

## Igarashi Kazuo Interview

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### **Dedicating his life to Aikido with his teachers and friends**

Interview with Kazuo Igarashi (7dan)

Aikido Hashimoto dojo in Hashimoto,Sagamihara-shi,Kanagawa pref.Everyday many members sweat and train at this residential area dojo.The instructor of this group of students is Kazuo Igarashi,7th dan.As a deshi of Kobayashi shihan,he now travels the world teaching Aikido.We have asked Igarashi shihan the following about his Aikido life.

### **A Retiring Childhood Disposition**

Aiki News:Kobayashi Shihan had trained Igarashi Shihan since he was a university student.After that,Igarashi Shihan worked for Kobayashi sensei as an instructor for a long period of time.

I heard you came from Niigata Prefecture,is this correct?

**Igarashi:** Yes.I was born in Mikawa-mura Higashi Kanbara-gun Niigata prefecture,which is near the border of Fukushima Prefecture.I lived there until I was 4 years old.◆ The neighboring village to mine is Tsugawa,which is where Shiro Saigo (Judo ka) was born. I was born in 1946 right after the Second World War.During my childhood I moved frequently as my father worked for a life insurance company.Since I was 5 years old,the longest period we stayed in one place was 2-3 years;the shortest period was 6 months.During elementary school we moved three times,and in junior high we moved three times.With every move I had to transfer to a new school.During Elementary school I was in Niigata.Junior high was in Sapporo,Hokkaido.

Do you think I was a good skier because I grew up in a snowy country? I was living in Takada,Jo etsu city around my third year of elementary school.Takada is where skiing originated in Japan.In my physical education classes in the winter,we skied from the top of the mountain.In my generation we wore long rubber boots that were tied to the skis.It didn't look good.

At an early age moving was okay,but as I got older changing schools many times made it difficult to make friends.As a result I kept to myself,keeping only a few close friends throughout junior high.

Aiki News:So you started martial arts.The martial art wasn't Aikido ;it was Judo,is this correct?

**Igarashi:** When I entered Tsurumi High school in Yokohama,I was shy,and wanted to change my personality.That's why I started Judo.Until then I wasn't doing much sport activities and was an especially poor player in ball sports.That's why I chose Judo.I received Sho-Dan in Judo in three years

There was hilly Mitsuike Park behind the school and running was part of our training.It was so hard.In my case,I had a small body being only 160 cm tall and 50 kg in weight.That's why I couldn't compete right away.Because of Judo my attitude changed from being shy to

becoming more outgoing and confident. Judo was fun and yet the training was hard. It was a good experience to learn other martial arts, other than Aikido.

## Encounter with Aikido

Aiki News: Did you go to Meiji University?

Igarashi: Yes, in April 1964. I entered the faculty of politics and economics. I saw Aikido for the first time at the University. Although I graduated from the faculty, I proclaim I actually graduated from the Meiji University Aikido club and not as a political and economics graduate of the Meiji University. (Laughing)

There was an Aikido club around 1955 at the university, which Kobayashi Sensei established when he was a university student. I didn't know about Aikido until I completed high school. At that time Aikido was not a popular martial art. I didn't see any publication of Aikido, but maybe there were some. The first time I saw Aikido was during a beginner's introduction demonstration of Karate Shorinji Kempo and Aikido. That was when Aikido attracted my heart.

Aiki News: Is it true that Kobayashi sensei was an instructor at Meiji University when he was younger?

Igarashi: Yes, Kobayashi sensei was exactly 10 years older than me with plenty of energy. Though he was young he was not filled with aggression. But after talking to his students of many years, they say that he used to be very aggressive and rough. Anyway, I trained 6 days a week excluding Sunday for 2 intense hours a day. The hierarchy between the teacher and students were very strict.

Aiki News: ♦ What aspect of Aikido attracted you?

Igarashi: For instance, in Judo a person who is small will never win against someone who is larger. However, in Aikido there was more to it than the size of your body. Looking at Kobayashi sensei and myself, we are both small individuals. Not only was Kobayashi sensei small, instructors such as Tohei Koichi sensei and Ueshiba Kisshomaru sensei and other sensei's at the time were small as well. While their body structure was small, when they wore their Aikido gi they appeared larger than they really were. Sensei's who were my size were actively involved which impressed me. Another aspect that attracted me to Aikido was that there were no competitions whereas Judo competed. If there was one word to describe Aikido it would be "fun". I was interested in how to create, grasp, and use Ki. Aikido has mysticism that Judo does not possess, which drew me into it. When I was a student I had the opportunity to attend class where there were several sensei's. Now many of these sensei's have dispersed to many countries around the world. ♦ Prior to attending Meiji University, there was a senior student, Asai sensei, who has committed himself to teach Aikido in Germany full time. ♦ He was 4 years ahead of me so as I entered, he graduated. ♦ We just missed each other.

Aiki News: Was O'sensei (founder Morihei Ueshiba) still alive back then?

Igarashi: Yes, I have seen him several times while was training. I thought Waka sensei (former doushu) was incredible, but O'sensei, I thought was beyond belief. I thought he was a God; he had a Godly presence around him. Whenever O'sensei entered the dojo, you would hear someone yell, "stop" and clap their hands, then the students would seiza and welcome him. In front of us, he would throw the uchideshi (resident student) and then tell us philosophical stories.

Aiki News:Have you ever been thrown by O'sensei?

Igarashi:No I haven't,it is really unfortunate.If I had known I would be doing this as a career I would have taken the initiative to be thrown even if it meant forcing myself upon him.

Are you asking me about his techniques?

His movements were performed in a way that seemed as though there was no contact when they were thrown like iriminage.It was unusual to see teachers who threw me,being thrown by him.

Aiki News:Do you have any other memories of when you were a student attending the Aikido Club?

Igarashi:I remember the Aikido camps,which were tough but exciting.Half of the time at these camps was spent weight training and running.They did this to weed out some of the students because the class sizes were too large.

How about the demonstrations at the University?Often at demonstrations I used a real sword to show the technique of tachidori.It gives me the shivers after thinking about it.Today I wouldn't even consider doing that.It's way too scary.It's nice to be young and fearless.

In my third year of University I started to train in Iaido and Jodo at a near by university.After taking Judo and several other martial arts I understood the greatness of Aikido.

### **Living at Kobayashi Dojo**

Aiki News:So you started working after University?

Igarashi:Yes,I started to work as an editor for a publishing company that specialized in topics related to engineering.In the mid 60's the growing economy forced me to work day and night making it impossible to practice Aikido for a while.I would attend special events at the dojo like etsunen geiko (year end training).After five years of working,I started to wonder if this lifestyle was right for me.I was so caught up in working that I didn't have any free time.I knew this was not right for me, since I was still young and needed to explore new things.As a result I quit my job and decided to pursue Aikido in a more serious sense.I then pleaded to Kobayashi sensei at the Tokorozawa Dojo opening banquet to allow me to become a student resident.

Aiki News:So an Uchideshi?

Igarashi:No,a freeloader (laughing).After working for five years I had saved enough to enjoy myself for at least two years without working,so I asked Kobayashi sensei to accept me into his dojo.Tokorozawa Dojo opened in November of 1972,and I was planning on living there.However,I was given an opportunity to stay at Kodaira Dojo where Kobayashi sensei resided instead.I moved in January 1 of 1973.Of course I paid for my living and training expenses.

Young students today often come and ask me how much I was paid,and how much they will get paid to become an Uchideshi.They are often shocked to hear that students pay the sensei.The publishing company I worked for allowed me to work anytime I was free;which gave me the opportunity to work during the day and return to the dojo in the evening.

In 1973,Bruce Lee released a blockbuster movie that led to a boom in martial arts.Sensei's were extremely busy;and as result I was confronted by Kobayashi sensei and asked,"What do you want to do?Do you want to become a professional instructor?" I was put in a situation where I could take this on as a career,but I was still unsure about the security of this job so I attended an acupuncture school as a back up plan.In three years I received my acupuncture license,and to this day I have yet to use it, but I feel it benefited me.Pressure points and meridians that I learned could be used in Aikido.◆ As Kobayashi Dojo expanded to different

areas, I started to teach. The experience I had living with Kobayashi sensei doing things together like eating, drinking, taking baths, and talking to him until the early mornings was a great.

Kobayashi sensei said that with every meal came alcoholic drinks. I'm sure I was a burden on Kobayashi sensei's wife. This lifestyle continued until I got married in 1976.

## **Instructing in Europe**

Aiki News: So in 1978 you taught in Europe?

Igarashi: Yes, Toshikazu Ichimura Sensei invited me to teach in Sweden, Finland, and surrounding Scandinavian countries. Before leaving Japan, Kobayashi sensei gave me advice on how to relax when teaching for the first time in another country. His suggestion was to first seiza, bow and then look at the face of each student from one end of the room to other. I was also told to begin class with suwari waza to ushiro waza. I found that what he told me was great advice and really works. At first when the students were sitting I didn't realize how big everyone was until they stood up and I couldn't see the back wall. I thought I was in trouble, (Laugh) and understood the reason why I was told to start with suwari waza. I found that foreign students were very serious and respectful. They were really enthusiastic and I noticed that the students were well educated about Aikido and O'sensei. I returned to Japan after traveling the Scandinavian countries for a year.



Aiki News: Did you notice any difference when you returned to Japan?

Igarashi: Probably my confidence and I was also told my teaching had improved. Since I couldn't communicate well with my broken English I had to find a different way of teaching using gestures and actions. I think my teaching improved because I had to think of ways people would understand better. Kobayashi sensei also has a very proper teaching style and even now each year I travel to Scandinavian countries twice a year.

## **I am who I am because of Aikido**

Aiki news: Thank you for offering your time. I'd like to ask you one final question, What benefits have you had doing Aikido?

Igarashi: The benefits? Who I am now is because of Aikido. I had no intentions of becoming an instructor but after dragging on for many years in 1983 I opened my own dojo. I feel I didn't put too much effort into becoming who I am today, but everything has worked out perfectly. To this day I still travel to Scandinavia, Australia, Canada, etc., but being 54 years old, traveling has taken a toll on my body and I was considering lessening it. I was told by Asai sensei that it is a privilege to be invited, that if I was disliked by others, I wouldn't get invited anymore. I continue to put my effort into teaching because I still have to teach in other countries. If I had nothing to teach the students, I would feel insecure, so I also practice. Until I am told that I have nothing more to offer, I will continue to work.

Interviewer: Tsukasa Matsuzaki September 5, 2000 at Hashimoto Dojo