

Fond Memories of Professor Tomiki

My first encounter with my beloved late Professor Kenji Tomiki was in April of 1958, after my most fortunate admission to Waseda University. I was searching for the most suitable sport for participation throughout the upcoming four years. I honestly had absolutely no idea of the nature of Aikido, since it was a relatively new martial art at that time. My main concern was simply to restore my health after I had been subjected to the cruel punishment of preparing for the college entrance examinations.

Although I had participated in numerous sports during my high school period (including Judo, baseball, swimming, etc.), by the spring of 1958 I was in bad shape both physically and emotionally. As such, I went around checking out all kinds of sports clubs available on the Waseda campus. It was totally by accident that I witnessed Aikido when I went to the gymnasium intending to check into Judo, Karate, Kendo and Boxing, which were practiced in the same building. Professor Tomiki was teaching Aikido immediately after his Judo instruction to well-trained Judo club members. Judo at that time did not have different weight classes – the weight class system wasn't implemented until the Tokyo Olympic Games held in 1964 (which, by the way, was the same year as the Beatles' first concert in Japan. Am I getting old?).

To put it mildly, I was a little discouraged watching the captain of the Judo club, Mr. Miyake, endowed with 300 pounds of huge body, smashing down and choking freshmen. I decided I would not subject myself to that kind of abuse and the irrationality of holding each other regardless of weight differences. The rules of Judo starting by grabbing each other were prohibitively against a 130-pound person like myself versus a 300-plus pound person like Mr. Miyake, so I reluctantly gave up the idea of joining them.

You can't imagine how ecstatic I was to witness Professor Tomiki's graceful Aikido with Atemi Waza (striking techniques) and Kansetsu Waza (joint techniques) applied from a distance. Immediately I knew this was the most ideal and suitable sport for me. I signed up for Aikido Club and shortly thereafter all of the new members went through one week of intensive Shinjin Gasshuku (traditional boot camp to test the determination and endurance of newcomers). As I explained in my article on "The Dawn of Tomiki Aikido" last year, Waseda Aikido Club was recognized as a full-fledged sport club ("Undo-Bu" in Japanese) in 1958, while all other universities still had only "Doko-Kai" (loosely organized clubs made up of students with the same interest).

The rest was history. I've been addicted and hooked on Aikido since then and my love affair with Tomiki Aikido has lasted over the last 40 years without any interruption or any doubt. Indeed, it has been a great ride.

Speaking of Tomiki Aikido in the USA, we established our national organization, the "Japan Aikido Association (USA)", in 1990 and our first humble National Seminar/Tournament was held in my hometown of Denver, Colorado in the same year. The movement of establishing our national organization was born right after our gathering at the first World Aikido Festival held in Tenri, Japan in 1989. Mr. Bob Dziubla and other enthusiasts spearheaded this movement successfully. After having had numerous national tournaments and seminars in Illinois, Ohio, Maryland, California, and Virginia, we are preparing to hold another national Tomiki Aikido Festival in Denver, Colorado in June of 2002. The journey was not necessarily always smooth, but overall we have accomplished satisfactory results with the tireless dedication of all the instructors and students scattered throughout the continental U.S., which is larger than all of Europe. As all of us know, Dave and Kerry Nettles have played the major role in keeping the organization intact.

My only regret was that Professor Tomiki's plan to visit us all over the world did not materialize due to his death in 1979. He really wanted this trip badly in order to spread his methods of Aikido training. However, due largely to many Aikido pioneers abroad such as Mr. Riki Kogure, Mr. Senta Yamada, Mr. Koshiyama in Switzerland, Mr. Tada in Brazil, Professor Higashi, Professor Kondo, and numerous other instructors, Tomiki Aikido has been spread across all the continents. It is also redundant to mention that Professor Tomiki's successors, Master Tetsuro Nariyama and Professor Fumiaki Shishida, took Professor Tomiki's place and went overseas to further develop Tomiki Aikido.

Needless to say, Professor Tomiki impressed all of us profoundly, not only with his technical abilities, but also with his deep and compassionate love as a true educator. He taught us the “Way of Life” (“Michi” or “Do”) and the principles of Aikido, so that all students of Tomiki Aikido, including even second and third generations, have been benefited continuously by his legacy.

I was extremely fortunate to be taught directly by Professor Tomiki when he was still young and vigorous, with a tremendous desire to create a truly educational competitive Aikido in an effort to learn a moment of truth and other essential virtues, such as mutual respect, cultivation of true sportsmanship and friendship, endurance, humility, patience, courtesy, creativity, determination, serenity/calmness, courage, alertness, swiftness, and many other inherent educational merits. The true value of competition is improving each other rather than winning or losing the match. As the founder of Judo, Professor Jigoro Kano, said, “Jita Kyohei”, which literally means “You and I together improve and prosper”. This is the true spirit and purpose of competition.

Professor Tomiki’s famous words “Mushin Mugamae” contain equally profound teachings telling us the importance of freedom from any thoughts, any ideas, and any particular posture. In essence, Professor Tomiki taught us that we had to keep our composure steady and calm even in the midst of dangerous situations, which at one time meant real sword fights for life or death. We do not have this kind of real-life fighting to test ourselves in modern civilized society, so today we are able to duplicate this “moment of truth” only through mutually beneficial competition. In short, cultivation of “Heijo-Shin” (calmness of mind under any circumstances) is of utmost importance.

Mr. Kenichi Futami, who is one of my Aikido friends in Japan and also the publisher/editor of the monthly publication “Shumpu” (“Spring Wind”), has been asking me to write an article of memories of Professor Tomiki. This request would seem to be an easy task, but I have had a very difficult time with how to begin and what to write because my fond memory was of Professor Tomiki himself and not any particular actual events. I have finally, however, endeavored to write this article as Mr. Futami requested.

The first thing I still vividly remember are the days of annual traditional summer Aikido Gasshuku (training camps). We had our summer camps twice at Tenri University in Tenri city near one of the ancient capitals of Japan, Nara city. The entire city of Tenri, including the headquarters of Tenri-kyo (one of the large religious sects) was spotlessly clean due to the strong belief of the members of Tenri-kyo to always do good deeds such as sweeping public roads and everywhere. The summer in Tenri-city was particularly hot and humid. The day of our hard and long training started early in the morning, being forced awake by the thunderous sound of Taiko (large Japanese drums). We could not complain about the excellent Judo dojo facilities, but the Dojo was very big, which gave us very hard times going back and forth doing Shikko (knee walking) and Zenpo-kaiten ukemi (forward rolls) with exactly the same number of repetitions done in the much smaller Waseda Dojo. These same numbers of repetitions were foolishly done out of our habits. We were all stupidly young and naive – no doubt about that!

The most enjoyable times were of course at dinnertime. The meals served at Tenri were exceedingly luxurious by the standard of the students. Above all, I still remember the most delicious Sukiyaki dinner, which Professor Tomiki and a few of the senior members enjoyed by a kind invitation from the Shinbashira of the sect (head minister of the Tenri religion). Professor Tomiki had very close friendships with these ministers and the school officials there. After supper, usually a few senior class members visited Professor Tomiki’s room and listened to his stories (sometimes too long) while we took turns to massage his shoulders and back. He also showed us how to enhance the food digestion when we ate too much by rotating his intestines freely at will. Nobody could copy his astonishingly vivid movements. I’m sure that only a few people in the world had this kind of close and private relationship with Professor Tomiki.

Secondly, the times assisting Professor Tomiki teaching American soldiers at Fuchu Air Base and the annual intensive martial arts trainings of SAC (U.S. Strategic Air Command Members) were priceless and unforgettable experiences. Our other great master, Professor Oba, frequently took the place of Professor Tomiki. Professor Oba was regularly teaching his Aikido, emphasizing self-defense techniques to the U.S. military officers at Fuchu Air Base. I really enjoyed assisting him. Almost always we were invited for dinner

at their Officers' Club after our classes. I've never been able to forget how and what Professor Oba ordered for his dinners. He would always say "New York Cut, Please" in his notorious Aikita-Ben (strong Akita area's dialect), which sounded like "Nyuuyoku katto Pureezi". As for myself, I said, "the same thing, please", without knowing at the time that a New York cut steak was the most expensive item on the menu.

Annually some 50 selected members from the Strategic Air Command Units from the U.S. came over to Japan for a period of 30 days strictly for the purpose of attaining advanced combat skills. I had the great pleasure to assist Professor Tomiki's Aikido instructions to them at the Kodo-kan (headquarter Dojo of Judo in Tokyo). Some of them even came over to our Waseda Dojo to polish up their techniques. After these training sessions, we went out for a different kind of training session, which was drinking around Shinjuku, Roppongi, Shibuyu. These were indeed very enjoyable ways to learn English, including many bad words such as _____? So please do not blame me for using these profanities accidentally.

Another memorable time with Professor Tomiki was when he and three of us were invited to join my classmate, Keizo Obuchi, who eventually became Prime Minister of Japan and unfortunately passed away a couple of years ago, possibly due to the stress of overworking to fulfill his duties. This trip was to showcase Mr. Keizo Obuchi as a clean young sportsman prior to his campaigning for Shugiin (a member of the House of Representatives). We gave Aikido demonstrations throughout his Gunma District. Obuchi-kun was the main star, throwing us all around in spite of his lower black belt ranking. I assure you this happened only in his hometown, Nakano-jo in Gunma Prefecture. Professor Tomiki received a hero's welcome, with flowers presented by beautiful ladies, obviously well-connected politically. I did not mind at all to be Obuchi-kun's uke (fall-guy) knowing his generous paybacks in the evenings, treating us to expensive tea house dinners and his secret night spots in the world-famous Onsen-Ba (Hot Spring resort area). We had no intention of getting any credit, but he was elected successfully as the youngest member of Shugiin (the House of Representatives) in the following year.

By the way, do you know what is Professor Tomiki's most favorite food? The answer is, surprisingly, greasy Unagi (Freshwater Eel seasoned with sweet soy sauce base) served over steamed rice. Whenever we went out to eat, he ordered Una-ju (Eel dinner box), so I did also as a courtesy. Since then I had the honor to visit his home in a somewhat rural area by train on several occasions. Every time he ordered for me a delicious juicy Una-ju because I ordered this same thing out of courtesy (reigi) when we had the pleasure of having dinners together.

I still and always will proudly keep his several brush paintings depicting bamboo in red ink, along with famous Japanese words. These memorable paintings are hung in my living room along with his famous "Mushin Mugamae" and "Yo Bushi" (cultivating martial artists' minds) frames. Thanks to Professor Shishida of Waseda University, the picture of Professor Tomiki, which hangs in our Dojo in Westminster, Colorado is the original which hung in the old Waseda gymnasium. I'm eternally grateful to Shishida Sensei's kindness. These artworks are my most precious and priceless possessions, which will always remind me of our great life-time Sensei, Professor Kenji Tomiki, and his legacy. I simply say to him "Thank You, Sensei, for your teachings, guidance, and memories." He was a giant in every way.

Written with fond memories.

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