

Heart-Wrenching Essay by Mike-San  
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It isn't often that one can say that they are doing what they love. I love Aikido and although I teach and have my own dojo, 'I will always be a student first.' This is my second time as a foreign *uchideshi* with Aikido Kobayashi Dojo and I am here to continue to understand what it means to be a student. Coming to Japan all the way from Texas where believe it or not people still think that we all have horses and are cowboys, I get the chance to just line up and bow to the *sensei* (teacher).

The teacher is none-other than Kobayashi Yasuo Shihan; also known as *Dojo-cho*. Wow to be in the same room with one of the most important figures in the Martial Arts world is simply a dream come true. You would think that his Japanese students who get to see Dojo-cho all the time wouldn't see it the same way I do but actually the reverse is true; they are just as awe-inspired to be around this man as anyone of thousands who have come into contact with this legend.

This legend is really a modest man with ordinary ways but that is what makes him so special to me; he is his original self and everyday in every way he is getting the message across that: 'One or Many...Just practice Aikido.' I think Sensei loves the sound of his students practicing and in a uniquely simple way he is adjusting the sounds of my practice.

Practice for me meant getting up at 4:50am or 5:15am depending on which Dojo we were training in that day and getting my mind and body woke up enough to settled enough to handle the days workouts. Dojo-cho would come down the stairs and open that noisy gate and you knew he was coming to do what he absolutely loves to do; it makes you want the opening and closing of that noisy gate to never stop happening.



Sensei would poke fun at me because I was always snapping my body to attention and would say 'Hai Sensei!' all the time. Also you loved it when Sensei would throw you around and say out loud how energetic (*genki*) he felt that day. It means a lot to everyone that Sensei spends his life helping people from all over the world to solve the mysteries and discover the wonders of Aikido. His joy and excitement has helped me understand that even though I can take something (Like Aikido) seriously I don't have to take life seriously. Sensei always found a way to make us laugh.



Getting to see Aikido Kobayashi Dojo as an organization in action has particularly interested me. Being a family owned and operated organization I have had a chance to see Dojo-cho oversee his company of instructors including his son Hiroaki Sensei who is not only the vice-president of A.K.D. but also the Fuku-Dojo-cho; second only to his father.

Very organized and very strict in terms of how they operate as a company was one of my first observations. On Fridays there is a training session for A.K.D. instructors as well as any other student who wants to practice that day. Breakfast on Fridays is made by us (The Uchideshis). I took my turn cooking the breakfast for the instructors following the morning training session and it seems that they liked my 'Texas Style' breakfast: Toasted bread with butter and jelly with two over-easy eggs on top. Oh yeah and some type of fruit. Don't tell anybody but I never had it before myself until I came to Japan. Yeah I just made it up on the spot because I knew that cereal or McDonalds take out just wasn't going to cut it.

Hiroaki Sensei is in charge of the Uchideshi and is largely responsible for our understanding of what to do and when to do it; father and son make a great team. I lost my parents when I was just twenty-five and well it's nice to see this family including Dojo-cho's wife (*okusama*) who has been equally important to the development of A.K.D. get along and live their lives in relative peace. We get to have breakfast with Hiroaki Sensei's family (Hiroaki,



Miyoko and we get to see Kaho-chan who is their daughter and very friendly and fun to be around); she likes my animal sounds. On Thursday mornings we get to have breakfast with Dojo-cho and on that day in that moment is usually when I am reminded of how incredible it is to be sitting next to this great man of Aikido.

We get to travel with Sensei to different dojos in and around the Tokyo area and also the different University clubs that he teaches at. Meiji University Aikido Club is now more that fifty years old and that to me is just unbelievable.

Last year Sensei took a couple of us to a building where he preceded to say that this was where he was born. After that we crashed a party at a Jinja and he lead us into what I think was a bone dance of some sort; I have it on film (Sensei can dance). That was fun. We went to Hombu Dojo where Sensei rents it out because he has so many students it takes a place as big as Hombu Dojo (Aikido World Headquarters) to house his Rank Examinations.



I have been to Koma-Jinja where the Kobayashi Family are patrons and this year I was able to go to Iwama for the first time and see the celebration at the Aiki-Jinja. That day was simply beautiful in terms of the weather. Now before that I thought it was never going to stop raining and everyone said that the weather was acting a bit crazy for this time of year. I did get

the amazing chance for the first time to actually see the cherry blossom trees in bloom and they were simply breath taking to behold. Now that leads to a lot of clean up because I think Sensei planted his cherry blossom tree more than thirty-five years ago and this tree is big and of course everyday we were sweeping up free *sakura* blossoms or just leaves and twigs. To me cleaning is more like cleansing the mind before you practice and well doing all this cleaning has helped me continue to understand how important it is to purify the Dojo and its surroundings before you practice.

I am a student first so it was important for me once the mourning period was over and I had a handle on my personal life to seek out a teacher and resume my status as student of Aikido. I have that with Dojo-cho and A.K.D. While I spend a great deal of time supporting my first teacher's organization (AAA) I still require energy for me and my students and I get that with A.K.D. Suffice it to say that I will not be able to adequately thank Dojo-cho and Hiroaki Sensei for opening up themselves to me and allowing me in even for a glimpse of the history and traditions of this great art as taught by this great man. My students say that they are in my debt; well I am in Dojo-cho's debt and will only be able to pay him back for his generosity by improving the sounds of mine and my students practice. I'LL BE BACK!!!



Oh yes and one more thing. The Sayonara party was great and the second party was equally as fun. I was showered with kindness and gifts all of which I am not accustomed to. I cannot thank Dojo-cho and Fuku-dojo-cho enough for what they do for us and for what they do for my teachers organization back in the states. All I can say is *Domo Arigato Gozaimashita* and please come to Texas so that we can return the favor.