

2019 Spring

Xin Qi Shen

Bernie Lau Sensei



WELCOME TO AIKIDO

My studying Aikido and meeting Bernie was due to fortunate circumstances. Late 1969 I had to quit judo due to a back injury caused by an incompetent instructor. He insisted I could do this hip throw on his 200+ lbs. I was a skinny young kid in Jr. High School. I pulled my back muscles and was in lots of pain. His advice was to work though it.

After 4 months off I decided to return to my Judo training since I really enjoyed it. The classes were held at the Washington Karate Association in North Seattle. During my judo days I had become a dojo rat so I knew the teachers and owners. I would run

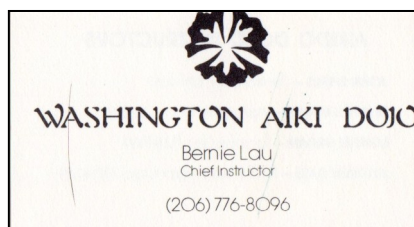


1973 UW Tohei's Demo
Bernie demonstrating Police methods

errands for them to the grocery store often. When I arrived at the dojo Mrs. Thiry told me the Judo instructor had to leave but they were starting an Aikido class, saying Aikido was a lot like Judo.

Since I enjoyed Judo more than Karate I signed up for the class. The first class was about 5-7 of us in a small mat room in back of the dojo. After a few stretches and Aikido exercises Bernie had us line up on one side of the room. He grabbed and twisted my arm (*sankyo*) and threw me across the room yelling, "curl up into a ball." Fortunately my Judo ukemi (falls) were good and I wasn't hurt. He then began to teach us forward tumbling.

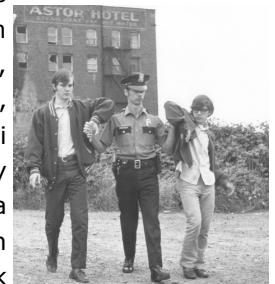
The next technique really amazed and bewildered me. He told me to club him on the head (*shomen uchi*). As I did, his movement swept me off my feet like a gust of wind had come from behind and lifted me. It was great until I landed on my back.



Bernie was an Aikido Shodan who had relocated from Hilo, Hawaii. His primary teachers were Y. Yamamoto, Meyer Goo, and Sado Yoshioka. He also attended classes and seminars by Koichi Tohei, Chief Instructor of Aikido Headquarters, the founder's son Kissomaru Uyeshiba, and the found himself, Morihei Ueshiba.

Bernie taught Tuesday and Thursday afternoons 3-5pm which was perfect timing for me. Eventually the club dwindled down to four of us. Chuck Livingston, Filipe, me, and an old gentleman Mr. Clark.

Classes were traditional and quite a workout, really good training. Eventually the class consisted of the Aikido taiso (warm-ups), six basic Aikido techniques, Aiki Jo (staff) 22 movements, Bokken (sword), and randori (multi-man attack). We didn't do fancy stuff, we just trained these for a little over a year. On one occasion he took us to Golden Gardens Park to practice our misogi and breathing techniques in T-shirts while it was snowing. As a kid I thought it was awesome. This was real training.



Bernie was very sincere and direct in his teaching. Classes were held in a traditional Japanese dojo way. As we learned the various warm-ups he'd have each of us lead the class time to time. I was use to it due to my Judo instructor doing the same, the only problem was trying to remember the exercises, and in which order we did them.

At this time Bernie was a Seattle Police officer who patrolled mostly China town (now know as the International District). Bernie was the ideal cop. He worked at being just, honest, and fair. In class he was sensei but outside of class he was just Bernie and treated us as equals.

During one of his patrols he chanced upon an Aikido club at 306 S. Main St. in Seattle. This was the Budokan Judo Club, an old bowling alley converted into a 200 mat dojo. It was huge, just awesome. This club was the Seattle Aikikai, chief instructor Yoshihiko Hirata 5th dan. Hirata was sent by the main headquarters and Koichi Tohei 10th dan to teach the existing Aikido group taught by Tom Katsuoshi.



recognize him until he spoke. One incident was during our usual lunch after morning Taiji class. Dave, Chuck, and I were sitting at the old Sunya restaurant and in walks this well dressed, slick looking guy with sunglasses. He looked like a classical movie gangster. He enters, sees us and comes over and sits down not saying a word. We all stiffen up and look at each

Hirata's Aikido was exceptionally good being trained by Tohei. Bernie came back with the news and suggested we go and check it out.

Bernie's Aikido was based on strong, clean technique and very basic. Hirata's was fast, fluid, and powerful. Eventually our club became part of Hirata's. Chuck and I started training there Mon, Wed, & Friday nights.

At this time Bernie was being moved to narcotics, vice squad, and eventually he went undercover. His teaching, Tue & Thur afternoons, became a problem so he decided to merge our school with Hirata's and our classes left the WKA.



Though this seemed to go smoothly for us students, it wasn't for Bernie. The Washington Karate Association had us all under

contract and insisted all students pay up their 6 month contracts. Unbeknownst to us, until years later, Bernie paid off all our contracts so we could move.

Bernie began teaching less and less leaving Chuck and myself to lead the afternoon classes or just practice. Eventually the classes were cancelled as he went undercover.

Walking around China town we'd see him occasionally but we never were sure if we could acknowledge him. On one occasion we were in a store about to pay for something and Bernie moves right besides me saying, "Get out of here NOW." We wandered across the street only to see several cop cars pull up with sirens blaring. It was a bust.



Sometimes his disguise was so good we didn't

other thinking, "WTF". As we start getting nervous he takes off his sunglasses and says hi.

Being undercover definitely had an extreme effect on Bernie in many ways but all-in-all the real Bernie never left.

AIKIDO DOJO INSTRUCTORS

JOHN SPIERS - Central Dojo, 329-4568

STEPHEN RUDEN - Wallingford Dojo, 632-5281

LONNIE GRIMM - Tacoma Dojo, 565-7189

ANDREW DALE - 1510 S. Washington Dojo, 782-9089

During this time undercover he was able to see the usefulness, or lack of, Aikido in real-life situations. This lead him to reconsider his training and seek out other arts and instructors.

He build a beautiful dojo in his backyard based on a Shinto style temple for his training and research. He traveled to study with Aikijitsu and Jujitsu shihans known for their effectiveness and having a connection with law enforcement.

When possible he'd bring these instructors to his home dojo and invite us to study with them as well. It was quite a list of martial arts who's who.



Teaching police tactics and due to his research he named his own art Icho Ryu Aikijujitsu, being a combination of these varied arts specifically designed for police work.

Having known Bernie all these years it's great to see him happy in retirement and enjoying life. He's always had a positive attitude and outlook on life. He is kind to a fault and has be taken advantage of due to his big heart and trusting nature.

I owe him a great deal more than just learning Aikido and Aikijitsu. One of the most important lessons I learned from him was how to practice, how to train, and keep training. The importance of ceaseless repetition and constant polishing of our technique. Life is training.