunday of Every Month - Jan-June*

## AN INTERVIEW WITH DIANE DESKIN SENSEI

*From October 11-14, Tacoma Aikikai hosted its first All-Dojo Intensive with guest instructor Diane Deskin Sensei from Sonoran Aikikai. The intensive was made possible by a technical committee grant from Birankai North America and free for all Tacoma Aikikai members who could commit to attending most of the classes. It was an incredible experience for all who participated as we went deep into weapons practice with an accomplished practitioner and talented teacher. Beyond the gift of learning from her at the intensive, I am grateful to have had the opportunity to talk with Diane Deskin Sensei and learn more about her personal Aikido journey, her teachers, and her current interests and insights. - Allison Muir*

### **I am curious to hear about your personal journey with Aikido. How did you first get interested and what led you to training?**

I started training in either late December of 1990 or January of 1991 in Santa Fe, New Mexico, with a student of Chiba Sensei's named Rihab Yaqub. She studied in San Diego for about 7 to 10 years before she came to New Mexico. The Santa Fe dojo was small but very interesting, and it has a lot of history. The original Santa Fe dojo was started by Nakazono Sensei, who was a direct student of O'Sensei. He had an acupuncture school in Santa Fe and was an expert on Kototama. In the late 80's, Chiba Sensei asked Ismail Hasan and Rihab Yaqub if they'd be interested in running the Santa Fe dojo. A couple of years later, Ismail returned to San Diego as an Uchi Deshi for Chiba Sensei, and later, he established Aikido of London. Rihab remained in Santa Fe and was running the dojo on her own when I started training.



*Turning up the heat at the first night of the All-Dojo Weapons Intensive*

At that time, I worked in social work and had a very intense job with a program that served Indigenous youth from all over the U.S. serious emotional/behavioral issues, and many had committed crimes on their home reservations. Because reservations are federal land, the youth jumped from a tribal court to a federal court, which is a whole different ball game. I was working in the facilities and was super stressed out. I worked three days on, four days off, four days on, three days off, 24 hours a day. We were

in our twenties and the way that we would deal with the stress was to go out and drink ourselves silly when we got off a shift. Then, before I knew it, my three days were gone, and I was back in that intense environment again. I realized quickly that I needed to find healthier options. I registered for an Aikido class that was taught in the dojo through the community college. I remember literally driving straight from skiing in Telluride to the class in Santa Fe with no idea what I was getting into. I loved it from the very beginning. At that time, ukemi was most appealing to me. I loved being thrown and flying around.

Rihab Sensei ran a full-time dojo, and there were many opportunities for me to train. She was an amazing teacher. She is a smaller woman than me, so her body type wasn't similar, but she had Chiba Sensei's basics in her, just amazingly. I got a foundation that to this day I'm grateful for. It built me from the ground up.

When I went to San Diego, I was preparing for my shodan. My intention was to go for six months. At that same time, my teacher, Rihab, decided she wanted to do a six month training at Mt. Baldy Zen Center. Neither of us came back to Santa Fe. She decided to become a nun, and I ended up staying in San Diego for seven years.

### **Are there other teachers that you consider guides or inspirations through your Aikido journey?**

Rihab was a very big influence on me when I first started, even though physically she was very different. I think often when you're first learning, there are benefits to working with people with body types that are both similar

and different than yours. It really does help, though, if you can watch a body that is similar to yours so that you can see how they move. When I was a young student, I would pay close attention to Lorraine DiAnne Sensei. She had a dojo in Massachusetts, but she was quite connected with Chiba Sensei and very active in the community. We were similar in size. I went to a seminar that she taught in Denver. It was great because it was a small seminar, and I got so much out of it.

When I went to San Diego, of course, there were a lot of Uchi Deshi, like Yahe Sensei, who were very influential for me. Murashige Sensei was a huge influence. I could never copy him because his aikido was so advanced. I had no clue what was going on, but the feel of it was amazing. We were always chasing it, trying to grab it. It wasn't like Chiba Sensei's Aikido, which was built on foundations. With Murashige Sensei, you would just be on the ground, and you had no idea what happened. I was fascinated with him, but I couldn't grasp my own Aikido from him. Whereas with Chiba Sensei, even when it was brutal and harsh, he had a way of teaching that was so clear. I could see everything that was happening, which was really influential for me. Then there were the kenshusei who were there at the same time as me, like Michael Sidebottom, Dave Alonzo, Teru Murashige, Jenny Flower, and Liese Klein, who had a big influence on me, too. There were also many international visitors during those early years who spent extended time training with us who also had a big influence on me.

### **When did you know you wanted to be a teacher?**

I didn't really go into it knowing what I was doing. It just sort of swallowed me up and got me on the path. I was fascinated enough with Aikido that I thought I might be interested in learning enough to teach, but I didn't ever think about opening a dojo until after my first full year in San Diego. That was a wild ride. Sensei was younger. He was difficult, scary, and amazing. It was intense, a pressure cooker. He built that environment on purpose. He wanted to take people to the edge of their limits and let them see that you can go further with a good teacher. Overall, it was probably one of the most influential periods of my life.

### **Do you feel like teaching has influenced your training?**

When I first opened the dojo, I had just come straight out of San Diego, so I was full of fire. Everything that was poured into us was about Aikido in relation to students and bringing up your students, but nothing about what it takes to run a business. I stepped into that naively and was very harsh with my students because that's the environment that I came from. On the mat it was harsh, but when we stepped off the mat, it wasn't that way. If I were to do it today, it would be different. But that's what it was. I'd say the first couple of years, I was so driven by wanting my students to be good and doing what Chiba Sensei would be proud of, that it took the joy out of training for me. It just became an intense job, which isn't sustainable. When that died down a little, I started enjoying my training more.

As I've aged, it's been a more difficult process. I'm through the difficult part now, realizing that the physical demands of training are not where my training is going to be anymore. I can't just push through things like I used to. That's a part of what we were taught in martial arts, but one of the downsides to that is that you can lose the ability to recognize what you're feeling physically because no matter how bad the pain is, you just do it, and deal with it later. Well, that worked in my twenties and thirties, but I'm paying a price for it now. Now my training is more accepting of what I can and can't do and focusing on the things that really interest me.

I'm fascinated with weapons and the relationship between body arts and weapons. I have always been from the beginning, but now I've made the choice that this is where I'm going to put my focus. It doesn't mean that I'm not interested in body arts. It doesn't mean that I don't, of course, see that you can't have Aikido without body arts. But for me, this is where my interest is and I'm going to let myself do that. It's for me now.

When Sensei died, it was a very difficult time, but at the same time, I developed a feeling of freedom in my Aikido. It was as if there was this person that I was modeling myself after for all these years, and I wanted the essence of that to stay, but I didn't feel the same restraint. With the combination of the pandemic and closing



our own physical space after 20 years, which was really tough, I made a decision that I was going to not pretend anymore. I was going to do what I needed to do to make sure my students get the foundation of body arts, but I was also going to put my energy and my interest into taking my weapons as far as I could. That's really what I've been digging into in the last three years.

**The connection between body arts and weapons really came through in the Intensive. Please share more about how weapons training informs our body arts practice.**

Aikido came from sword work. Even though we say that body arts is the foundation; truthfully, if we look at the inception, it is from sword work. What I find fascinating is how it can really change a person's practice. Just like in body arts, you are figuring out how to connect, how to project energy through your body. But with weapons, no matter the weapon, you're still trying to figure out how to project energy through your body - through this instrument in your hand- and impact the other person. It's the same thing even during the rowing exercise (funekogi undo), when you're starting to feel the connection to the ground, how to move your body as one unit, how to absorb. In weapons, it's more difficult to see that happening, but it is there. Also, if you look at the footwork, how you get off the line and where your arms are, it's similar to body arts. When someone starts to make a leap in weapons, their body arts improve. In my mind, they're not separate.

In body arts an encounter is typically over pretty quickly, but in weapons, especially when you get into the forms, that encounter can be complex. Often people think of weapons as just kata, two people working with each other with no real connection, but that is not what weapons is. Weapons is connection, that visceral feeling when you really get an encounter going with someone. When that happens, I feel it with my whole body. I was always chasing that, chasing Sensei's weapons. When you watch Sensei do weapons with someone that he had an amazing connection with, it was riveting.

Also, as I age, this is what I can do. If I could still take breakfalls in a class, I might still be doing it, but that's not where my life took me. I have two artificial hips in addition to the regular limitations of aging, and there are certain things that I can and can't do. Weapons is one of those things I have no restrictions on, so it's opened up a door for me to deeply study it in a way that might not have happened otherwise.



**During the Intensive, you incorporated Original Strength, which was really interesting and new for most of us. Please share more about Original Strength and how it fits into Aikido training.**

In 2015, I started having serious problems with my hips. I was still in touch with Riha, who moved to Phoenix after her time at Mt Baldy. When I told her about what was going on with my hips, she introduced me to Original Strength. She showed me a few movements and gave me a book and a website link. I started doing the movements at home. I had pretty bad arthritis, so I knew they weren't going to heal, but I found my hips started feeling better. In 2016, I attended an Original Strength workshop. I then started incorporating Original Strength into the warm ups during class and noticed that students responded well to it. The movements connect the body, the nervous system, and the brain, bringing the vestibular system online. I started incorporating it more and more. On Saturday mornings, I would do the first 45 minutes of Original Strength. Then we would do weapons and body arts. The students were really getting into it. Not only could they feel everything come online, but it's also very soothing to the nervous system.

I've done several Feldenkrais classes, and I always found them fascinating but too complex, and I was never sure I was doing it right. Original Strength is very similar; it's just put into simple concepts that anybody can learn. Around that time, we had a student start who had a head injury as a teenager. We started noticing her movements were getting better just from doing the Original Strength. She was much more stable when she would

get up to leave the class than most other times. About a year later, Jim Davis, who along with his wife, Murphy, helped me run the dojo from the beginning, got Guillain-Barré syndrome and was completely paralyzed. He continued doing Original Strength when he was in the hospital and throughout rehab. He and I think it accelerated and deepened his healing because it is simply based on movement patterns that are naturally programmed into us.

I find the things that I teach best are things that I find fascinating. If I can really dig into something, and I feel like it relates closely or will be beneficial to the students and my training, it's an easy leap for me to figure out how to incorporate it. My newest thing is that I've been interested in circular movements, so I've been learning to swing Indian clubs. It has a very similar feeling to weapons. I bought six sets on eBay and started incorporating that for just 5 or 10 minutes in Saturday classes. They are weighted, so it's easily applied to weapons, expanding your energy into the weight of the tip. It's also fantastic for shoulder health because it tractions your shoulder, but you're still getting a full rotation. I try to keep myself interested because the more interested I am, the more it enhances training for my students. Honestly, I feel like a student again, more than a teacher, which is really fun.

### **How was the Intensive for you?**

I got a lot out of it. It opened my eyes to beginners and weapons. Most people that were there were beginners and the progress they made over four days was amazing. It changed my thinking a bit. I don't need to separate beginners out when I'm teaching a weapons class; we can fold them in. There's a lot that can happen even in the early stages of weapons training.

### **Would you like to see more Intensives like this one?**

I would. It's not a replacement for seminars, but it offers a different window that we might have been missing, and it's easier on the people who are running the dojo because seminars are grueling. They're grueling to prepare for; they're grueling financially. Often you lose money on them. You can imagine if you're running a dojo, every single time you have a seminar, you lose two weeks of your life because it's so intense to prepare. You're trying your best to get as many people there as possible, so the students feel pressured and that's stressful; whereas the Intensive had a different feel to it. Regular classes could continue. It didn't interfere with kids or teenage classes or people that might want to come to a morning class. It didn't cost the students any more. Students committed to three or four days. There's so many benefits to something like this. The schedule was perfect for me, with a couple of hours each day and then a long day at the end to tie it all together. For me, it was a fantastic experience. You have such an amazing community, and it's super exciting to see all these young students. I don't mean necessarily in age, but in the first 5 to 10 years of Aikido life. I thoroughly enjoyed it, and I got a lot out of it myself. You're lucky having Ea and Eric there because that's such a unique combination, both Aikido and people wise. There's just something special about that, and I'm thrilled to see what you as a community are building together.

### **What are some of the benefits of seminars where several dojos come together so that we can practice with different teachers and different students?**

There is benefit to being exposed to different types of Aikido and this has been a big change for me. When I first started with Chiba Sensei, even though we respected them, we were all, including Sensei, very critical of other styles. I looked at Aikikai, especially Chiba Sensei's style, like that was it. What I realize now is that I can still choose the style I want, but there are things to be taken from every different style, from any martial arts way of moving your body. Not only is the exposure to different people, different styles, different behavior good, but you also get this community network so that when you travel or you end up moving, you can find a dojo pretty much anywhere. You make a connection with someone who knows someone that you've trained with and that builds this web of connection. Seminars are exciting. Sometimes it fuels something; it lights a fire in someone. You might be that someone, and then you light that fire in the dojo because the fire is lit in you. The potential is really important, but at the same time, I think it's also important to not let that become what drives us from an organizational point of view. There needs to be a place for them, but they're not the answer.

Aikido is becoming a lot of senior people. I don't mean just seniors in rank, but also in age. We have kids pro-

grams, but nothing in between. If you want a healthy life and a healthy organization, all those stages have to keep moving through. That's one of the things I really like about what's happening in Tacoma. Ea and Eric do a good job. They're not bringing in 50 seminars and overwhelming everyone and overwhelming themselves financially. They're going to carefully think about who is a good option for the dojo community, and then recommend certain seminars that you might want to travel to together. They're not just saying "do as much as you can and we're going to bring in everybody we can and we want you to go to everything" because over time, people won't stay. There will always be zealots, but we need more than that if we want Aikido communities to survive.

### Is there anything else you want to share?

I've practiced Aikido more than half my life now, which is wild to consider. Jim, the guy I was talking about earlier just turned 70. He started training when he was 18, so he has been training for 52 years of his life and even after being paralyzed with Guillain-Barré, he still wants to do it. In fact, he teaches a Wednesday night class, and if no one comes, he still trains. To me, that's the beauty of Aikido. That fire can stay in us even when we're not doing what we were doing 30 years ago or 20 years ago or even ten years ago. Even if it's a temporary setback, you can still study, you can still practice. The older I get, the more I see it.△

## OUR DOJO COMMUNITY

### *A Newcomer's Experience*

PAUL PELLIGRINI

Learning something new is not easy. Aikido is no different. For me, it feels as though my brain is being re-wired. I am learning new ways to move my body. Prior to Aikido, I had never done a forward roll or a backfall let alone tenkan or irimi. Aikido has introduced new ways to step with my feet and use my hands in a coordinated manner all while creating an awareness of where my center should be.



I signed up at the dojo in late December 2022, taking advantage of a 2-month special. During those first couple months of training, there were many times that I felt overwhelmed, mentally more than physically. The fluidity of the techniques left me in awe, but as is common when learning, I felt as though I struggled often.

In doing an internet search for the definition of community, I came across the following: "a feeling of fellowship with others, as a result of sharing common attitudes, in-

terests, and goals." Based on that definition, the members of the dojo are a community. It can easily be seen before, during, and after every class. That feeling of community is a big part of what kept me around after those first couple months. It kept me coming to class, kept me training when it may have been easier to give in to my insecurities. The community kept me progressing.

That progression led me to take the test for 6th Kyu and, eventually, 5th Kyu. The thought of those tests was nerve wracking. This was something I had never experienced. For physical activity, I grew up playing basketball, a team sport. The idea of performing individually was completely foreign to me. Luckily, for both tests, I was not the only person testing. Although I was testing individually, I did not feel alone.

Not feeling alone. For me, that is a big part of what the community does for its members. I think back to the evening before my 5th Kyu test. Classes were canceled and Ea Sensei opened the dojo for open mat from 6pm to 8pm. Still feeling fairly new to the dojo, I showed up not knowing what to expect, but I knew that I needed as much preparation as possible. During that open mat, a couple other kohai and I drilled techniques for almost the full two hours, bringing the best out in one another. That is community defined.

I view learning Aikido as a journey. That journey can get uncomfortable at times, but discomfort is needed to grow. I've learned to welcome that discomfort, knowing that I am a part of a community that supports one another. We root for each other to be better versions of ourselves with each day that passes. This journey has been wonderful up to this point. A big part of it is the amazing community that I am on it with. △

## COMMUNITY

EVERY MILLER

In January of 2020, I was rapidly approaching peak burnout after years of working as a victim's advocate in intimate partner violence. I finally had to leave a job that, as difficult as it was, had been deeply and profoundly meaningful to me and a team that had become like a family. In February of 2020, I ended a long term relationship and moved out of our shared home with nowhere to go. I spent weeks couchsurfing across Washington and Oregon, all my belongings shoved in the trunk of my car. In March of 2020, whiplashed by too many changes and too much uncertainty, I remember desperately thinking that I needed everything to just stop for a minute. Sorry, everyone.

When the lockdown orders began, I lost my new job, still hadn't found a place to stay, still hadn't managed to catch my breath. Feeling completely adrift, I had to decide what to do. Could I shelter in place in shared housing with complete strangers? Stay in the short term rental with an onsite landlord who kept complaining to me about his wife? Hightail it back to Jersey, if my car could even make it over the mountains?

In some ways, the pandemic did bring a strange sense of clarity. On March 13th of 2020, I didn't have much certainty about what the next few weeks would bring, but I knew I needed to be with people I trust. When the world gets frightening, we huddle together to weather the storms. I was incredibly grateful to have a community of new and old friends, my team from the DV shelter and far flung cousins who formed a net to catch me, who gave me a safe harbor. To share that trust with someone is a sacred thing. It's a privilege and an honor to be welcomed into someone's home during plagues and wildfires and unrest.

As we all reemerge into a new world and a new social fabric that feels a bit frayed in spots, I've found myself thinking more and more about what makes a community. Is it built out of a shared space, or a sense of shelter in each other? Does it come from a shared language, a common familiar rhythm of old stories and well worn jokes? Is it built by our rituals, our practice, our forms, the work and study we do together? Maybe by our mutual agreement to help keep the dojo clean, to wash our gis every once in a while? Does it lie in our teachers or our code of conduct? What is it that gives this dojo such a strong and lively feeling of community?

There are many things that can make up the scaffold-



ing of a community. But the heart of it, I think, has to be trust. The core of Aikido requires a sense of safety with each other. Trusting your partner not to dislocate your shoulder or sprain a wrist. Trusting our teachers to guide us to a deeper practice. Even a sense of trust in yourself, to take ukemi or execute a technique correctly. This kind of trust must be earned, built up from each time we give our partners our body as uke and get it returned safe and uninjured. There's something priceless about this ability to meet each other on the mats with a sense of trusting vulnerability.

In a world filled with uncertainty and new storms always on the horizon, it's a privilege to share that trust and to build community with each other. Like any other technique, we only get better at it with practice.△

## SEEING

EA MURPHY

Our brains have amazing ways of becoming more efficient by categorizing everything we encounter. Do any of the nervous system stimuli we receive fit into the box of bird, food, music, or cat? Can we name what is seen, heard, or felt; and if we name it, do we know what it is?

A side effect of this incredible feat of neurobiology is that we perceive a world of sameness and difference. Does it fit into a box like this, or a box like that? Interestingly, if a thing is too different - if it doesn't have a box - we might not perceive it at all.

You may have noticed this process in your Aikido study. When you first start training, everything is a blur of movement - an abstract painting that ripples across your vision. You try to catch a trace of it, and over time the forms start to resolve into patterns. The more time you spend on the mat, the more the movements fall

into categories. This is irimi; this is ten kan. That is ikkyo. The building blocks of more complicated concepts take shape in the difference, for instance, between iriminage and kokyuho.

Through this recognition and categorization of stimuli, we can start to learn, but in doing this, by necessity, we stop truly seeing. In fact, science has shown that a large amount of what we “see” is predicted by our brain and not received as direct visual input at all. Cleverly, our neurobiology uses memory and experience to deal with the enormous amount of visual information bombarding us at any moment. While this specific evolutionary adaptation is indispensable for learning, it has its dangers. If not questioned and attended to, these boxes of same and different slide all too readily into a world of bias and discrimination, with ramifications from the individual to the community, as we are limited in what, who, and how we perceive. So in this context, what does it mean to truly see?

In the Japanese martial tradition, we speak of stealing techniques from our teachers. The responsibility is on us to “see” and “steal” what we perceive. In this way, seeing cannot be a passive activity, nor is there just one way of seeing to perceive the true essence of a thing. In an interview published in the journal, *Sancho*, Chiba Sensei talked about different ways of seeing. If we simply watch as things pass us by, or if we just see fragments of a hand or a foot, then we have missed the whole and have no image to study and chew on. “Ken no me”, or the “eyes to see” as described by Miyamoto Musashi in the *Book of Five Rings*, requires the calmness, clarity of focus, and awareness to see things as they are, with no preconception. To open these “eyes” we must actively push past our own biological reliance on categorization to view the whole and all its parts. Opening our eyes to wake up! in every moment is one of the most diligent tasks we face in budo training.

Beyond the physical reality of a thing, there is also the essence of the thing. Once we can see the shape of something in our training, we can expand our perception to sense its essence. Musashi called this type of vision, “kan no me”, or the “eyes to see through”. At this higher level of observation training, we can start to intuit and feel what is actually present behind the forms.

Finally, there is what Chiba Sensei described as “seeing as being”, when the divisions between self and other falls away, and you become what you see. In Aikido training, this type of seeing can let you steal from the

inside out. By drawing on emotion, you can touch what you see, moved by the experience through all your senses.

Without a doubt, the act of seeing and perceiving in budo is not trivial. If we passively wait for what we see to be explained to us, we will never open our eyes. If we rely too much on our brain’s capacity for categorization and prediction, we will never see the essence of things. If we see only ourselves and other, inclusivity will always be an illusion. We cannot rest easily in what we perceive. To search for truth in Aikido practice, we must develop our eyes.

As discussed before, our brains are wired to see same and different. Neuroscience demonstrates that we categorize based on the boxes created by our experience and the concepts defined by our culture. By default, this creates all sorts of bias towards concepts outside of our experience, which we either see as “different”, or we may not see at all. In addition to limiting what we see, this also limits who we see in our community and in the world.

“eyes to see”...requires the calmness, clarity of focus, and awareness to see things as they are, with no preconception..

On the other hand, developing our eyes in Aikido practice creates new neural pathways that not only let us see more on the mat, but opens our eyes and hearts to others around us. When we begin to “see as being”, our differences fall away, opening the compassion to build bridges between our individual experiences. This is amplified in our practice, when we further “see” our partners through our tactile connection on the mat. In this sense, the dojo offers a rare and unique way of unifying a community. Expanding our practice outside our dojo and around the world magnifies this experience. Across cultures and traditions, our commonality is strengthened through Aikido practice, where we meet beyond categories in our collective journey. In this way, Aikido also offers a unique path to uniting a global community.

As Aikido training challenges us to develop eyes to see, can we challenge ourselves to take these lessons off the mat as well. Can we keep our eyes open and fresh as we meet people in our daily lives? Can we see them as they are, without any preconceptions, by waking up to each new encounter? Can our definition of community expand beyond who shares our sameness? So much is possible when we explore what we truly see. △

# UPCOMING EVENTS

*\*see our annual member event calendar, updated monthly at [www.tacomaaikikai.com/member-calendar](http://www.tacomaaikikai.com/member-calendar)*

## KANGEIKO WINTER INTENSIVE

JANUARY 8-13

## IAIDO BEGINNER'S SERIES

JANUARY 17-28 (WEDNESDAYS)

## YOUTH LEADERSHIP ORIENTATION

JANUARY 20, 2-5 PM (SATURDAY)

## KYU AND DAN TESTING

YOUTH: MARCH 5-6 (TUES/WED)

ADULTS: MARCH 7 (THURSDAY)

## SEMINAR WITH MIKE FLYNN SENSEI

TACOMA AIKIKAI, MARCH 22-24

## 5TH YEAR ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

### Community Open House

APRIL 20 (SATURDAY)

## SPRING BEGINNER'S SERIES

MAY 2 - JUNE 27

## BIRANKAI SUMMER CAMP

CAMARILLO, CA

JUNE 19-23

## KIDS SUMMER CAMP

JULY 9-12 (TUESDAY - FRIDAY)

## TEEN SUMMER CAMP

JULY 23-26 (TUESDAY-FRIDAY)

## GASSHUKU SUMMER RETREAT

AUGUST 22-25 (THURSDAY-SUNDAY)

### SELF DEFENSE SUNDAYS

An empowerment-based self-defense program for everybody. Drop in for one or join for all sessions. Build your skills on and off the mat and help empower your community.

**Last Sunday of every month, 2-5pm**

*\*by donation for dojo members.*

**JANUARY 28:** Women, Non-Binary, LGBTQ

**APRIL 28TH:** Women, Non-Binary, LGBTQ

**FEBRUARY 25TH:** Women, Non-Binary, LGBTQ

**MAY 26TH:** Women, Non-Binary, LGBTQ

**MARCH 30TH (\*Sat):** All genders

**JUNE 30TH:** All genders



Gasshuku Retreat - August 2023

## Tacoma Aikikai

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## January 2024

COMMUNITY  
TACOMA AIKIKAI JOURNAL  
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