

Aikidosphere

An Interview with Kanai Sensei

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(reviewed by Helena Neves-Pelchat, Julien's mother)



Introduction

My name is Julien, I am 10 years old and I've been practicing Aikido for a year. I have passed my yellow belt exam and I am now working hard for my orange belt.

I love Aikido. During my life, I've had the opportunity of visiting different Aikido dojos and I've always been impressed at seeing the different techniques and the amazing tobiukemi.

I have always dreamed about being a famous journalist when I grow up, someone as famous as Christianne Amanpour of CNN or Mike Wallace of 60 minutes. That is my dream. So, when I found out that I had been selected to interview Kanai Sensei I could not hide my excitement. I took it as my first journalism assignment and although a bit nervous, I was very honored to do it. Kanai Sensei is my hero. I see him all the time when he comes to our dojo in Montreal, one of his most famous pictures is in my house's computer home page and I knew he had been a direct student of O-Sensei.

I started by introducing myself and told Kanai Sensei that I started to practice Aikido because I thought it helps to defend oneself. I also told him that I found tobiukemi very impressive because one can make a person fly with their bare hands.

What about you, Kanai Sensei, why did you start to practice Aikido?

Same reason you have. I wanted to be strong, you know!?

When I started Aikido, I found it to be very difficult and I was very, very, confused. How was it the first time you started to practice Aikido?

I was very confused too. I didn't understand what I was doing for a very longtime.

I was very nervous the first Aikido Exam that I did, but it went very well. I knew that if I did something wrong, Claude Sensei or my instructor Mohammed would tell me. When it ended, and I passed, I was extremely proud of myself.

Oh yeah? O.K.

How was it the first time you did your first Aikido exam? Were you also nervous?

My first Aikido examination was how to teach new students. Because we are professionals, we have to teach the new students. So, that is what I did. Then, Doshu Second Doshu, was watching how I taught the new students I don't know how I did, but somehow, I passed. That is why I am here now.

How old were you when you became a Shodan?

Shodan? I think around 20 years old.

How did you meet our Sensei Claude?

Sensei Claude! (laughs). He practiced a very long time too. Then, he came to my dojo and I kept an eye on him. He is a genius. He is very strong. He is something, you know. I was very sure he'd become a good teacher.

You are an Aikido master. But it must have taken a lot of physical and mental effort to become one. Did you put your whole life into Aikido? And if so, why?

Yes, it was quite difficult and yes, I did put all my life into Aikido. At first, when I started Aikido, I found it to be very difficult but I wanted to know what it was I was learning. But now, I am stuck to people. That is why I am still here. I am very interested in people.

Did you have any other things you liked to do when you were a child like me?

Oh yes. When I was a boy, like you, I wanted to be a sailorman. Just like Popeye, you know!

Then I wanted to know about Kanai Sensei's family. Where he had been born, raised, about his parents, whether he had brothers, sisters, and pets.

I now live in Canada but before that, I lived in Singapore. And I was born in Mejiro, Tokyo, where I lived the first two years of my life. What about you, Kanai Sensei, where were you born? And where were you brought up?

I was born in Manchuria, which was a Japanese colony at the time. I stayed in Manchuria for nine years. After WWII, I came back to Japan with the whole family.

My mother was born in Portugal and my father was born in Canada. Where were your parents born, Kanai Sensei? And what did they do? Did they practice Aikido?

My parents were both born in Japan. My father worked in the Japanese Army. He was a Japanese MP. He did not practice Aikido but he was a Kendo instructor.

Do you have any brothers or sisters? Do they also practice Aikido?

Yes. I have an older brother and an older sister. No, they do not do any martial arts.

I have six cats, including a "Mi-ke cat" that we found on a Tokyo street. Did you have any animals when you were a child?

Six cats. Wow!!! That's great. (laughs.) I had one dog.

Finally I was curious to know about Kanai Sensei's life with O-Sensei.

O-Sensei was the founder of Aikido and a very famous person. How did you get to meet O-Sensei?

When I became uchideshi, I lived in Hombu Dojo and around that time I met O-Sensei.

How was it when you were an uchideshi with O-Sensei? Did you like it?

It was very hard, very difficult. You know I don't like hard work. So, every morning, when I woke up in the Dojo I would sit and I would always think "OK I quit tomorrow. I'll just do it today but I'll quit tomorrow" (laughs). For ten years, I was always thinking that.

What kind of work did you do at the dojo for O-Sensei?

Cooking and I was O-Sensei's otomo, because everywhere O-Sensei had to go, there had to be always someone with him. I did everything you know! Around that time, Hombu Dojo was very poor there was no TV, nothing. So, the uchideshi every night had to read books to O-Sensei, give him massages, prepare his bath everything just like what's it called? a maid just like that.

Was O-Sensei strict?

Yes. To uchideshi, yes. But he's so sweet to outside people that came to practice at Hombu Dojo. He's very nice and sweet, but not for us.

Where was O-Sensei's first dojo? Was it in Tokyo?

I don't know what dojo was first, but I went to Tokyo Hombu Dojo.

So, was it Wakamatsu Dojo?

Yes, yes, Wakamatsu-cho Dojo. It's in Tokyo, Shinjuku.

I went there with my mom.

Oh, is that so? That's nice!

Did O-Sensei have a favorite technique that he liked to teach his students?

Yes. His favorite techniques were shomenuchi ikkyo and shomen uchi iriminage. Everyday, we had to practice those techniques most of the time in suwari waza.

What about you? Do you have a favorite technique?

Yes, at about that time when I was an uchideshi and I got more confident my favorite technique was shihonage.

Really??? Mine too!

G-O-O-D!!!!!!

Did O-Sensei like nature? What about animals?

Yes. I think so. Very much.

That's all

That's all? Yeah? O.K. Thank you. (laughs)

I really enjoyed interviewing Kanai Sensei. I was nervous at the beginning but Kanai Sensei was so nice that I felt more and more relaxed. Now, I have another dream. I wish to interview all Aikido Masters and publish a book about my interviews with them.