

The Aikido Center of Los Angeles



道の為、
世の為、
人の為
合気道

The Aiki Dojo

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

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In This Issue...

Message From the Teacher

by David Ito.....Page 1

Landmine Learning

by David Ito.....Page 2

Teachers Among Teachers

by Ken WatanabePage 3

What Do We Do for Aikido?

by Santiago Garcia Almaraz..Page 3

Untitled

by Rev. Kensho FuruyaPage 4

The Legacy Will Continue

by Shaun MenashePage 5

See You in the Spring

by Rev. Kensho FuruyaPage 6

A Fond Memory of Furuya Sensei

by Mike Van Ruth.....Page 7

The Path

by Rev. Kensho FuruyaPage 7

Lighting the Way

by Santiago Garcia Almaraz..Page 8

Message From the Teacher

by David Ito, Aikido Chief Instructor

On April 5, 2002, Furuya Sensei wrote this in his Daily Message:

As I grow older, I see that, like the warrior, we are really not here on Earth for very long. Before the great warlord Oda Nobunaga set out into the battlefield he often recited these lines from the Noh play, *Atsumori*, "Man's life is but a 50 year span and passes like a mysterious dream." Just like the *sakura* or cherry blossom, as we begin to mature we are already blown away by even a gentle breeze – All warriors understand this but we have lost this beautiful sentiment today. I

think this is why we waste so much time today and take so much for granted. We never appreciate anything because we think that we always have it – and as much as we want as well! If we begin to realize that nothing is permanent, maybe we will begin to appreciate everything a little bit more. Maybe when we realize that it is not only the cherry blossom that is so fleeting in life that we will not take so much for granted. There is only one opportunity to learn Aikido and that is now!

It is hard to believe that nine years has gone by since the night when Sensei passed away. It is naïve to think, but when we are young we never think about people dying.

Sensei's passage deftly illustrates the path of the warrior. His resolution was that with what little time we have, we should spend it living well. We know our death will eventually

come but with that realization comes a sense of clarity which enables us to be present in the moment and thus it enables us to truly live.

There is a saying that Sensei liked which is apropos to his life and death, *Hana wa sakuragi, Hito wa bushi* which means, "The warrior is like the cherry blossom who often dies quickly or too early in life and on the battlefield." Before we know it, our parents will pass

away just as our teachers will too. As sad as their deaths are, their passings are a crude reminder for us to live our lives instead of just suffering through them. Sensei used to admonish us by saying, "There is no time left" and now I not only feel it, but I truly understand it too. With this newsletter I hope that Sensei's life and also his death will somehow inspire all of us to live our lives well. Please use your life and your time wisely because as Sensei said, "There is no time left."



Reverend Kensho Furuya
1948-2007

Upcoming Events

March 5th:

Furuya Sensei *Meinichi*
Memorial Service

April 15-17th:

O Sensei Memorial Seminar

May 28th:

Intensive Seminar

May 30th:

Dojo Closed: Memorial Day



Landmine Learning

by David Ito, Aikido Chief Instructor

“A boat that isn’t tied up will drift along with the stream.”

– Japanese proverb

During my time as a student, I felt that every time I went to the dojo I was going to fall into a trap and get into trouble. Now I know that sounds like hyperbole, but it is not. I believed that everything at the dojo was designed as a snare of some sort just waiting for me to mistakenly fall into. Situationally there were Japanese antiques placed everywhere just waiting to be accidentally broken or piles of books or papers just waiting to be knocked over and not to mention most of dojo rules were unwritten and some were so circuitously spoken about in an implied way that I didn’t even know they existed. All these things were just waiting to attack me and instigating Sensei’s wrath. However, these so called traps were only there to push us to become more aware, diligent and disciplined martial artists.

Being a Zen priest, Sensei might have gotten this idea from a famous Zen story about Matajuro Yagyu:

Matajuro Yagyu was the son of a famous swordsman from the Yagyu clan. His father believed that he was lazy and needed a boost so he disowned him and threw him out of the house. Distraught and in need of a teacher, Matajuro traveled to the region of Kii and to the famous Kumano Nashi shrine in search of a great swordsman who had retired there named Banzo. When the two met, Matajuro announced to him, “I have come to learn swordsmanship.” To which Banzo replied, “You wish to learn swordsmanship from me but you aren’t ready.” Matajuro pushed forward and said, “I’m willing to work hard.” Banzo quipped, “It will take you ten years.” The relentless Matajuro then said, “What if I work extra hard and double my training.” Banzo laughed and said, “Then twenty years.” Banzo reluctantly took Matajuro on as a student with the condition that he act as his servant and not talk about swordsmanship or even handle a sword. Day in and day out for a year, Matajuro cooked, cleaned and tended to his master’s needs and never once talked about swordsmanship. He began to become frustrated with Banzo and thought about giving up and running away to find a teacher somewhere else when suddenly he was struck in

the head from behind with a *bokken* or wooden sword. When he looked up, Banzo stood above and said, “How do you expect to master swordsmanship if you can’t even dodge this piece of wood.” From that day on, Banzo would sneak up on Matajuro and strike him when he least expected it. He had to learn to be on guard at all times even while he was sleeping. Then one day while Matajuro was making lunch, Banzo leaped out of the bushes and attacked. Matajuro kept making the food and calmly picked up a lid from one of the pots and blocked the strike without pausing. That night, Banzo presented Matajuro with a certificate of mastery and congratulated him on his mastery of swordsmanship.

Pain, embarrassment and failure can be some of our best teachers. They are not easy, but they sometimes create a certain amount of strong motivation to succeed. I often wonder how Sensei’s method worked or if there even was one. All that I know is that I learned a lot of lessons through trial and error that helped me become the person I am today. Here is one story how I learned to be prepared. One year we got a huge group of visitors from Japan. They stayed in Los Angeles with us for over a week and every day we took them sightseeing and then we trained with them at night and finished off the day by taking them to dinner. Sounds great, right? It was far from that for those of us who were from the host school. Every day was like a pressure cooker and every moment we all felt like we were going to get burned by the heat.

One night, we took our guests to dinner somewhere on the west side of Los Angeles and each of us was charged with driving a small group. I am not from that side of town so I just followed one of my friends who drove in front of me. On the way back to the hotel from dinner there was an unusual amount of traffic and my friend started to drive fast and weave through the heavy traffic. I couldn’t keep up and I ended up losing him. Now this is the time before cell phones where people relied on knowhow or Thomas Guides to navigate their way. Luckily for me that day, there was a huge party going on in downtown and all the exits on my side of the freeway were closed. Not knowing my way around, I just drove until the exits weren’t closed and doubled back on the freeway. Pretty smart, right? Wrong. It made the journey back take 30 minutes longer because of the traffic. When I arrived at the hotel, Sensei was waiting out front. He was furious and yelled at me for not being prepared and for not exiting the freeway and taking side streets like everyone else. I was so angry that I yelled back, “I don’t know my way around downtown.” We just glared at each other for what seemed like forever and then he slammed the door and walked away.

Later that night I was still mad at him and resolved myself to not let that happen again. I thought that I would need some type of tool to help me since I am not good with directions and get lost easily. I decided to draw a map of downtown with all the major streets, landmarks and the restaurants the dojo frequented. I had the idea that it should be small enough to be concealed but still large enough to read. Every time I went someplace with Sensei or the dojo, I would update my map.

Continued on page 4...

Teachers Among Teachers

by Ken Watanabe, Iaido Chief Instructor

When we train in the martial arts, we learn to sacrifice and we learn to persevere. When we reap what we believe are the benefits of training it's easy to think, "Yes, I did this!" Of course, it's true that a student's potential to master the art lies solely within themselves, but we cannot forget the role that a good teacher plays into the student's road to mastery.

Our teacher, Reverend Kensho Furuya, earned his shodan, or 1st degree black belt, in Kendo when he was 10 years old. He earned his Aikido shodan and began teaching when he turned 14. Sensei became respected and was well-regarded by his students, the Aikido community, and other martial arts teachers. Yet, as respected as he was, I remember him telling us that he only considered himself a second- or third-rate teacher.

Not many practiced harder and more diligently than Sensei, but instead of self-congratulation, he attributed his level of mastery to his teachers. There is little doubt that Sensei considered the masters under whom he trained a point of pride. Sensei trained under some of the very best martial teachers of the time – teachers such as Mori Torao and Takiguchi Yoshinobu for Kendo; Mitsuzuka Takeshi and a teacher named Ebihara for Iaido, and 2nd Doshu Kisshomaru Ueshiba, Tohei Koichi, Yamaguchi Seigo, Osawa Kisaburo, and Arikawa Sadateru for Aikido. Sensei told us many times how fortunate he was to find and train under his teachers. With a training background like that it was no wonder he regarded himself as only second- or third rate!

Sensei always told us stories about his teachers to inspire us, much like they inspired him, but he also reminded us that not all the teachers he trained under were top-notch. He also practiced under some less-than-stellar talent, and that experience also influenced his views on teaching and training. More than ever he regarded studying under a competent teacher as one of the most important choices a student could make for themselves and because of his experiences with less-than-ideal teachers, Sensei often sought only the best teachers to bring to his dojo.

Sensei was very demanding of his students and of himself, but he was also very selective regarding who he allowed to come into the dojo to teach us. He would always try to expose us to only the highest quality instruction, even from teachers of other martial arts or disciplines. Sensei even invited his friend, Master Adam Hsu,

one of the world's foremost experts in Chinese martial arts to teach us numerous times.

Sensei held Master Hsu in such high regard that he felt it was important for us, his students, to be exposed to a teacher like Master Hsu. Although our dojo practiced Aikido and Muso Shinden Ryu Iaido, Sensei believed that we could only benefit from his teaching and his presence.



Sensei with Chiba Sensei and Mitsuzuka Sensei

Even when his attempts at bringing someone to the dojo didn't pan out, we still gained something from the planning and preparation process. I remember on one of his trips to Japan, he told us about a trip he took to visit the Iaido master, Mitani Yoshisato. Mitani Sensei specialized in Muso Jikiden Eishin Ryu, a school of Iaido that was a close relative of our own Muso Shinden Ryu style.

Although Mitani Sensei's dojo taught a different style of Iaido from our own, Sensei

felt that an opportunity to train under an expert like Mitani Sensei was still important to our own progress. Sensei knew that Mitani Sensei was too elderly to travel to the United States, but he also knew that Mitani Sensei's son was very good and hoped he might come in his father's place.

Even more difficult was Sensei's attempt at bringing over Yagyu Nobuharu Sensei, the headmaster of the Owari-Yagyu Shinkage Ryu, the school of swordsmanship upon which Aikido swordsmanship is based. I remember that Sensei spent so much time and effort writing letters and arranging phone calls trying to arrange for Yagyu Sensei to visit Los Angeles.

Neither of those attempts by Sensei to bring over a first-rate teacher like Mitani Sensei or Yagyu Sensei ever materialized, but despite his failures, he still wanted us to receive the best training possible from the best teachers possible.

From our experience preparing for Mitani Sensei and Yagyu Sensei, we learned that a true teacher was not someone who sought fame or to increase their numbers. First rate teachers would have no interest in traveling to the United States and throwing themselves at us in order to spread their art, much less have any extra time in their demanding teaching schedules to afford taking a trip abroad. It also proved that first rate teachers – ones that are up to Sensei's standards – were few and far between.

Continued on page 4...



“Winning and losing are only a game bored people play. There is nothing in this world that can defeat us but ourselves. We must understand this clearly in every move and thought we make in practice, even when we are blinking our eyes or slightly turning our heads.”

– Reverend Kensho Furuya

Landmine Learning *continued from page 2...*

My little map came in handy until the day came when I had to drive Sensei someplace by myself that I had never been to before. That day, I got lost and he chastised me the whole drive home. I got lost because when Sensei asked me to drive him I just showed up at the time he asked me to, but completely unprepared.

After that incident, I realized that in addition to being prepared, I needed to be proactive. So despite being shy, I needed to be assertive and whenever Sensei, or anyone else for that matter, asked me to drive them someplace, I would ask them about all the details, call the place and ask about certain specifics like parking and then I would draw my map to and from with alternate routes. It got to the point that after I got all the details, called the place for specifics and drew up my own map that I didn't even need to look at the map.

To a logical person who isn't a martial artist, these things seem unreasonable. To a martial artist, these things make perfect sense. As a martial artist, we have to be prepared for anything. In our training there is no such thing as finished – there is always another layer we can add.

It is said that young people have something called *iji* or willfulness that will prevent them from becoming successful and that it is the teacher's responsibility to instill *konjo* or fighting spirit in them. I do believe that in my case this is true. I am a person with a tremendous amount of *iji* so much so that it is to my detriment at times. My training under Sensei was very difficult and I felt that I suffered for a large part of the time I was his student, but I also learned a great deal too.

Today, I understand that Sensei's strictness was entirely for my benefit and I am saddened by the toll it must have taken on him. The landmines in the training were there to expose my deficiencies and force me to overcome them – they were like Banzo's sword. In a sense, they were there to blow up and destroy the lazy, angry, and willful person so that a better, kinder or more compassionate person could emerge. I can say with all honesty that the person that I am today is a result of all the landmines I stepped on as student under Sensei. They taught me how not only to be a better martial artist, but a better person too.



Untitled

My life is full of empty memories of friends and loves long gone. . .
The old sword still shines brightly, but it is not the glitter we all love today that blinds us from the old iron soul.
Standing against the crashing waves.

Editor's note: Sensei posted this poem to his Daily Message on January 1, 2003.

The Legacy Will Continue

by Shaun Menashe, Aikido 2nd Dan

By this, the ninth annual memorial of Reverend Kensho Furuya Sensei's passing, it's easy as Westerners to overlook paying homage and appreciating someone amidst the sea of concerns competing for our attention.

As traditional arts are adapted to fit the Western palate, they are skewed and filtered through the lens of the Western notions of independence and individualism. Eastern arts which are heavily reliant on obligation and devotion to one's teacher sometimes run in direct contrast to the more self-focusing philosophies of the West. There is a Tibetan culture saying: "When we study, we shouldn't be like an old man who only chews the soft potatoes and spits out the tough meat." If we minimize the importance of the teacher and their efforts, we run the risk of disregarding the foundational basis of Eastern disciplines.

As we go through changes in our life and our priorities adjust accordingly, it's sometimes natural to cut off the old to make room for the new. In the dojo, daily training helps us to be vigilant, prioritize, and prepare but as we practice less, or not at all, the areas of our lives that we once saw as secure can possibly risk atrophy from inattentiveness.

For the last seven or so months, I have spent some time away from my Aikido training rehabbing injuries and getting my acupuncture practice off the ground. Taking time off was not an easy decision and this is my first leave of absence in nearly ten years. While I still have a presence in the dojo, it is very different type of training than training on the mat. Since age 25, the driving force behind my life has been Furuya Sensei, the dojo and Aikido. Now 34-years-old, I am dedicating my energies to my clinic in Silverlake. Just as I have seen many students, new and old, part ways with the dojo and move on to new ventures. I wondered how this shift in priorities might affect my relationship to Furuya Sensei, Ito Sensei, the dojo and Aikido.

Because the martial arts are considered a hobby, it seems natural to leave your training behind when life happens. As the product of a materialistic culture, we believe that we can purchase anything. The teacher has trained us and we have paid our tuition in return. In the West, we consider this an equitable exchange but it runs in direct contrast to Eastern traditional practices which are rooted in appreciation of the time and energy the teacher has invested. Perhaps as consumers, since we purchased this practice fair and square, we feel free to do with it what we please.

Western culture places its emphasis on the individual over any other social unit. By rewarding individualism, the contributing factors to their success become obscured. It becomes all too easy to overlook how others have helped us. When I first opened my practice, I experienced these influences first hand, as I became short and was less tolerant of friends who lamented about their schedules when my output tripled their own. I started to see the "self-made" attitude develop within me despite having in no way accomplished any of this on my own.



"Because our teachers sacrifice their whole lives only to become stepping-stones for us, they deserve our great respect and admiration."

– Reverend Kensho Furuya

good qualities and endeavors are recalled and appreciated.

After nine years, many operating under the same assumptions will have forgotten Furuya Sensei. Especially if we have traded one discipline for another or one teacher for another, we are likely to write the past off and Sensei as no longer relevant, not seeing how he has influenced the person we've become today.

In the East, the social unit is naturally emphasized and is held together with gratitude, loyalty and deference. Active and inactive students patronize teachers and many of these practitioners will train in some capacity for their entire lives. These cultural themes are present in dealing with the living and the dead and we can see numerous accounts of ancestor veneration in many Eastern cultures. In making daily offerings, those who have passed are held in memory and their good qualities and endeavors are recalled and appreciated.

Without some sense of appreciation for the teacher it's difficult to reap the full benefit of our training. In acknowledging Furuya Sensei's efforts to achieve a high level of proficiency within his discipline and in eventually sharing those skills with us for our benefit we can become inspired and uplifted in our own practice. It's important as Westerners not to neglect this aspect of the Eastern disciplines. Our devotion need not manifest in grandiose, romantic displays, but in simply mustering a few moments here and there to remember Furuya Sensei's efforts as our teacher and it would serve as a reminder that we have experienced something truly special.

Today the dojo has a new crop of enthusiastic practitioners. It is through their efforts and dedication that the continuity of Furuya Sensei's teachings persists. It is my sincere wish to help maintain this space for them to grow in Aikido just as I have. While on my hiatus from training on the mat, I am still in training as I support Ito Sensei in his role as Chief Instructor by reconciling the dojo bills, organizing the paperwork, and doing whatever else I can do to contribute. Through the force of our efforts and practice we can ensure that Furuya Sensei's legacy, teachings and memory will live on.

Teachers Among Teachers *continued from page 3...*

Regardless of martial art or traditional pursuit, Sensei wanted us to be exposed to the most competent instruction possible, much like he experienced when he was training. He often told us that it only takes one lousy teacher one moment to instill bad habits into a good student – believe me, I’ve seen this happen before my own eyes to overly-impressionable students and fixing someone else’s teaching mistakes was not on Sensei’s list of favorite pastimes.

Knowing Sensei’s experience with both good and bad teachers, it was easy to understand his reasoning behind the strict manner in which he instructed us and it also showed how much he cared about the teachings that he passed down.

Sensei tried to convey the role a good, competent teacher plays in a student’s progress. Sensei, knowing exactly how difficult it is to find a first rate instructor, did his best to give us the same kind of experience that he had hoping that these masters of the highest

caliber could somehow inspire us.

Sensei understood the student’s need for a good teacher more than any of us and he always tried to provide us with the best instruction possible. Knowing how difficult it is to find a good teacher he still wanted us to share in a tiny bit of his own experience with us.



Sensei sharing some good food and good conversation with Master Hsu

We must remember that however strong, talented or clever we think we are, finding a good teacher is the best chance we have to master the art of Aikido. The old Japanese word for teacher translates to “compass” meaning that the teacher was only a stepping stone, a starting off point from which training begins. Sensei’s teachers pointed him in the right direction as sure

as he pointed us in the right direction.

As hard as we might practice and as diligently as we may have trained, we cannot forget the teachers who, in spite of ourselves, turn us in the right direction and send us on our way to mastery.

“What people have the biggest misunderstanding of in this world, I think, is the misconception in regards to: ‘receiving is not taking,’ and ‘giving is not losing.’” – Reverend Kensho Furuya

**See You in the Spring**

by Reverend Kensho Furuya

Cut me once and I will die,

But who can kill the cherry blossoms of Spring?

It reminds me of a very famous story about a priest in ancient China. He was confronted by barbarian warriors but refused to cooperate with them. The leader said, “If you don’t confess, I will cut off your head off with one stroke of my blade!”

The priest smiled at him and said, “It is easy to cut off my head, please go ahead, but can you cut the cherry blossoms which bloom each Spring?”

The leader was dumbfounded at the priest’s wisdom and quietly left him in peace.

Of course, our physical bodies are impermanent and subject to injury, age, sickness and death. But we are admonished here to become like the cherry blossoms which never fail to come back each Spring as if they are eternal. In Aikido, we try to become our greater selves – in oneness with the universe and thereby become eternal and no longer subject to petty threats or even death. Of course, we are talking metaphysically here but I feel this priest so wonderfully understood the concept of “no -enemy” which we strive each day to understand in our Aikido training.

Editor’s note: *Sensei posted this poem response on Aikiweb’s Aikido Haiku forum on October 16, 2003.*



The Path

by Reverend Kensho Furuya

Aikido is all about your heart,
 We often forget this about our art,
 Stick to the Path, look not left nor right,
 Collect all your courage with all your might,
 Bow you head low, and lose your sight,
 Lose your hearing and lose your speech,
 Just reach the highest limb you can reach,
 It is the quiet one who protects the meek,
 Embraces humility and treasures the weak,
 True strength comes from within heart,
 And this is all about our art.

Editor's note: Sensei posted this poem to his Daily Message on February 2, 2005.



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The Aiki Dojo

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

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A Fond Memory of Furuya Sensei

by Mike Van Ruth, Aikido 3rd Dan

I came to the dojo in the mid-1990's to study Aikido and that was also the time that I had begun my study of Iaido under Furuya Sensei. Being an art student in college studying ceramics I became intrigued by the sword as a piece of art, but that also meant that I couldn't afford the funds to purchase my own *mogito* or training sword. It was around this time that the fringe of Little Tokyo where the dojo was located became known as the Arts District where they would have art walks so that local artists could open their studios to the public to show and sell their wares.

Sensei had the great idea to help me raise money so he signed up the dojo to participate in one of these art walks. He proposed that I make some ceramics for the event and set up a display in front of the dojo to sell them. I thought that would be a great idea and began making a collection consistent with the Japanese tradition of folk pottery. The work included bowls, plates, vases, bottles, and a couple tea pots.

The morning of the event, I set up the display of wares in front of the dojo. Members of both the public and the dojo purchased my work. It was so successful that I made enough from the sale to purchase my first sword with a little bit left over. Although being able to get my sword was wonderful, it was also one my of the fondest memories of Sensei.



During the sale, Sensei would come out from the dojo several times to look at the ceramics on display. It was a little intimidating since he had a very discerning eye for Japanese ceramics and for all Japanese art for that matter. But he took special interest in a tall blue vase (in the center of the picture). He never said anything about it, but I could tell he liked it. After the third or fourth time of him coming out and looking at it, I pulled it from the display and put it away so that it wouldn't be sold. The look of Sensei's face when he came out and saw that it was gone was priceless. It was apparent by the look on his face that he wasn't happy that the vase was gone. I knew right then that he really liked it and wanted it.

After the event was over and the display was taken down, I presented Sensei with that blue vase as a thank you gift for allowing me the opportunity to sell my ceramics in front of his dojo. It is a wonderful thing to be able to repay, even in the smallest way, my debt of gratitude that I felt toward him. Now that Sensei is gone, I will always have a gratefulness that I can never repay and it is hard to even fathom his true impact on my life. The dojo still has that vase and every time Ito Sensei brings it out, I remember that one sunny afternoon and the gift that Sensei gave me for which I will forever be in his grateful for.

The Furuya Foundation and the Aikido Center of Los Angeles

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Lighting the Way

by Santiago Garcia Almaraz

Chief Instructor, Aikido Kodokai (Salamanca, Spain)

Once in a while throughout life's journey we are privileged to meet someone who leaves such a deep indelible impression on us that it changes our lives forever.

For me, Furuya Sensei was that person and I feel incredibly honored to have known him and to have been his student.

This year will mark my 19th year with not only the Aikido Center of Los Angeles but with Sensei as my teacher.

I remember Sensei often watching us from his chair as he sat beside the *tokonoma* during classes as he would give brief instructions about the technique. It was so incredible how he could give just a couple of corrections without even standing up that could change the course of our techniques. Sensei understood the techniques so well that he could analyze our mistakes and explain why it did or did not work and give us just a slight variation of the same movement that would be so substantial that it would change or improve everything.

I also have fond memories of Sensei sitting on the blue demonstration mats surrounded by students joking about something or chatting with someone in a relaxed manner. These conversations were so interesting that it made me feel that if I was careful enough that I could end up learning something wonderful. He would talk so casually about something that was probably insignificant to him like the detail of a technique, a fine point about Iaido, an explanation of how to make or prepare some food dish, or perhaps we

could learn something seemingly benign like the history of a book or a scroll but to us it was amazing and it always made me think more deeply later.

I often speak of Sensei in my classes to my students because it makes me feel that by doing so he is there present at each class watching over me, my dojo and my students – protecting us. I think that keeping Sensei's memory alive is something that is essential for our dojo's existence and our continuity but also to show our appreciation for all that he has done. Sensei is the reason that the future generation of students in my dojo get to follow the path of Aikido and without him we would not have been able to learn Aikido, Iaido or Japanese culture that we enjoy today.

Today, it is difficult to find teachers like Sensei that are so cultured, disciplined and dedicated to their arts that the deep and lasting impression left by them changes us forever.

Now, it's our turn to carry on and pass on the dojo, Aikido, Iaido and Sensei's teachings to the future generation of students. It is not only our heritage but our duty to keep the flame

alive that illuminates the way of Aikido and guides the students who come after us.

I think I've said it before that Sensei was like a father to me and he is in my heart and I think about him with every step I take inside and outside of the dojo. He is the reason why I follow the way of Aikido and the reason why I try and understand the art and also the reason that I have decided to teach.

I feel very fortunate to have met Sensei and even more privileged to be able to call him my teacher.



*Douzei no Momo mo Sakura mo tsuzuku beshi
Ichiban yari no ume no sakigake.*

**You companions of Momo and Sakura follow after me
I the Ume is first to ride into the enemy's line!**

– Shokusan nin, the poet

Editor's note: *I found this poem in Sensei's notes and thought that it would make a great ending to this issue. The title sensei translates to "one who comes first." In his notes, he wrote, "I saw this beautiful poem inscribed on a sword and thought that it was befitting of a samurai warrior. The plum is the first blossom of the New Year and the cherry and peach blossoms come much later."*