

# Two Cranes Aikido Summer Newsletter

School of martial art and contemplative practice

August 15, 2011



## The Reach of a Raven's Wing

**Summer is here** (in theory), and although the temperatures may not live up to our expectations, we appreciate the long days of glimmering light and the extra moments with family and friends in the woods, the mountains or at the beach. Recently I spent a weekend at the Sleeping Lady Mountain Resort, cushioned in the hills outside Leavenworth, WA. When I wasn't practicing on my yoga mat, I wandered through the emerald green woods and soaked in the fecund scent of pine. As the evening light began to dim I reached Icicle Creek and was met by a couple of jet-black ravens boisterously squabbling in mid-air. They dive-bombed each other in flight with more grace than the blue angels could imagine possessing. Mesmerized by their majestic precision of angulation and delicate grace of shifting from branch to branch, I lay down on the carpet of soft needles to study their dance. What appeared an intimate battle of heart and mind was perhaps their declaration of true love. After traveling in flocks when young, ravens mate for life. What a tremendous show of mutual respect and live blade spirit those magnificent creatures demonstrated in the air. It's exactly what I want in my practice on and off the mat to express.

Riding the currents of our moment- to-moment experience with an acute graciousness requires practice. The ravens teach us how to fight well and how to hold space and how to declare our conscious connection with one another and our stellar planet. As I returned to the city and revisited the chaotic news of debt-ceiling debacle, I was struck by how brilliant is our potential as human beings and also how flawed. The greed expressed between the congressional leaders we hope would have the dignity to resolve their petty angsts and come together in the spirit of diplomacy is an outrageous misuse of power. It's easy to be swept up in the disappointment and helpful to bring the teachings we study daily into our precious bodies and hearts; remind ourselves of what we love. I close my eyes and see the ravens express their passion in flight and resolve that we must dedicate our training to the power of embodied diplomacy for all.

Spread your wings wide.

Kimberly

# Upcoming Two Cranes events this fall:

## August:

**We are hosting a first annual Aiki Principles Seminar** hosted by George Ledyard Sensei. Exemplary teachers from around the nation- Toby Threadgill: Takamura Ha Shindo Yoshin Ryu, Howard Popkin: Daito Ryu, Kaizen Taki: Systema, George Ledyard Sensei and I will join together to explore technical methods and philosophical concepts to enhance our understanding of ‘what is truly Aiki?’ Those not signed up are invited to watch classes.

## September:

**The Pacific Association of Women Martial Artists Camp** happens in Seattle this year from September-2-4 at the Miller Community Center. Women students will experience a range of gifted teachers from all over the country. Sign up now!

## The Third Annual Seattle Bridge

**is Sept. 29-Oct. 2.** Hosted by Northshore Aikido and Two Cranes is an event not to be missed. Hiroshi Ikeda and Mary Heiny Sensei, along with George Ledyard, Joanne Veneziano, Lee Crawford, Mallory Graham Senseis and I will spend four days creating a training immersion. It is always a delightful opportunity to renew valuable friendships with training companions near and far. **We will appreciate all of your help to make this event unforgettable.**

## October:

**Our 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Halloween Party:** just around the corner is ghost and goblin time and so is our party at the dojo on Saturday, October 29 with piñatas and outrageous costumes, music, food and- we hope-tarot readings from the famous Taryn Sass. Families and friends are all welcome.

## November:

**Tom Read Sensei** will teach a weekend seminar in **November 4-6.** Always a deep learning experience! Look forward to seeing you all.



**Black Belt Dinner** Friday Nov.11.

**January:**

**Dan Mesisco Sensei** will instruct at Two Cranes for the first time. He is masterful at addressing how we can be more relaxed and more joyful in our movement. In his 40 plus years of training he consistently focuses on how we stop the fight in our interactions by removing the duality we unconsciously create. I met Dan over thirty years ago at the Colorado Rocky Mountain Camp and I am very excited to welcome him to Seattle. Check out this u-tube: [http://](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w-acv7trJp8&feature=related)

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=w-acv7trJp8&feature=related](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w-acv7trJp8&feature=related)

**April:**

**Mary Heiny Sensei, Tom Read Sensei and I** will teach a week-end seminar together on April 6-8.

**August:**

**Salmon River Trip for Teens in 2012: Teen-agers get Ready:** We are preparing an adventure for our Two Cranes Teenagers down the Salmon River in early August of 2012. I have fond memories of sharing this experience with our teens in 2005 and will include a writing piece in our articles on the web for you to check out.

## *TCA Donates to Tsunami Victims*



*On the week-end of the Doran Sensei Seminar, April 1-3, we raised \$1,050.00 for the victims of the Tsunami in Northern Japan. With these funds our dear friends Maki and Brian Snoddy sent 200 care packages for school children in the region, complete with book bags, pencils, pens and paper, items that they have been without since their schools were demolished. With your help we will continue to extend our support to those who have suffered in this catastrophic tragedy. Thank you all so much for your heartfelt generosity.*

Big News:

Our MindBody accounting system is in place. It promise an to be an efficient and intuitive method to streamline records of your training history and accounting process. Yea!

FANTASTIC OPPORTUNITY: *Please join us for four days of training*

# THE SEATTLE AIKIDO BRIDGE FRIENDSHIP SEMINAR AT TCA SEPTEMBER 29 - OCTOBER 2

The Aikido Bridge Friendship Seminars are Hiroshi Ikeda Shihan's vision for carrying O Sensei's teachings into the future.



**ALL ADULT AND TEEN STUDENTS ARE INVITED TO ATTEND**

Full seminar \$200 before 9/15, \$225 after (includes banquet) One full day \$125 (does not include banquet) Saturday banquet \$25 – dinner, wine, beer, music.

***Register soon, space is limited!***

## TCA Recognizes the students who tested this year:



**5th Kyu: Vanessa Skantze, Mary Ellingson, Catherine Banks, and Meredith Bailey**

**4th Kyu: Gordon Moore, Travis Hobrla**

**3rd Kyu: Paul DeShaw, Leo Olachea, Jill Flynn**

**2nd Kyu: Richard Woods, Dan Pollack**

**1st Kyu: Dennis Johnson**

**Shodan: Darren Spehr**

**Congratulations to each of you. My gratitude for sharing your practice with us.**

### **A Favorite Poem**

#### *THE PEACE OF WILD THINGS*

*When despair for the world grows in me  
and I wake in the night at the least sound  
in fear of what my life and my children's lives may be,  
I go and lie down where the wood drake  
rests in his beauty on the water, and the great blue heron feeds.*

*I come into the peace of wild things  
who do not tax their lives with forethought  
of grief. I come into the presence of still water,  
And I feel above the day-blind stars  
waiting with their light. For a time  
I rest in the grace of the world, and am free.*

*-Wendell Berry*

## 2011 Seminar Recap

### Tom Read Sensei Seminar:

On an unusually sunny Saturday morning in February, Tom Read Sensei invited us to feel our feet solidly on the ground and guided us to assume a vertical posture. “Face your partner with open hands,” he said. “Let the light flow through you.” From this place, we can run a continuous line of intention from the beginning of our technique to the very end. “Create a convex shape as though you were holding a baby. If you point your little finger to the ceiling and push towards your partner just until you meet power and no more, you will feel the sweet spot of contact. Then make your *kokyū* (breath) move.” All these details provides tiny hints; together, they have huge ramifications for our enhancing our capacity to skillfully blend with our partners.

Tom Reed Sensei's dad devoted much of his young adulthood to studying with the spiritual teacher J. Krishnamurti. At an early age, Tom was immersed in these studies of the nature of mind, meditation and the dynamics of creating skillful human relationships. Now, his own teachings of Aikido shine like jewels. He offers us precious details that can allow our blends to be seamless.

Then there is the big picture. Since I can remember, Tom has been interested in examining the nature of consciousness. “I believe our practice is about experiencing freedom. Our posture says how it is. We can shape ourselves to be able to receive and unite with our universe.” He reminded us to include our imaginations in our training. “Picture yourself as a sweeping tornado, a bright yellow sunflower or conch shell and see what happens to our interaction.”

### Frank Doran Sensei Seminar:

Doran Sensei was not hindered by erupting volcanoes this year and was able to come to Seattle to teach in April. Not only did he share exquisite details of his 50-plus years of Aikido practice, but also he presented ideas from other martial art forms such as judo and tai chi. He told intriguing stories of his



**2010 seminar recap cont.**

days as a drill sergeant and encouraged us to learn how to feel a sense of presence in the space we occupy. “Own your space!” Sensei also noted the importance of *kuzushi* (the principle of unbalancing an opponent). In the first moment that we interact with our partners, we want to be capable of breaking balance so that we can lead the attacker, and ourselves, to a safe outcome. The entire seminar I tried to replicate the commanding posture he maintains in every moment, on and off the mat.

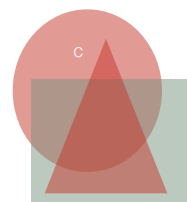
The excellent photos shot by Susan Adams and Daniel Stockman-now on the website- reveal just how animated Doran Sensei appears in practice. You can see the luminous ki emanating from his hands. A few of us noticed how taken he was with the slippers around our dojo, so we gifted him with his own pair of bubblegum pink bunny slippers to take back with him to Redwood City Aikido. Just a little memento of our appreciation.



**Two Cranes Institute welcomes Richard Strozzi-Heckler.**

This was the first seminar of its kind. Richard evoked the qualities that make a true leader. We examined how to bring our somatic attention into our communication with others, into our decision-making, and into the act of naming our intents and purposes. So much of the leadership in our world is conducted in the mental realm. The heart and soul gets left out. Our imaginations, our intuitions, and our insights arise from our bodies and bring valuable information into play.

I appreciate Richard’s willingness to share he has gleaned from working with people all over the globe. The numerous books he has written like *The Leadership Dojo* and *In Search of the Warrior Spirit* provide us with gems of wisdom. As Two Cranes Institute takes its vision out in the world, we look forward to crafting a vital partnership with Strozzi Institute.



## The Santa Cruz Summer Retreat

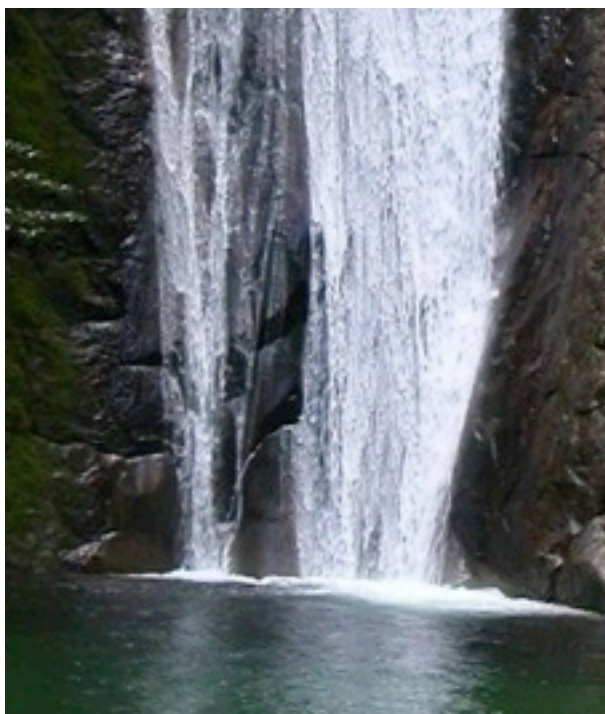
**Motomichi Anno Sensei** and senior American Shingu lineage Instructors, Mary Heiny, Linda Holiday and Jack Wata Senseis. A number of TCA students joined me, and we trained till we dropped. I've lost count of how many years I have attended this retreat (maybe 15 or 20), engaging with friends and new acquaintances from all over the United States and Europe. During the retreat, we celebrated Anno Sensei's 80th birthday at the Coconut Grove Restaurant on the festive boardwalk.

Throughout the week, he moved us with a grace and a showman's alacrity that I can only in my wildest dreams imagine I might have if I reach 80. I watch him train and I feel a soulful transmission of O Sensei. Over and over again he said, "Open your heart and let your inner light shine." What moved me most was Anno Sensei's advice to reinvest in our practice each day. "Create each day new, you've never been here before," he offered. "Have your training be completely fresh and unknown to you." He spoke of *misogi* (purification practices) and likened it to taking a shower under a roaring waterfall. We can notice the feeling of water spilling on our bodies and cleansing us both physically and spiritually. "Aikido practice should be approached with new eyes each time we bow onto the mat," he said. "Renew and refresh yourself and above all have gratitude!"

When we have the opportunity to train with a master teacher whose vibratory rate can lift the room to high levels of consciousness, everybody's skill increases. Throughout the four days of the retreat, the whole room was energized by Anno Sensei's wisdom stream. An immense kindness was shared by 100 people in a civic auditorium right in the middle of the city. We could experience a subtler capacity to connect, collaborate, and create. It was as if we were in a star burst of clear seeing. Passers-by could feel it too. I spoke with a woman who wandered into the auditorium to peek at all these people in white and black uniforms dancing and bowing. "I don't know what I'm feeling and hearing, she

said, " but I was drawn to step through the door and see what the happy fuss was about."

I returned home from training with a renewed sense of how I can, as chief instructor, inspire myself and step up my own training commitment to share fresh ideas with you all. How do we keep our training fresh and alive? How do we look at the same movements we practice daily with completely new eyes each time we step on the mat? How do we keep our movements sensible and tension free? How do we adjust our practice when we have injuries to take care of from time to time? How do we implement a new ideas in our training and retain the fundamental principles.? These are just a few of the questions that I find important to keep investigating each and every day we engage in our practice.



# Abundant Gratitude

\***Our Introductory Series Program** has been immensely successful. We all can remember our first days on the mat. It can be a magical and a tenuous time. **Robert Chang and Gina Lagalbo Senseis**, as well as a great many of you, have been guiding and inspiring our newest students in the second class on Tuesday evenings and Saturday mornings. Robert and Gina focus on precision, flow and magic making. New students are not only inspired to continue training, but several have invested time and attention to demonstrating for 5th kyu.

\* **Jen Stoakes** offers her heart and management skills as she cares for the dojo on a daily basis. In addition, she directs our cutest program: the Mini Cranes, who wear the triple zero gis. **Michelle Fokos** has generously offered her talents to help us manage the office and she adeptly organizes our video recording our dojo events. **Sara Gerhart Snell** rocks. Five days a week, from September to the end of June 80 plus children and teenagers joyously train wielding their bodies, staffs and swords through space. I imagine that O Sensei is quite proud.

\* We are pleased to announce that **Taryn Sass** has agreed to assume the role Teen Program Director. Her powerful positive training spirit touches the hearts and spirits of our young adults.

\*Check out the photos of **Susan Adams and Daniel Stockman** on the TCA website. Thank you for their fabulous images.

\* Gratitude to our dedicated adult teachers who instruct each week: **Anne Yamane, Dan McAbee, Dave Hurley, Cynthia Wold, Kris Allott, Jim Allbaugh, and Dan Murnan Senseis.**

We are fortunate to have such a talented and thoughtful group of teachers who steward our school. And we are fortunate to have not one, but five, teachers at Two Cranes who have trained for 25 years and more: **Anne Yamane, Dave Hurley, Dan McAbee, Joey Perlmutter, and Greg Mock.** Together they help me create an inspirational learning community.

Thank you all for your dedication to Aikido.



## Weapon class opportunities:

**Monday night weapons class is a splendid opportunity** to study the fundamentals of sword cutting, paired practice, and the relationship between weapons and empty hand. **Kris Allott Sensei** is always studying. When you attend her class, there are valuable insights to steal from her.

**Aikibojitsu class is another training opportunity** that occurs on one Friday night a month. Led by **Dan McAbee Sensei**, we explore the basic principles of the bo staff and are inspired to feel the flow of lines. Quarterly intensives encourage students to study the gorgeous katas created by Tom Read Sensei, North Coast Aikido



## Connection - Why Bother

“I think I’m connecting with my partner on the mat,” a brown belt student noted after training with Anno Sensei in Santa Cruz, CA. “But maybe it’s all in my head. Throughout the class Sensei referred to the power of uniting heart to heart. My head says *no problem*, but in reality I can’t feel a thing.” He paused for a moment and said, “Now I have big questions: What is connection really? Why is it a primary principle? Am I connected to myself? How do I feel a true sense of connection with people on and off the training mat?”

I was delighted to reflect on wonderings of this student. We know that training can be an exercise outlet and training can be self-defense technique. It can be energetic and psychological. It can be mind-blowingly profound. But before anything really happens on import, we must connect. Just connect. Connection begins before anything physical takes place. It allows us to engage without excess effort. Some might say that it’s the invisible part of the interaction, like the way a small creek seamlessly flows into a mountain stream. Connection changes *two* into *one*. It’s the aspect of our practice that eliminates opposition and allows us to feel unified with our partner or let’s

think bigger—the world. When we connect in this way we become one with our partner in an experiential way.

There is a place in the Grand Canyon where the warm silt-laden waters of the Little Colorado River spill into the larger river basin. The Tapeats sandstone (550 million year old dried deposits of the Tapeats Sea) of the Little Colorado creates a luminous, milky turquoise color. When it meets the dark green or, if in flood, red-brown

Colorado River, the confluence of colors dazzles. One of the Hopi’s sacred sites, the Sipapu, is located near this special Colorado River color mix. The Hopi regard this spot as a portal where they can connect into *The Fourth World*. Connection in this light transforms us. This act is what evolves our practice into an art form. ‘Loving protection for all beings’ relates even where the opposing forces seem irreconcilable. The proponents of Aiki extend into all levels of being dynamics.

## Connection cont.

### How do we connect?

1. **Connect to center:** The “center” can be defined as a place right below our navel or, as the children say, “it's right between our heads and our toes.” By consciously sending our mind out to our partner’s center and shifting our weight back and forth, we can simultaneously touch center, entice our partner and neutralize his attack. The shifting is not a big effort, just a couple of inches back and forth. Yet the effects of this energetic action are powerful. The thinker of the movement changes the outcome of the movement.
2. **Breathe:** It’s easy to forget that breath is the emperor of connection. When we breathe in through our nose and out through our mouth, with a subtle pause in-between, we set up a deep and calming rhythm in our bodies. This simple act animates our essential being.
3. **Balance our energy field:** Acknowledging that we have front and a back, an up and a down, and side-to-side energies surrounding us, allows us to instantly hook up to a radiating energy field. Scientifically it can be measured as heat emanating from the body, and it represents our energetic relationship to our surrounding environment. The more we are aware of the energy that surrounds our physical body, of the energy that holds us to earth, the more control we have over how we move through our world.
4. **Feel gravity:** one of our fundamental practices on and off the mat is to establish a connection with the earth. One of the easiest ways to practice this is to plant the bottoms of your feet firmly on the ground. Sense the weight of your body, sense how your arms hang off your shoulders, and balance on one foot. Relax and shut your eyes, wrapping your shoulders down your back.
5. **Open head, heart, & hara (center):** Wendy Palmer's conscious embodiment work encourages us to connect our mental, emotional and spiritual bodies on the mat.

These fundamental ideas take but a moment to try, providing a vibrant way to engage us in embodied practice. Just Connect!



**Check out the web for new photos posted and articles written by students and colleagues in the writing section.**

**See you on the mat.  
Perhaps in the woods too.**

**Kimberly**