

## Aikido, Nidan Essay

By Gabriel Tolentino

It was sometime in 1994. I just finished jiyuwaza and I turned my back on my opponent, so he attacked again. By reaction, my guard was up and I did a tenkan to face him. To my surprise, we met with perfect timing and connection. Without any strong impact between my hand and his face, his feet flew up and he landed fully on his back. “You really threw me!” he said. That moment of discovery consumed me, the feeling of being one with your attacker. I wanted more.

Later that year, my friend Glenn and I went to a Saito Shihan seminar in Charolettville, VA. It was my first seminar and I did not have a clue who Saito Sensei was. All I knew was that he flew in from Japan. I figured someone from the home land must be good. Boy, did I get lucky! The seminar was great, and I met my present sensei there, Bernice Tom Sensei.

Bernice Tom Sensei was going around helping people with the seminar.

Koshinage was the technique. She stood only about 5’5” and weighed no more than 120. Bernice Sensei loaded a guy twice as big as her onto her hips, walked around a little bit to show her balance, and then threw him. Seeing her handle such a larger opponent so easily really impressed on me how effective Aikido could be. Later, I would become her Uchi-Deshi for three years, between 1997 and 2000.

I am now testing for Nidan, and what I've learned from Aikido is that training never ends—it is a martial art that practices both mind and body, something so devastatingly effective as a physical art that it constantly calls on us as practitioners to develop our mental awareness and compassion for others. Through our daily life we use Aikido both on the mat and off the mat.