



# Aikido Insights

Tenshinkai Headquarters Westminster, California, U.S.A \* Issue #5 \* Spring 93

## **AIKIDO INSIGHTS**

Founded 1991

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**Aikido Insights is a newsletter  
of Tenshinkai Aikido Federation  
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Westminster - CA 92683  
Phone: (714) 894-1003**

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Published Quarterly

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**The 24th Commemoration in Memory of  
O'Sensei Morihei Ueshiba**

**(1883 - 1969)**

## EDITOR'S NOTE:

*Aikido Insights* welcome its readers. In this issue you will read about the Commemoration of O'Sensei passing, the Silver Anniversary of Tenshinkai Aikido Federation and Aikido training.

Dang Thong Phong Sensei opens this issue by sharing his reflection of O'Sensei during his trip to the Hombu Dojo in Japan in 1967.

N. Ho follows Sensei's article with his report of the Silver Anniversary Celebration of Tenshinkai.

Hoa Newens, Darrel Tanton, Beth Hall, Bruce MacLeod, Alexander MacLeod, Genevieve MacLeod share their memories and impressions of the anniversary event.

Finally, Mai Chi Hong, Robin Sarac, Gary Welborn and Quang Hai Nguyen have written about: Foundation of Technique, and the Budo Center as My Second Family.

*Aikido Insights* staff warmly thanks everyone who have written articles, as well as the numerous individuals who have attended the Anniversary and Seminar.

Lastly, our heartfelt thanks to Jacqueline Haycox, Regina Uliana, Howard Anderson, Duong Dinh, Richard Smith and many others for their time and effort in completing this issue.

As you continue to learn and grow in Aikido, we would appreciate hearing from your experiences. Your articles can be sent to *Aikido Insights*.

It's spring time again! *Aikido Insights* wishes you the best of the season.

Jim Wenrick

## 1993 International Martial Arts Festival

The festival will be held on the 21st and 22nd of May, 1993 at the Sheraton Universal Hotel, in Universal City.

Phong Sensei and Tenshinkai Aikido Federation have the honor to participate in this grand event. Phong Sensei will give a demonstration with a group of students on the evening of the 21st. On Saturday the 22nd, Phong Sensei will give a two-hour seminar.

Other noted masters include Wally Jay, 10th Dan, Small Circle Jujitsu; Karl Marx, 9th Dan, Keichu-Ryu Karate; John Williams, 9th Dan, Shinto-Ryu Aiki Jujitsu; Wai Ming Chau, Inheritor and Prof.; Peggy Chau, Sifu, Wu Mui Kung Fu and many others will participate.

There is a special rate for Tenshinkai members. If you are interested, please contact Phong Sensei for advance registration before May 10th., 1993.

## My Second Family

By Mai Chi Hong, 8yrs. old

Two years ago I went to see my cousins practice Aikido. It looked fun. I went home and thought about it. Then I asked my mom permission to join the Budo Center.

On the first day I was scared and lonely. I didn't know anybody. There were lots of people, both American and Vietnamese. Two week later I met Lynn. She is nice and helped me get used to being with people I didn't know. I have four new friends that are nice too.

The exercise is fun but sometimes difficult. After the warm-up exercises the rolling and breakfalls begin. If you can't roll or breakfall you seat down on the side.

I was in three festivals. I had to practice hard to be in the festival. On Friday, February 19th, 1993, I took part of the adult class.

Instead of practicing techniques with the adults, my brother, his friend and I practiced with the "sticks". I was the only girl there. I felt very special! My Sensei is very nice and smart. He teaches really well too. Sometime he plays with us. My Sensei's name is Dang Thong Phong.

A boy in my class, name David, who wears glasses, told me that he lives in Anaheim but I thought he said "Bannahim." He lives in Orange County.

One month after I started in Aikido, my dad joined in. He practices with my brother and me at home. Now, after two years with the Budo Center, I have many more friends, many more instructors and I spend many hours at the center. They are like my second family.

□



# A Few Days With O'ENSEI MORIHEI UESHIBA

By Sensei Dang Thong Phong



On this very day twenty-four years ago in 1969, O'Sensei Morihei Ueshiba, founder of Aikido left his disciples for eternity. Until now and forever, O'sensei will live gloriously in our hearts, and in my heart as a bright example of learning. He excelled in the art of self-defense, as well as being a proponent of a martial art philosophy serving peace, private and public welfare.

I arrived at Hombu Dojo on November 17th, 1967 at 4:00 pm. Because of the geographic latitude, Tokyo was almost twilight at 4:00 pm. Lights were on in the streets, bright white here, red there. It was colder in Japan than in Vietnam, making me ill at ease of an isolated foreign visitor on the streets at dusk.

However, I felt a great warmth when I entered the Aikido Headquarters building. I was received by a woman from California, to whom I introduced myself and after some conversation, learned that she was the editor of their quarterly newspaper "Aikido". She was undergoing training every day and held a second degree black belt.

Half an hour later, I was received by Mr. Kisshomaru Ueshiba, son of O'Sensei Morihei Ueshiba. When he was informed of my desire to see the dojo, he was greatly pleased. I took that occasion to ask permission to train at the dojo.

The next day, I arrived at the dojo at 6:00am and spent half an hour doing calisthenics to warm up my muscles. Afterwards, a senior member came to greet me and the training began. As I sit writing, I can still see clearly the "Shiho-nage" movements. The wrist of my partner was so thick that I could only wrap my fingers half way around it.

The morning practices lasted two hours, and I had already been weakened by two weeks stay in Korea, because of the unfamiliar climate, drink and food. But back

on the mat, seeing the diligence and assiduity of Doshu Kisshomaru I was encouraged to train very hard. Also, I made every effort to go to the dojo twice a day.

The second day as we were doing exercises, my black belt companion suddenly made a bow. Under the dojo custom, it meant that he was either too tired or for some other reason could not go on. I looked around and saw that everyone was sitting down. And to my great surprise, I saw O'Sensei Morihei Ueshiba coming into the dojo.

He was over eighty years old. At that age, O'Sensei had the appearance of all aged men, with wrinkles and hollow cheeks. But there was a profound difference between him and other teachers I had met. The difference consisted of O'Sensei extraordinary power and force. It is a strength I could not believe existed if I had not seen with my own eyes.

O'Sensei waved his arm to the right, and a black belt student immediately stood up and made a bow. He began his lecture in Japanese. I understood nothing.

However, I could comprehend him through his demonstration of throws, and I was able to deduce the theories.

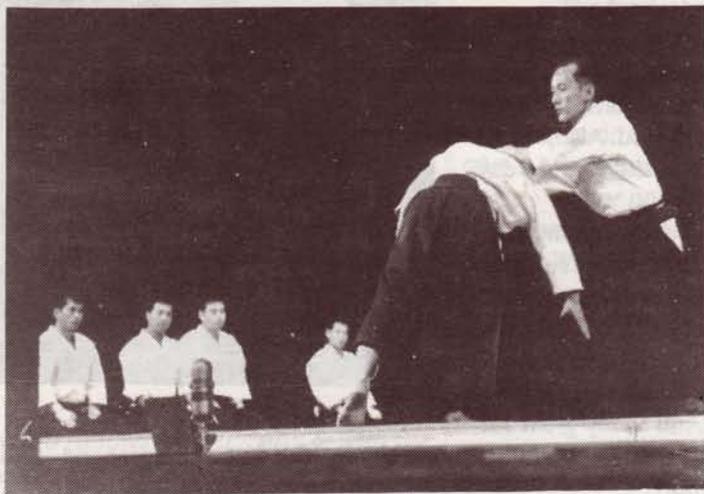
All the techniques taught by O'Sensei required "Ki". To combine theory and technique, the black belt made a step forward to grasp O'Sensei. In the twinkling of an eye, the black belt student fell on his back. Time after time, he rose up and attacked O'Sensei. Each time the attack was neutralized.

Eventhough I already knew that O'Sensei was an expert at defending himself. Nevertheless, to watch a strong young man attacking a very old man made me feel uneasy. To my amazement, O'Sensei



Photo taken by Phong Sensei (1967)

made some throws which made the opponent fall without touching him. No one would suspect that his inner force was so strong. I thought that his body must conform to the laws of nature.



*Doshu Kisshomaru Ueshiba demonstration  
Photo taken by Phong Sensei (1967)*



*Phong Sensei at Hombu Dojo (Nov. 1991)*

I arrived at the Aikido World Headquarters first as an individual having the honor of returning to the mother school to be trained and apply for the third degree black belt examination. Second as a representative of Aikido Vietnam, I presented a photo of all the members of the Aikido dojos in Vietnam. He looked at it and raised it over his head for everyone to see. Then O'Sensei spoke with his eyes half closed. It seemed that he was praying for the peace of Vietnam and the world.

Time elapsed quickly. It was on my fourteenth day and I was allowed to take the examination for third dan by Kisshomaru Ueshiba.

Fifteen minutes had passed. I was on the edge of exhaustion--too tired by having to match partners several times stronger and taller than myself.

Afterwards, I was invited to have lunch with the staff of the Aikido newspaper. In a cordial atmosphere they asked me about the expansion of Aikido in Vietnam and about my personal impression of Japan.

Before leaving Japan, I attended an Aikido exhibition by O'Sensei Morihei Ueshiba, Kisshomaru Ueshiba, Senseis of the Hombu Dojo. In attendant were several hundred black belt students from various universities in Japan. O'Sensei performed during this exhibition, using only a fan to fight against daggers and swords of his opponents.

At the end of the demonstration, I bid farewell to O'Sensei, the Father of Aikido. He warmly advised me and other Aikido disciples to whole heartedly develop ourselves in one spirit of mutual assistance and peace.

I remember O'Sensei, his golden words, and the task I have taken upon myself to dedicate my life to Aikido.

On this day, with a heartfelt remembrance of O'Sensei passing, I wish each student to practice with diligence in order learn and grow in Aikido.



# Tenshinkai Aikido Federation

## Celebrates Its 25th Birthday

By N.Ho

On the 16th and 17th of January, 1993, at the Federation Headquarters Dojo in Westminster, California, the Tenshinkai Aikido Federation celebrated the twenty fifth anniversary of its foundation.

It is known that in 1967 Sensei Dang Thong Phong, after having studied Aikido with Grand Master Mutsuro Nakazono and Nobuyoshi Tamura from 1960 to 1963 in Vietnam, went to the Aikikai Hombu Dojo in Tokyo, Japan, to attend Aikido classes under the instruction of O'Sensei Morihei Ueshiba and Doshu Kisshomaru Ueshiba. It was at the Hombu Dojo that he gained his 3rd degree black belt after an examination by Aikido Doshu Kisshomaru Ueshiba.

After returning to his native Vietnam, Sensei Dang Thong Phong compiled a text of regulations and statutes to found

an organization to be called the "TENSINKAI AIKIDO FEDERATION." The name Tenshinkai, meaning "God's Heart Association," was given by O'Sensei Morihei Ueshiba and Doshu Kisshomaru Ueshiba to the Vietnam Aikido affiliation in the 60's. They also entrusted Sensei Phong with the duty of organizing and propagating the Aikido art in the spirit of "Love" and "Peace."

More than two hundred Aikido members were present at the inauguration of the celebration. There was participation by many Aikido groups such as those of the following chief instructors: Sensei Frank McGouirk, 5th dan, of the Aikido-Ai Dojo in Whittier; Sensei Kim Peuser, 5th dan, and Sensei Hoa Newens, 5th dan, both of the Aikido Institute in Oakland; Sensei Nakayama James Moritaka, 4th dan, of Chushinkan Dojo in Anaheim and Sensei Van Duong of the Fort Saskatchewan Aikido Club in Al-

berta, Canada. In addition, many black belt grade former students of Tenshinkai Aikido Federation came from great distances to assist at the ceremony. Among them were Mrs. Cathie Le Minh Anh, Vietnamese "AO DAI" designer in Paris, France; Mr. Vo Truong Tho from Michigan; Mr. Truong Dai Hy from Texas and Mr. Tran van Quang from Oklahoma.

At 10 a.m. sharp the celebration was inaugurated by a major speech from Sensei Dang Thong Phong, president and founder of Tenshinkai Aikido Federation. He began his speech by greeting the guests, the friendly Aikido teams, and the Federation members who had come from great distances. Then he summarized the formation of the Federation and its twenty five years of continuous history including its five year presence in the United States. He did not forget to praise the Aikido philosophy and the Aikido practitioners' con-



ception of life, which is to know how to live in harmony with others. It goes without saying that Aikido is a martial art, but the aim of this martial art is not to seek victories through competitions as most other martial arts do. Aikido teaches us how to win over our bad natures and undesirable behaviors. It stresses the development of our ability to mingle with society and to live harmoniously with others in everyday life.

In a tense society, a society of stress, a society in which violence is seen as a legitimate means of making wealth, and a society in which honor is won by dominating and subduing ingenuous people's wishes, Aikido is a perfect meditation. Aikido is "TAO," it is "ZEN" and it is the way to serenity and relaxation. Aikido is not merely a martial art as most people think. Aikido is seen as a Martial Art because it is a perfect self defense. However, looking into the matter thoroughly, we must conclude that Aikido is NOT a Martial Art. Saying "Martial Arts" is suggesting that force is used. In Aikido we never use force, especially force of the muscles. We only use the power of our mind. We concentrate our mind in "KI's WAY," in the power emanated from our spirit, in the motion of our body in circles around the central point of our being which is our brain from where all orders are given to our limbs which act in conformance exactly with those orders.

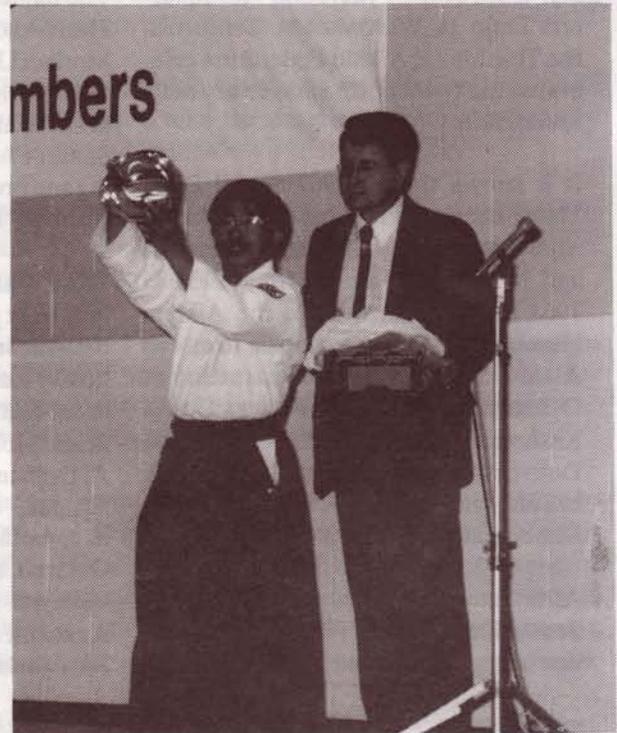
Following his speech, Sensei Dang Thong Phong respectfully handed each of the aforementioned Aikido delegations a bouquet and a picture to keep as souvenirs marking the maturity of the federation. After that, Mr. James Wenrick, Editor-in-Chief of Aikido Insights, the official "voice" of the Tenshinkai Aikido Federation, presented a silver cup to Sensei Phong. This present was given to symbolize the unceasing twenty-five year activity of Master Phong, a period filled with pain and difficulties. Many other presents were offered to Sensei Phong by the Aikido Delegations to welcome the celebration. In particular, Mrs. Cathie Le Minh Anh offered a very beautiful portrait of O'Sensei Morihei Ueshiba which she had painted in color on silk.

She brought it from Paris as an offering to the Federation from a student to the Mother Dojo. All members who had contributed their labor and their merit to the Federation since its foundation were issued certificates of appreciation.

We then witnessed outstanding Aikido exhibitions by the Aikido delegations. To begin, Senseis Kim Peuser and Hoa Newens of the Aikido Institute in Oakland performed incredibly with their students. Then Sensei James Nakayama Moritaka and his students from Chushinkan in Anaheim presented an amazing exhibition. This was followed by Sensei Truong Van Duong and his students from the Fort Saskatchewan Aikido Club of Alberta, Canada. Finally, the host Aikido team from Sensei Dang Thong Phong's Tenshinkai Aikido Federation Headquarters in Westminster fascinated the spectators with its admirable exhibition. The ceremony ended at 11:30 a.m.

In the afternoon an Aikido seminar for adults was held. About 70 Aikido members from various dojos enrolled, and the Senseis took turns teaching Aikido techniques to the participants. Each Sensei demonstrated his or her special method, showing his or her own way of realizing the Aikido art. Aikido members of each dojo realized immediately that the proverb "MIGHT IS RIGHT" is wrong. Small people, usually seen as weak, could see their inferiority complexes vanish immediately. Furthermore, they felt themselves flying in the air. They had the feeling that their limbs suddenly became light and nimble. They wanted to participate in the "Aikido dance," the dance of cranes, of peacocks, of Phoenix spreading their wings leisurely above all the brutal attacks of life.

This could be seen by their mirthfully passionate countenance. A fact deserving everybody's notice was that NO SHOUT, NO ROAR was heard in the dojo that day as is often heard in some other Martial Arts schools. All the "TE's,"



the "WAZA's" and the "UKEMI's" were performed through soft and gentle movements in a peaceful atmosphere. The spectators had the feeling of being in a dance hall, not a Martial arts studio, although the glitter of daggers were very often seen.

On the next day, at 2:00 p.m. sharp, a black belt awarding ceremony was held at Tenshinkai Aikido Federation Headquarters Dojo. Most of the guests were parents and relatives of Dojo members. Sensei Dang Thong Phong emphasized in his speech the important daily duty of the black belt holders to exchange techniques with classmates or partners in order to develop and grow. Attaining the degree of black belt is only the first step on the stairs leading to the threshold of the door to the Aikido community. Black belt bearers must sense and understand their duty toward the Dojo and toward the community. They must

cooperate with the Board of Instructors to teach and help new students in order to propagate as soon as possible this noble art to all classes of the society.

Sensei Dang Thong Phong read the nominative list of practitioners who had just passed the 1st and 2nd degree black belt examination. First degree black belts and hakamas were officially awarded to Mr. Au Duong Di, Mr. Chan Sam Way and Mr. Ngo Chien by Sensei Dang Thong Phong, as President of Aikido Federation. Second degree black belts were awarded to Mr. Nguyen Minh Hai and Mr. Cao Xuan Chieu. This was the first time in the United States that the Tenshinkai Aikido Federation had issued second degree black belts. A session of Aikido exhibition took place after the black belt ceremony. This exhibition was performed exclusively by the Tenshinkai Aikido Federation Headquarters Dojo members. The exhibition went on in an enthusiastic atmosphere.

After two days of celebration, the 25th anniversary of the foundation of the Tenshinkai Aikido Federation ended with a toast of cocktails offered by the Federation to all assisting members and guests in a friendly, merry atmosphere. It marked the affirmation that the Tenshinkai Aikido Federation has attained a stable position in the international community of Aikido and has shown itself to be worthy of admiration and respect.



*A gift of O'Sensei portrait by Mrs. Le Minh Anh, Paris, France.*

*(Above)*

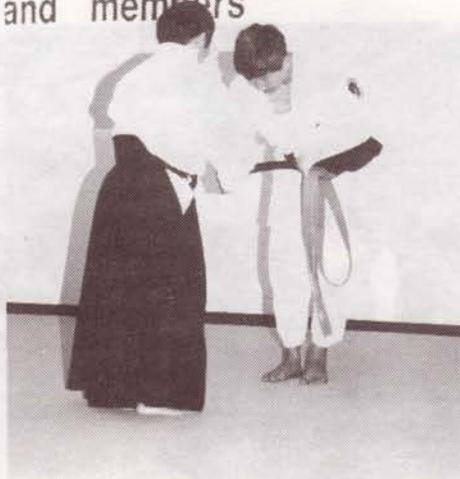
*A demonstration by James Fisher and Jim Ogborn.*

*(Below)*

*Shodan advancement, Mr. Au Duong Di*

*(Below -Left)*

Ily welcomes  
and members





*Aikido-Ai, Whittier, California  
by Frank McGouirk Sensei.  
(Above-Left)*

*Aikido Institute, Oakland, California  
by Kim Peuser Sensei and Hoa Newens Sensei.  
(Above-Right)*



*Fort Saskatchewan Aikido Club, Alberta, Canada  
by Van Duong Sensei. (Above)*

*Chushinkan Dojo, Anaheim, California  
by James Nakayama Sensei. (Right)*

*A demonstration by members of the Aikido Institute  
and Kim Peuser Sensei. (Below-Left)*

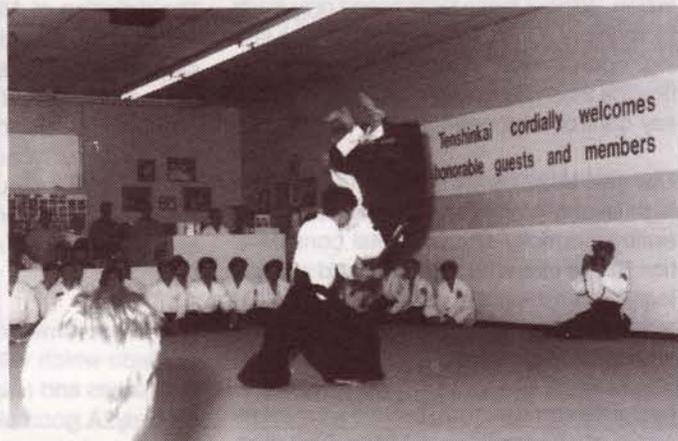
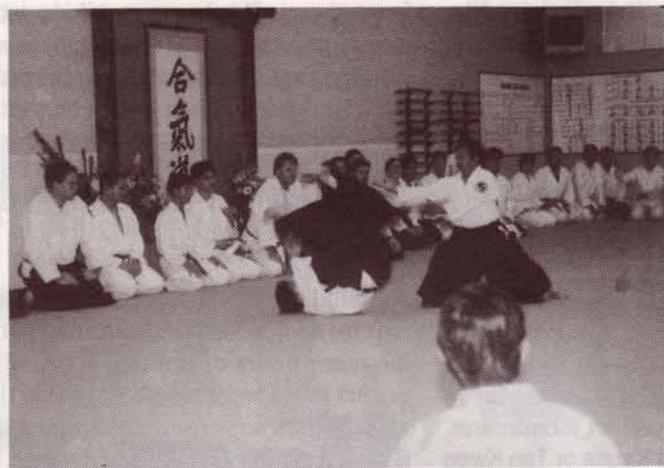
*Nidan Advancement,  
Mr. Cao Xuan Chieu and Mr. Nguyen Minh Hai.  
(Below-Right)*





*Seminar by Frank McGouirk Sensei.  
(Above-Left)*

*Demonstration by James Nakayama Sensei  
(Above-Right)*



*Seminar by Dang Thong Phong Sensei  
(Above)*

*Demonstration by members of Tenshinkai Dojo  
(Right)*

*Demonstration by Van Duong Sensei  
(Below-Left)*

*Shodan Advancement, Mr. Ngo Chien  
(Below-Right)*



## Memory of the Silver Anniversary Celebration

By Darrel E. Tanton  
Fort Saskatchewan Aikido Club

Recently fellow student returned from a rewarding seminar in L.A. with Sensei Dang Thong Phong. Some students were impressed at the skill level of the L.A. Aikidoist who endure regular, rigorous training, as well as enhanced technique delivery speed.

This is fine, if a student has obtained a high level of skill and conditioning enabling him or her to respond and react to this type of training. This skill level is not attained overnight! For instance, before attempting to deliver a technique fast you must develop timing, coordinating, control and concentration. Without these skills speed only leads to an injury. Once a student develops timing, coordination, control and concentration, he then has achieved speed, or shall I say controlled speeds!

Our goal as students must be to acquire a high level of skill to implement techniques swiftly, correctly and with total consideration for the uke, who must respond accordingly. There are many variables to consider when discussing the path to hard training and controlled speed!

I will state some factors I believe we must be aware of when training in Aikido. First of all, months or years of training does not constitute a high skill level. Knowledge and skill attained and retained are most important. This requires continual, repetitive practice both physically and mentally. We must take note of the various physical capabilities and inabilities of others. Some may not be in good health, may not be as flexible or may be suffering or healing from previous injuries. Size is another interesting factor, a small stature or light frame may enable one to achieve greater speed, agility and flexibility. This may also be an advantage when completing various break falls. Age brings other areas of concern such as less flexibility, less endurance, brittle bones, or possibly reduced speed. Another variable to consider is prior skills and training. People who have backgrounds in other martial arts or sports may adapt quicker than others. We could also consider the weather, -30 degree Celcius could cause people to ex-

perience arthritic pains or other ailments. Longer warm up exercises may be needed in extremely cold weather. Another important item is the training area, specifically the mats. Judo mats may be too hard and less shock absorbing as compared to other training mats designed to soften the fall from various throwing techniques. We must bear in mind that the harder the landing surface, the lesser the amount of repetitive falls the human body can withstand. Finally, we must have a good, sensible attitude and be enthusiastic.

We are all students of Aikido; we must help each other! There must be continual concern for our uke's well-being. We should always respond, react and harmonize with the uke. Thus lessening the chance for injuries!

Remember, we train for fun, fitness, as a hobby, a vocation and then self-defense. We are not in competition, we do not spar! The definition of Aikido is the way to harmony with Ki. Ki is the life force, the universal power, the power which lies dormant in most humans and waits to be awoken. Therefore, there is no competition in Aikido, only harmony! If one wishes to be competitive, he or she should be practicing an art that encourages competition, tournaments, and sparring such as Karate or Tae Kwon Do!

Hopefully in time we will achieve high skills in Aikido which will encompass applying techniques and responding to techniques properly. A good uke must react and flow with the technique appropriately. This could be in the form of breakfall, backroll, frontroll etc... Most importantly, the techniques must be applied correctly with concern to the skills level of the uke. This is critical in order to prevent injuries. Please understand injuries take time to heal resulting in setbacks or permanent disabilities. Injuries also could prevent a person from working, resulting in financial catastrophies. Therefore, please try to develop the basic techniques, skills and awareness. Everything else will fall into place!

I conclude by stating, "Do unto others as you would have do unto you!" Try to respect Aikido, your sensei and fellow students. Be concerned for their health and well being. With hope, luck and perseverance, we can be together for many years enjoying Aikido as well as sharing the art of Tenshinkai Aikido with future generations!

□

## TO BE A STUDENT...

By Robin Sarac  
Fort Saskatchewan Aikido Club.  
Edmonton, Alberta, CANADA

To be a student of Aikido requires that one possess certain attributes, including patience, dedication, humility, and a willingness to help others.

In my case, patience was the first trait that was put to the test during the initial stages of my Aikido training. Having taken Karate, I was used to seeing an immediate practical end to every technique I was shown. While many Aikido techniques can be very practical, these are usually taught later in the training process. The Aikido student must be willing to practice basic techniques over and over again until they fell natural and fluid. This takes me to the next important quality, dedication.

Any student, newcomer or veteran, will require dedication. Dedication to put in the many hours of training required to perfect the fundamentals of Aikido that make it look so very graceful, and make it such a potent form of self defense.

In addition, a students will need to grown in humility to accept instruction and criticism from fellow students as well as your sensei--regardless of their rank. Humility to realize that we are all students we must work together to achieve the harmony that is the heart and soul of Aikido. This brings me to the final quality I will discuss: the willingness to help others.

Aikido is not about competition, it centers around harmony. To achieve this harmony, students of Aikido should possess a willingness to help others. They must strive to help other students progress and gain a solid knowledge and understanding of the philosophy behind Aikido. Aikido is not just a set of movements designed to neutralize or project an attacker, it is a philosophy: A WAY OF LIFE.

These are by no means the only qualities required to be successful in your Aikido training, but they are some of the most obvious in life. ■

It has been a long, busy week at work. The weather has been very inclement: three weeks of continuous storms and showers in the middle of a record-cold winter. I was still recovering from a throat infection that Friday evening, yet I was excited about our trip to Westminster.

Upon leaving work, I grabbed a sandwich and caught a ride with some Aiki friends to the airport. The rain was pouring down. There was standing room only at the airline gates. The plane was an hour late. When we landed the storm was there to greet us too. But despite this ominous start, it proved to be a heartwarming and memorable weekend. I was



looking forward to this day since three months ago when Phong Sensei told me that he was planning the 25th anniversary celebration of the Tenshinkai Aikido Federation in January, 1993. That would be the first reunion of Tenshinkai members outside of Vietnam since the war ended in 1975. I could not miss this at any cost, especially since Sensei had formally invited our dojo to the event. The members of our party, which included our chief instructor, were also eager to meet again with this man who had left such a powerful impression on them when he came to give a seminar in Oakland last October. Rain or shine, we were determined to attend.

In reality, attending was both a lesson and a boost to my sluggish spirit.

When Sensei Phong arrived in the United States, he was 52 years of age, was still recovering from the effects of physical and mental abuse from the communist prisons and reeducation camps and hardly had any material possessions. Shortly after reuniting with his wife and two children after a 13 year separation, he undertook the monumental task of rebuilding his Aikido life from scratch. He started a dojo, which had to be moved through several locations, and after five years, attracted a student roll of over 170. In addition, he revived the Tenshinkai Aikido Federation and rallied many of his former students who were scattered all over the world. Sensei labored hard to fulfill his Aiki mission. I heard from the students

that it is not unusual to find him in the dojo at 4:00AM or 11:00PM.

During this visit to the Tenshinkai Headquarters Dojo I saw the fruit

of Phong Sensei's unceasing effort in the past five years. I knew that Sensei was a very determined person with an unbending spirit and so I expected to see wonders in his dojo. What I saw exceeded my expectations and was so spiritually uplifting that it instantly cured me of my five-week-old cold and made my wife suspicious about my jubilant mood upon my return.

I was impressed not only by the technical proficiency of the students, but also by their buoyant training spirit and their esprit de corps. In addition to the classes for the seminar, the program included a long list of demonstrations and ceremonies. Yet everything went like clockwork. The guests, including chief instructors and students from several dojos, were extremely well taken care for.

I thought that for a relatively young dojo to organize such a major event without any noticeable glitch, the students must have been guided by an impeccable teacher. I do not recall having seen a similar case of successful dojo leadership throughout my twenty-six year Aikido career.

Not being one who rests on his laurels, Phong Sensei intends to open a branch dojo in a nearby town. He also has a vision of going back to Vietnam some day and helping revive Aikido there. A normal person would shudder at such thoughts: going back to teach at the place where one was so atrociously persecuted just five years ago.

Reviewing Phong Sensei's life thus far, I can only marvel at the power of his spirit. Indeed, being a physically diminutive person, Sensei must be endowed with an unusual spirit in order to overcome the numerous trials and tribulations that have come his way.

Because Sensei's life struggle has taken him in and out of the darkness of com-

## *An Impeccable Spirit*

*By Hoa Newens,  
Aikido Institute, Oakland, California*

munist jails several times and to a different continent, it is hard for one who comes into contact with him recently to get the proper perspective on his life and realize the steadfastness of his spirit.

It is my hope that all his students and all those who come across his path understand the worthy cause that this man is consecrating his life to and join hands with him wholeheartedly.

I am most grateful to Sensei for inviting me to this special event, for it allowed me to witness the extraordinary accomplishments of an impeccable spirit and renewed my faith in the Aiki path.



In teaching brown and black belt students, Sensei Dang Thong Phong said: "We can learn everywhere, and from everyone, from high ranking black belt and the beginning white belt students. Learning is promoted when the brown and black belt student takes the opportunity to teach and share with others. In fact, the student who teaches will learn much more because teaching is learning..."

Sometime ago, when I first heard these words from Sensei Phong, I was puzzled.

her mind is, the realization comes that this is just a small opening. In addition, cultivating a sincere and concentrated heart which regards our strong and weak points is necessary for improvement. It is in this way our selfishness is shaped.

I find that it is dangerous when facing an opponent to focus primarily on his or her weakness and not regard his or her strengths seriously or vice versa. There is a need to see both in order to obtain a complete evaluation for the benefit of everyone involved.

ent viewpoints.

Patience can be learned by every student simply by training daily. However, I have to confess that sharing with the beginner, and especially young children I learn wonderful lessons about patience. There are times when I think to myself that I am very patient or "very cool." I believe that nothing can shake my calm. In fact I am ready to prove it by expecting something, anything big to happen. It does not take long. An unexpected moment, a young child shatters my "cool" and teaches me how easily I can lose my patience.

I admire all of my friends who are sharing their knowledge with children. They are not only patient, they are very creative with their ability to capture and hold a child's attention. They teach me a great deal by their example.

There is a story that demonstrates my case. Yoritomo Tashi told a tale of Lao who is one of his students, who is very dedicated to follow the way of calmness, but had not yet grown to a higher level of calm.

*One day he came to see Tashi and said: "...Sensei, I listen to your teaching and practice very hard every day. Now I think I have gotten everything right. I am completely in control of myself. today I would like to show you my results."*

*"Lao, you better be careful. Do not fall into the snare self pride and of being over confident. You should know that in order to reach the fullest calmness people have to stand on top of all obstacles. Anything, no matter how big or small?"*

*"Sensei, I already know that. Right now, I am willing to try any of your tests to prove it."*

*Tashi asked, "Are you sure? Have you won over all of your feelings?"*

*Lao responded, "I am very sure. I believe that even if the sky would fall on my head I would not shake my calmness."*

*Tashi responded, "All right, if you insist, then why don't you sit down over there."*

## Learning Through Sharing

by Quang Hai Nguyen

I thought the only place learning occurred was at the dojo or school and nowhere else. Besides, who are the qualified teachers of Aikido and how could a student learn everywhere? When I wanted to learn something I wanted to learn only from high ranking students and teachers, from "the best." It would be a waste of time to be involved with "novices." They could not teach me!

Fortunately, after a period of practice I found these thoughts were short-sighted and selfishly driven. It was like Sensei has said: "In practice we provide the time for the lessons to sink in and become part of our behavior." There have been many times in the past when I was practicing and suddenly understood more than the technique. I realized what Sensei had meant, my surface understanding was deepened and actions changed.

In learning, a person must open and clear the mind so he or she can be receptive to new ideas and actions. However, it is important to understand that as open and clear as a person thinks his or

The benefits of learning from high ranking students or "the best of the best" cannot be denied, however, many times I did not understand clearly what the "best" was talking about or demonstrating. Sometimes the gap was too great between my level and "the best." Meanwhile, many things close by offered much to learn as long as there was a willingness to learn. I found when I did not restrict myself by any learning situations or persons and simply seized the moment, I learned!

When I was a beginning white belt and intermediate student I thought I made the most mistakes of anyone. In fact, I am still making mistakes. Now when I see the opportunity I can share what I have learned.

As different as people are in size and shape so are the mistakes. When a student asks me what is wrong or why is it not working I may not instantly have the answer unless I have made a similar mistake. To obtain the answer I have to put myself in his or her position. In so doing I also learn valuable lessons from differ-

*Just be silent and wait for my test. I will see how you are going to handle this incredible test."*

*Tashi then called one other student and whispered something into his ear which made him look terrified. After that Tashi said aloud; "Sit down next to Lao, there is a good chance for you to learn another important lesson, too."*

*Tashi said, "Lao is a son of a very rich and high class family. He wears expensive clothes many of which are beautifully decorated." Tashi instructed Lao to lay his coat next to where he was sitting. The other student walked toward Lao in order to sit down as he had been instructed by his sensei. On the way to sitting he pretended to accidentally step on Lao's clothing with his dirty shoes. Lao, not wasting a second, and looking very upset hurriedly pushed the other student out of the path of his clothing and yelled: "How careless you are!"*

*Tashi raised his hand and said, "That's enough. I do not need to test you any more, Lao. You made two mistakes.*

*First, you were forced to break your silence by this awkward situation. Second, your anger overtook and controlled you. These are two very important mistakes of the student of calmness. There is a third mistake which you should avoid; allowing other people to suddenly shake your calmness. You did not know how to prepare for the unexpected. I understand if there is an armed man who would walk in and threaten you he would not take away your calmness. Or when you hear terrible news such as the earth almost blew up. It may not shake your feelings of calm. When I told you be prepared for an incredible test, by intention was to make your mind uimagine you will see something big, bery bit to happen. But you did not expect to see some silly and funny thing like that to defeat all your training. You must memorize this lesson."*

*"...Teaching is learning. And if we learn with the intention of teaching in the future, and spread the wonderful art of Aikido, our way of learning sure will be different." Let us do it together. □*

## The Foundation of Technique

by Gary Welborn, Aikido of North Orange County, California

After the initial movement to get off the line of attack, the foundation of technique is breaking the balance of the attacker's posture. Without accomplishing this, the Aikido technique applied will not work as intended. If the attacker's posture remains firm, only the use of excessive force, with a resulting mechanical modification away from correct movement, will allow you to overcome the attacker. Aikido techniques applied in conjunction with an underlying use of excessive power establishes a mechanical flow of movement inconsistent with the technique, making its results different than what was originally intended. If you fail to break the attacker's posture, you have a fight on your hands.

To accomplish an imbalance in your attacker, you need to rotate his or her upper body off the line of the original attack. This breaks the attacker's connection to the ground, disturbing the structural integrity of the body, and taking the power out of the attack. Movement is initiated either by leading the attacker physically off line at the moment of contact or by leading the attacker through a reaction to do something you do, by influencing his or her perception of reality. To lead the attacker physically, you make contact along the line of attack and redirect the attacker by movements of your body. This can be as simple as grasping the attacker's wrist, taking it with you as you turn away or enter. The "something" that you can do to influence the attacker's movement is "atemi." As the attack comes in, you move off line and respond with a strike (atemi) of your own. Your strike does not need to make contact to be effective. If your strike (atemi) is perceived as real, his or her mind will react as if hit and the body will move away, creating an opening as the attacker's mind bounces between what is actual and what is perceived. This opening need only to be momentary, just long enough to allow your entry. With either approach, once an imbalance is created, the minimum use of force applied in the correct direc-

tion will result in the attacker being easily thrown.

With regards to timing, the imbalance must be accomplished as an extension of the attacker's movement, coming as a part of the attack. Making your movement a part of the attack is what I believe is meant by the term "blending." The attacker needs to be off balance before he or she realizes what has happened. The attacker's movement becomes a subset of your movement, losing its original intent in the overall flow that you now control. The attack loses its subjective power in the flow of impartial power and the attacker is now just along for the ride.

Other items of importance to consider during the attack and your response are the distance between you and your attacker, your posture during the entire process, and proper breath control on your part. Distance means maintaining the correct spacing between you and the attacker, allowing your continued control of the process: Too far and the attacker can not be brought into the flow of your movement; Too close and you can get in each other's way. Proper distance can only be learned through practice as it is personal, different for each individual, differing with each attack or attacker. Your posture must remain upright and in balance or you may lose your advantage. If you need to lower your body, you do not do so by bending your back. Your body should move up and down during the flow of movement as a result of flexing your knees. If you need to be lower you bend your knees, tall you straighten them. Your breath should remain calm and controlled. Breathe in as you draw the attacker in, pulling out the attack and stretching out the attacker's energy. Breathe out as you turn the attack into your technique, as you throw or pin. Consider what has been said as you practice; notice what effect your awareness of creating an imbalance in your attacker has in the outcome of your techniques. ■

## North of Forty Nine

The big news this time is that some of us were South of Forty Nine; in Westminster, California for celebrations commemorating the Fifth Anniversary of the Budo Center. Did we enjoy ourselves?

My dictionary describes "incredible" as:

1. beyond belief or understanding; unbelievable
2. marvelous; amazing.

Any of these terms (but particularly the later) could describe the hospitality that our group was shown. One of our members commented that she now knows how Chuck and Di feel when they travel. From the moment we left the plane we were treated like royalty. Not only in food, lodging, and conversation but also in Aikido training. Given that Sensei Phong and his students had a major seminar to present and other guests to look after, we would have understood if we had to occasionally fend for ourselves. But no, we were always looked after--even to the extent of shopping. A very big "Thank you" from all of us from Fort Saskatchewan to all of you in Westminster who made our stay so enjoyable. I remarked to several students from the Budo Center that I thought our treatment was phenomenal and the recurrent comment was "That is how Sensei Phong is"; therefore, the biggest thanks of all to Sensei Phong.

From our point of view, the most important presentation received by our club during the celebrations was a certificate from Sensei Phong to Van Duong (our instructor) officially recognizing the Fort Saskatchewan Aikido Club as a member of the Tenshinkai family. We all value that recognition very much but I think that Van values it most of all. When we first started the Club, it was Van's fond-

est dream that some day we would be accepted into the Tenshinkai family. That certificate marked the realization of the dream and, in return, we will try to uphold the good name of Tenshinkai along the top of the world here.

I was personally very impressed by the quality of Aikido in Westminster. So many people took the time to help me (along with other members of our group) and gave such good advice that I had the overwhelming desire to move to the US in order to further my training at the



Budo Center. It is no wonder to me why Sensei Phong's students progress so rapidly. There is ample opportunity to practice and the quality of practice (if my experience is anything to go by) is exceptional. From these aspects alone the trip was well worth while.

In summary, our visit to Tenshinkai Headquarters was a memorable experience for us all. We wish to extend our most grateful appreciation to all of you who made it so worthwhile. Perhaps one day we will be able to extend an invita-

tion to you, to come here, so that we can try to repay your kindness.

*Bruce H. MacLeod*

## The Difference Between Force and "Ki"

I have found with doing Aikido that my ability to use my strength has increased. It is not so much muscle strength itself as how I use my body. For instance, I could not pick up a 100 kg. man in my arms but I can on my hips doing Koshi nage.

Force is the ability to overcome resistance with strength. Force is negative and not helpful to techniques in Aikido unless it is used properly. Force is frequently the last refuge of the incompetent. Ki is the ability to focus on doing what has to be done. Using Ki will allow your mind and body to act together to find the best way to accomplish the task. It can give you power in self-defense or the ability to stay warm in an ice cold river. The use of force may obscure learning while the use of Ki will enable learning.

Aikido has been helpful in my other extracurricular activities such as dancing because of the strength and attitudes I have developed from it.

*Genevieve S. MacLeod, 12 Yr. Old*

## Seminar in Westminster, California

On January 15, 1993, I went to train with Sensei Phong. He and his students are very good. Some of the students are called "high flyers" and they literally live up to their name, in rolls and break-falls.

I did a demonstration with one of our students. His name is Calvin. It was enjoyable. The training was very hard; I tried to cope with the seminar but I was pooped. We stayed in a motel. The hospitality was great, and so were all the people we met there. I hope I have the honour to go and work with Sensei Phong again.

*Alexander T. MacLeod, 9 Yr. Old*



## **My Trip to Tenshinkai Headquarters Dojo**

*By Beth Hall  
Aikido Institute, Oakland, California*

On January 15, my friend Nina Beck and I flew down to Orange County to attend the 25th Anniversary celebration of Sensei Dang Thong Phong's Tenshinkai Aikido Federation. We were met at the airport by one of Sensei Phong's students. He took us first to the dojo, where we were greeted by Sensei, then to our hotel to rest before evening class.

Later, Sensei's wife picked us up and took us to the dojo where we had an opportunity to train and meet more of the Tenshinkai students before the actual seminar began. Nina and I were both astounded by the ukemi we saw. Sensei's students were very strong and graceful and had some of the most high-flying falls I had ever seen. That was an enjoyable class.

Later in the evening the rest of our group from Aikido Institute in Oakland arrived. In the morning we had breakfast together before heading to the dojo for the opening ceremony of the day's events. We were greeted warmly by everyone at the dojo. I know we all felt very welcome there.

During the opening ceremony, our dojo was presented with a poster commemorating the event as well as a lovely bouquet of flowers (which, I must add, I brought home to Oakland with me and placed them on our altar there for our whole dojo to enjoy!)

After the opening ceremony there was a public demonstration in which we were honored to take part. It was also very exciting to watch the other demonstrations by different dojos as well as Phong Sensei's dojo. Following the demonstration, the actual classes of the seminar began.

The first class was taught by Frank McGouirk Sensei from Whittier California. I have known Frank Sensei since I was a young girl growing up in Southern California, and it was a pleasure to see him again. The next class was taught by both of my teachers, Kim Peuser and Hoa Newens. Then came the last class of the day, taught by Phong Sensei himself. We had hosted him at our dojo over the summer, and I know we had all been looking forward to experiencing his

dynamic techniques once again.

I was pretty tired by the time of the last class, but the power and fluidity of Phong Sensei's Aikido woke me right up. We all trained in groups for that session and I really enjoyed getting to practice with so many new people. All of the Tenshinkai students were so considerate and helpful, it was a really enjoyable class.

Phong Sensei and the Tenshinkai dojo were very hospitable, providing us all with breakfast and lunch, as well as a lovely banquet style dinner. I was personally touched by the wonderful sense of community that was so pervasive at Phong Sensei's dojo. All told, it was a truly enjoyable day, and a great honor to have an opportunity to take part in such a momentous event.

We, at the Aikido Institute hope that we will be able to host Phong Sensei at our dojo again soon. We also extend an open invitation to all of the students of Tenshinkai Dojo, it is always a special treat to have visitors. ■

## Aikido demonstrations

*presented by Sensei Dang Thong Phong and his students will be on Friday  
May 21st as part of the International Martial Arts Festival.  
The Sheraton Hotel, Universal City.  
8:30pm*

Send us this form or a copy for your subscription to Aikido Insights.

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**Monday thr. Friday**

8 - 9:30AM *Adults*

5 - 6:30PM *Juniors*

6:30 - 8PM *Adults*

**Saturday & Sunday**

10 - 11:30AM *Juniors*

11:30 - 1PM *Adults*