



Beautiful Downtown Los Angeles, home of the ISF/AB/KTRR Honbu Dojo!

Greetings from Honbu:

Happy 2003 to all! The year has started well here, with a great public demonstration and lots of contributions for the Newsletter! Please keep the great articles and announcements coming, and we will do our best to print them all. Articles may now be sent to: news@shinkendo.com.

The Honbu students and all branch dojo wish to offer our sincere condolences to Obata Kaiso on the recent passing of his mother. Our hearts are with you now and always, Sensei!

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Kaiso's Tokushu



真劍道

Thank you all very much for your cards, emails and kind words regarding the passing of my mother. I want you to know that I am just fine. My mother felt no pain. She died the way Japanese people hope to die: peacefully, naturally, and with all of her affairs in order. Please don't worry about me at all.

I hope you all got your annual Good Luck Cards from Honbu Dojo. Please give them to your friends for me. Explain to them the concepts of "Dan" (good judgement) and "Zen Aku" (knowing good from bad) as I have taught them to you.

When you perform in public demonstrations, it is important to remember the idea of "Ji Ta Shizen," or Self, Others, Nature. You must be careful for yourself, others, and all things around you. Do not use real swords at full speed in public. 80% or so is safer. It has always been of greatest importance to me that no one gets hurt in Shinkendo.

The Honbu Dojo will have another demonstration in April, in Monterey Park. I hope you can be with us.

Practice safely!

-Obata Toshishiro



Kaiso and Mrs. Obata show us how it's done.



James and Mr. Saito practice Tachiuchi

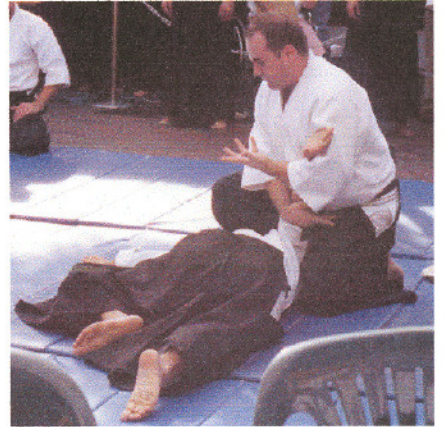
January 04 Demonstration in Little Tokyo!

真劍道

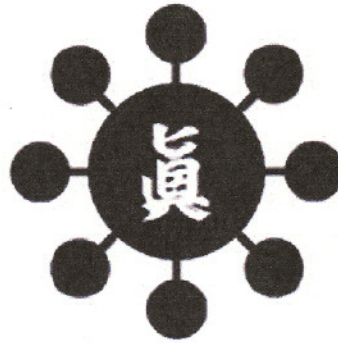
The Honbu Dojo was very pleased to be invited to participate in Little Tokyo's New Year celebration. We were given over an hour to perform, and were able to showcase Aikido techniques, Toyama Ryu Kata, Shinkendo Kata, sparring, test cutting and more!

The atmosphere was relaxed, and Matthew was even given a microphone with which to MC the event and explain to the crowd what they were watching.

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Nathan-San demonstrates Aikido techniques.



Above: Vicky and James - Shall we dance?



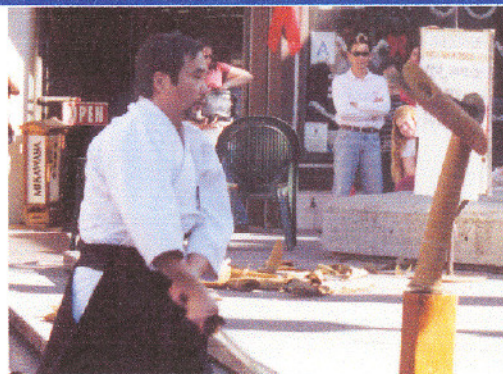
James and Mr. Saito - Tachiuchi



James slices through tatami like butter!

January 04 Demonstration, continued

Below: Obata Kaiso shows the crowd his flawless technique.



Above: Mr. Saito makes a clean cut.

Often Kaiso has to carefully choreograph these events due to time constraints, but since we had over an hour to perform this time, Kaiso encouraged us to choose our own best forms and demonstrate whatever we wished. It was a privilege and an honor to know that he feels such great confidence in us!

Obata Kaiso treated the crowd to a rare demonstration of his cutting skill, flawlessly performing double-cuts several times in a row. We were honored to watch him perform, and were humbled, as always, by his great skill.

We had a great time, and we all look forward to our next event in Little Tokyo!



Above: Surrounded by multiple tatami enemies, Matthew fights on undaunted!



Left: James calmly notes his Shinken;



Right: Steve demonstrates Happo-Giri.

From the Ranks

"Confused Newbie" Part II
-Michael Shu (Honbu Dojo)

In the previous newsletter I mainly described me getting lost just trying to find the Honbu dojo. In this extravagant installment I shall describe how I got lost within the very dojo. A lot of it didn't even have much to do with the teachings.

I was advised to purchase an aikido gi, which wasn't much of a problem. A couple of days after that, I received my "deluxe cotton hakama" with indigo dye from the Tozando company in Japan. It would have been a great life-long hakama, if I only knew how to take care of it better. I decided to shrink it by washing it... in the machine. It came out looking like mush, but I was able to iron it back to what I thought the original shape was. The indigo dye ran so much even after washing that my gi looked like blue jeans after the first time wearing it. It took a couple of months for that to stop.

My first class was not picture perfect as I had hoped. I had just put my gi on when I realized I didn't have an obi to keep it all together with! Waddling out holding my gi together with my hands, I caught Mrs. Obata and asked if there were a spare obi lying around. There being none, she asked Sang of the Aikido class to lend me his, which added another weight on top of my pile of embarrassment. Luckily I didn't ruin it with my runny hakama, since it was still laying all freshly washed and crumpled back in my apartment. Later, Mrs. Obata gave me an old obi of hers which I used for a while. Saito-san commented that it was a bit too broken in, and gave me a nice new one which was all white and stiff. Thus I sort of feel like the dojo moocher.

Anyway, on that first day of class, we lined up with me on the farthest left end and trying to do what everybody else was doing. I knelt when the others knelt and bowed at this direction and that whenever some mysterious Japanese command was shouted out. Then Sensei called me up to the front and all eyes went toward my direction.

Many thoughts ran through my head at this point. Was there some sort of weird initiation thing that this Shinkendo dojo did on their new students? If so then I really hoped that it wasn't to humiliate the new student by having the sensei whip his butt with a bokken. So reading his gestures I ran up to the front and faced Sensei. He gestured towards the class:

"Please... introduce...". Part of me was really relieved that there wasn't any funky Shinkendo hazing but then I had no idea what to say. So out from my mouth came, "Um... hi, my name is



Michael Shu...", and then I looked over to Sensei. He continued to gesture towards the audience saying, "Tell something more..." So I said, "Err... I'm a student at USC studying psychology, I'm 20 years old, and I've taken some martial arts before when I was younger..." I stopped there since I knew nobody really wanted to spend the entire class time listening to my life story and concluded, "I look forward to training here." Then sensei said "Hai, yoroshiku onegaishimasu" and everybody bowed and said the same as I was almost running back to my place in the line. I froze and bowed before doing that, thankfully!

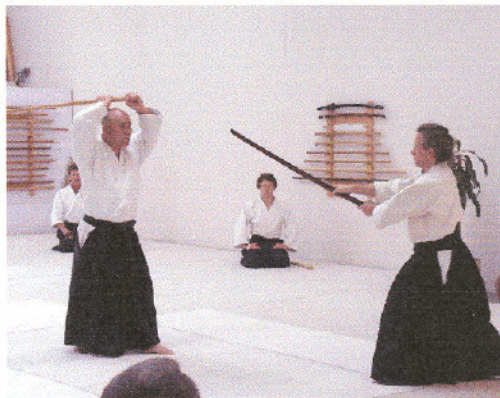
Thus began my training. Even more confusion ensued, but that I will describe in the final part of this magnificent trilogy of the newbie. Look forward to hearing about my hitting myself in the head hundreds of times with my bokuto, and adding a permanent feature on one of our poor mats...



Branch Profiles: Oakland's new home!

Mike Esmailzadeh Sensei is the head instructor of Suigetsukan. He holds the following student and instructor licenses: Toku-e/Kyoshi in Shinkendo, Rokudan in Toyama-ryu Battojutsu, Rokudan in Danzan Ryu Jujitsu, Godan in Aikibuken, Instructor in Kadena de Mano. He has been actively involved in martial arts for 26 years. Mike was born in Germany, and immigrated to the US at the age of 12. He began studying Jujitsu at that time. He started studying under Obata Kaiso in 1988 and sees the study of Shinkendo and Aikibuken under Obata Kaiso as one of the main influences in his martial art development. He feels that the training he received under Obata Kaiso allowed him to take his martial arts training to new levels.

After leaving Los Angeles he founded the Suigetsukan Dojo in 1991 in Oakland. The dojo was located in a store front for two years. In 1993 Suigetsukan became a non-profit corporation and moved to a warehouse with 1100 sq./ft of mat space, and living quarters for Mike and four *Uchi-Deshi* (live-in-students). After being at this location for almost 10 years, due to the rise in rent and with the hope of finding a permanent location for the dojo, Mike Sensei and several of the other members of Suigetsukan decided to buy a building. In October of this year this dream finally became a reality. Luckily the new dojo is located only six blocks from the current location. Since then (and for the next few months) we have been (and will be) working five days a week on renovating the space. Hopefully the work will be done by the end of March. Once completed it will have living quarters for six people upstairs and a 1550 sq./ft. training area downstairs. This will be a great help since especially Shinkendo takes a good amount of space to do safely and we were starting to outgrow our old location. Suigetsukan currently



offers classes in Shinkendo, Aikido, Kadena de Mano and Jujitsu. Once we complete the move to the new space, we hope to expand the number of classes we offer to 5 days a week and add a children's program.

Suigetsukan is fortunate to have other Shinkendo dojo nearby in Northern California. Jim Alvarez Sensei of the Shinrei dojo in Livermore, Margarita Jimenez-Hall Sensei and Rowdy Hall of the Seikishin dojo in Morgan Hill, and Russ Rhodes Sensei of the Pacific Coast Academy of Martial Arts in Cambell - all of which are within 1-2 hours driving distance. Working with these other dojo and their teachers strengthens all of our commitment and practice to both Aikibuken and Shinkendo.



Student Profiles: Sensei Lou D'Agostino from New York

Jinsei Shinkendo

I first met Toshishiro Obata Kaiso in May 1999. I had been aware of Obata Kaiso through his books and I was fortunate in owning a Shinkendo video, which I had purchased at least a few years prior to our meeting.

Ever since I had begun my martial arts journey, I had been very interested in seeking out a qualified instructor in swordsmanship. As a child in 1970, I visited Japan with my father for the Worlds fair held in Osaka. A seed was planted in my mind after witnessing an awe-inspiring martial art demonstration displaying various Japanese Budo. In May of 1999, I had been learning Iaido and our group invited Obata Kaiso for a seminar. Due to my obligations and workload at my Dojo teaching Taekwondo and self-defense, I was not sure that I would have the time to undertake a Shinkendo Seminar. I also felt that I would be learning a completely new way of swordsmanship and was not sure I was up to the task. I was reluctant to attend the seminar.

Well, I was very right in some regards. After participating in my first Shinkendo seminar my mind, body and spirit was awakened by Kaiso's energy, enthusiasm, personality, and expertise. I was hooked. The intensity, variety and the beauty of Shinkendo captivated me in a way that was very fulfilling and satisfying. I was learning to use the sword in an entirely new way. I was learning a complete art that accurately reflected the historical use of the Japanese sword. Since that fateful meeting, I have come to understand Shinkendo and the tradition of the Japanese sword in a way which would previously have been impossible.

With all humility and respect for our art and towards our members, I have gained this insight through opportunities to study privately with Obata Kaiso, attending Shinkendo seminars and the honor and privilege of being a Shinkendo instructor. Unless one is fortunate enough to be a Honbu student, attending seminars is the next best thing to being there. It is also a wonderful way to get to know the founder of our art, and to understand a bit more about Shinkendo generally.

In September of 1999 I received my Kenshuin Menjo. Since that time, Sensei David Birdsell

Sensei Lou (far right) and students



of the Midwest has made numerous trips to New York to help me and the Shinkendo NY dojo members improve and learn the Shinkendo curriculum. Each time I have the opportunity to practice with Sensei David is not only instructive but also historical in a manner of speaking, as he has been Obata Kaiso's student since the mid 1980's. Other long time students and instructors are Arizona's Gene Hauenstein (recently retired), Southeast Senseis Paul Couch and Yumi Matsuoaka. In addition to being Shinkendo-ka, these people have also become good friends, and it is a pleasure to be associated with such a fine group.

The above group of senior instructors has helped in spreading Obata Kaiso's message of humanity and has contributed to the growth of Shinkendo in their respective regions. In the coming years I hope that our Humble New York Dojo will be able to contribute in a likewise fashion.

In closing, I would like to thank Mrs. Obata for her kind words of encouragement and for sharing and expressing freely her thoughts and ideas. I would be remiss in not mentioning Yoko Obata and her contribution to the ISF and for helping me with e-mails, numerous phone calls, and for the honor of being my Tachiuchi partner. Yoko Obata is a fine young woman, with unlimited potential. Finally, let me express my joy at sharing Shinkendo with my wife and the students and members of the Shinkendo NY Dojo.

Dear Obata Kaiso, thank you so much for the opportunity to be your student, and to represent Shinkendo in New York. It is my sincere wish and obligation that I will "serve" for the remainder of this lifetime and beyond.

Jinsei Shinkendo!

Lou D'Agostino
Shinkendo New York, January 22, 2003