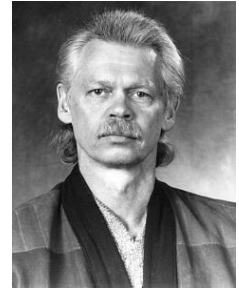
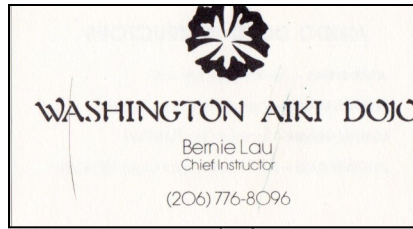


Bernie Lau Sensei

BK: My Teachers,
A.T.Dale



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, sensei Chris. 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 a few 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 owner



1973 UW Tohei's Demo
Bernie demonstrating Police methods

(Julius Thiry). I would run errands for his wife 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 and I'd like it.

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 off my feet. I flew across the mats and it

was awesome until I landed on my back.

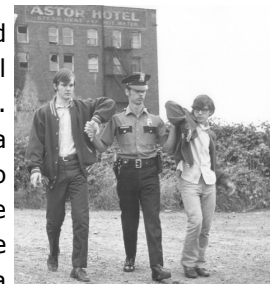
WELCOME TO AIKIDO

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 founder 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, super-good training. Eventually the class consisted of the Aikido taisho (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. I will say this is his character. Classes were held in a traditional Japanese dojo way. As we learned the various warm-ups he'd have each of us lead the once in a while. 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 Chinatown (now know as the International District). Bernie was the ideal cop. He worked at being just, honest, and fair. In class he

Bernie Lau

was sensei but outside of class he was just Bernie and treated us as friends.

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. Tom had been teaching a small group at the Nichiren Buddhist Church for a couple of years prior.

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



Hirata-Tohei-Bernie

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



Bernie's Aikido was based on strong, clean and basic technique. 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 & Thurs 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 was a for-profit business and had us all under contract and insisted all students pay their 6 month contracts. Unbeknownst to us, until years later, Bernie negotiated to cancel contracts so we could move.

Bernie began teaching less and less leaving Chuck and myself to lead the afternoon classes which had moved to the Budokan. Eventually the classes were cancelled as he went undercover.



Walking around China town we'd see him occasionally but we were never were sure if we could acknowledge him. On one occasion we were in a store about to pay for

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

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.

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



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 has a positive attitude and outlook on life. He is kind to a fault and has been taken advantage of due to his big heart and trusting nature by various martial art

Bernie Lau



organizations to exploit his notoriety.

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, keep training, and the importance of integrity. The importance of

ceaseless repetition and constant polishing of our technique and ourselves. Life is training and exploration.

STORIES

During the time he was undercover Chuck and I spotted him at Golden Gardens. We were in the sun reading at the beach when we spotted him. There were two others that seemed to be with him but distant and we weren't sure. We knew not to yell, "Hi Bernie", we just watched. He strolled down the walkway and we lost sight of him. As we started to leave the parking lot, a car pulls in front of us, Bernie got out and comes over. "You're not going to say hi?" he says.

Having know Bernie for all these years I can honestly say his spirit is strong, honest, and friendly. In spite of all he's been through Bernie is Bernie. He has pursued his quest for knowledge and refining his art of Icho Ryu. He is responsible for bringing several masters of the arts to Seattle including: Don Angier, Wally Jay, James DeMile, Sado Yoshioka, Fedrick Loverett, Sensei Tabata, and others. He has shared them with the Aiki community, opening their seminars to all. He learned from them and then took what was important to improve his Icho Ryu Aikijujitsu.



Bernie remarried his second wife, I was one of the

witnesses, so that she'd be taken care of under his benefits incase something happened to him. She passed away a few years ago.



Bernie produced several Videos on Aikijujitsu as well as two books. He travels to South America and Hawaii for relaxation and teaching seminars. He was awarded an Aikido 5th Dan ranking by the Aikido Hombu Dojo in 2021.

I won't add more since his life story is published in his books:

- ◆ Dance with the Devil The Memoirs of an Undercover Narcotics Detective
- ◆ Descarado: Shameless Betrayal in the Martial Arts World

RESOURCES:

https://ejmas.com/jcs/jcsart_svinth_1101.htm

