

David Valencia

Sunset Cliffs Aikido

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### Aikido

I always knew I wanted to be involved in Martial arts. I would watch Bruce Lee movies, and found an enormous admiration for his many great qualities. He displayed good character by minding his own business and not seeking out trouble or maliciously harming anyone because he had a clear understanding of what is right or wrong. Yet, if things weren't right, he wouldn't back away. He would stand up for himself and stand up for those who could not defend themselves. He demonstrated strong physicality, mental clarity and self-confidence but at the same time, he was humble and unassuming. I thought those were great qualities for someone to live by.

Coming from a circus family background, we lived by the motto, "the show must go on." This was a family business and the family and the business had to come first. Getting hurt was not an option because then I wouldn't be able to perform and that was not an option. After many years of traveling with the circus and living in a place of "having" to do things for the family, I decided to do one thing for myself and pursue my dream of training in a martial art.

After living in San Diego for a number of years, I decided that this was the place I was going to stay. Then, shortly after the new year of 2000, I brought about a new start for myself and found myself living in Ocean Beach. It must

have been a Monday, because that has always been my day off, when I decided to check out the martial arts places around the area. Not really knowing much about Aikido, other than an old soccer friend had started training and was loving it, and the Japanese culture seemed to reside with me since I had traveled to Japan on two different occasions, I walked into Sunset Cliffs Aikido and observed an entire beginners class. Before the advanced class started, Sensei said, “hello” and introduced herself. I told her that I had a bad wrist from overuse and asked if she thought I could practice Aikido. I remember it like yesterday, Sensei asked me to grab her wrist and squeeze it to see how much strength I had. She then asked me to hold my hand out, flat, like a piece of paper and with two fingers in a scissor-like motion, she very gently “cut” my hand. She then told me if I could squeeze with that much strength, I could practice Aikido.

No more excuses. I’m not traveling anymore, I can afford the classes and I didn’t have to be concerned about injuries. What a perfect opportunity. I was finally able to pursue my dream.

It’s been eleven years now and every time I step onto the mat, I can be very present and able to concentrate no matter what my day has been like. I remember to breathe properly and I see things more clearly on the mat, unlike things outside of the mat. During training, direct attack is more apparent. With that, there is an element of honesty, integrity and trust that go along with practicing Aikido and it’s more apparent that you have someone else’s well being and trust in your hands. I have learned to step forward instead of backing away,

make myself heavier or lighter to allow someone to fully attack and to attack with integrity and compassion. I respond with integrity to move out of the way only when necessary or to move someone else out of the way if necessary. I am able to keep my head up and not to compromise my posture. I am aware of all direction and I feel the connection to the ground. With Aikido, I am able to work with all those qualities that I once recognized in Bruce Lee. As a son, father, husband, friend, employer, colleague and as a soto deshi (outside student), I use the practice of Aikido every day of my life.