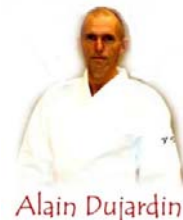


History and evolution of our dojo

By Chris Van San

For this interview we were hosted by “TenChiNoDojo” on Saturday November, 16th 2013.

Sensei Alain Dujardin 5 Dan Aikikai was my host.



Sensei, thank you very much for receiving us.

When was TenChiNoDojo founded?

In September 1989 I started the Aikido department, rather by coincidence...

What were the circumstances back then, how many members and which teachers were there?

I had just become “Aikido Initiator VTS” (= first Aikido teacher level for Belgian Government of Sports) and I had the technical grade of Ikkyu Aikido. To be honest, at that time I was losing interest a little in Aikido and was considering to take up my former JuJutsu keiko. Because of this, I entered a JuJutsu dojo in Wondelgem, a dojo of which I still knew the dojo cho. We had an introductory conversation during which he told me that he was just looking for an expansion of the dojo activities. So instead of re-starting my Ju Jutsu keiko, I started an Aikido department in that dojo. I remember lively having to restart from zero during the first two years, after every summer holiday I had to start all over again with zero members...

I never intended to become an Aikido teacher, and followed the initiator course only to improve myself and my understanding of Aikido.

The most recent Initiator course that was organized in 2013 shows that nothing has changed; practically every participant has no intention of becoming a teacher ;-)



Were there name changes in the dojo?

After the unfortunate death of Tamura sensei and Sugano sensei in 2010, as president of the Belgium North Aikido Federation, I have done what was required to lead the federation through this difficult period. I have stabilized the situation, made contact with Hombu dojo and with the Australian Aikikai to ensure the continued support and education in Belgium North. Thanks to these efforts we are blessed by the yearly International Aikido Seminars lead by Tony Smibert Shihan and Hayato Osawa Shihan in Belgium.



Once we had a stabilized situation however, I felt the need to clearly profile myself and my dojo within this new aikido landscape.

Hereby showing respect towards Sugano sensei and his teachings together with the commitment to continue to study these teachings.

And together with the obligation to teach according to what I believe to have learned from him.

Secondly I wanted to make a clear engagement towards Doshu and Hombu dojo, as I have understood as to be expected from an Aikidoka that has been listed in the regions of the higher grades (=godan aikikai and above)

With these statements in mind, I changed the name of my dojo to TenChiNoDojo, together with a new emblem in which (for the familiar) the most important guidelines of Sugano sensei's teachings can be found...





Sensei, How did the Dojo develop in time? Has there been stagnation, slow progress or a period of significant growth?

During the years the amount of dojo members developed in a wave-kind of pattern, although there was always a positive growth noticeable...

However also here there was a moment during which I considered to end the continuance of the dojo...

At the end of a certain season (May-June) I started getting only 6 or less members during practice and I was seriously considering to thank the remaining members and then stop dojo-practice after the summer break, had it not been for the fact that I had already confirmed my participation to a demonstration in November (so in a new season) in Ghent..

So for this reason I continued my Dojo practice and as it turned out there was a rather big increase in members...

Looking back I can say that all was coincidental... both my becoming a teacher as well as the continuance of my dojo turned out to be just coincidental...



aikidostage voor de jeugd

met Alain Dujardin (5e dan)



TenChi no Dojo
Sporthal Neptunus
Botestraat 100
9032 Wondelgem
info@tenchinodojo.be
0470/125473
stage is open voor allen



zaterdag 16 februari 2013
van 14.00u tot 15.30u

Sensei, how do you see the further development of your dojo and yourself? Vision? Direction?

As mentioned before my own Aikido development has had a very big influence from the teachings of Sugano sensei and Tamura sensei, in which Sugano sensei's teachings were most prominent. On top of that I have found in the Australian Aikikai, and especially in Tony sensei, a real and close Aiki family... A family that is always there for you, even outside of Aikido as I was able to experience a few times so far... I cannot do anything else (nor do I want to) then to continue my own search on this Path and to pass this on to the people who are fond of my teaching. Primarily to the members of my dojo but next to that also to anyone who feels an interest in it...

A teaching in which the Inner Aikido has an important role, in which Aikido goes much deeper than being able to perform a ikkyo or shihonage technique...

During the last 5-6 years I also have invested quite some effort in developing and improving my ties with Hombu dojo, this by means of a yearly resourcing locally in Tokyo. There I live as a Soto deshi during some three weeks every year in the middle of Japanese society, with main focus on daily practice (2-3 classes a day).

This has now become an experience that I cannot do without anymore and even have started to continue this daily practice back in Belgium... I feel the need more and more to feel the tatami daily and experience Aikido, sometimes even in Tandoku dosa..

What are the goals for the future for your dojo, Sensei? What do you wish to accomplish with your Dojo?

Well, by now the Dojo has progressed slowly but steadily towards a group of people who help and support each other. An Aiki-family. New comers always mention to me that the way in which they were accepted and helped by everyone, were the major reasons for becoming a member of the Dojo.

I think almost recognizing the feeling of a real Dojo among this wonderful group of people... I also notice that, after the initial test period, I accept everyone with their own characteristics.. No prejudice, everyone with good intentions is welcomed..

This is as I have seen with Sugano Sensei worldwide, planting a seed, cherishing, feeding, protecting and watching it develop in that specific soil..

The ultimate goal is to raise a real Dojo, where all items can come to its proper development. This is not possible in a sports center unfortunately... I am also aware that probably it will remain a dream and I don't even mind... The journey is far more interesting than the destination...

I am proud of having the privilege to accompany a real and solid diverse group of people in its development.

Tony sensei told me only last year that one can only claim to have an Aiki-dojo if one has the young and the elderly, women and men, valid and invalid, strong and weak, united on the tatami. I think it is justified to say that we have accomplished this aim.. and it feels good like that.. Aikido is supposed to be meant for all and not competitive..

What better proof can one give then to realize this each class on the tatami?



Sensei, is there a youth department and a senior department in your dojo?

Youth department was started since 1991, a senior department is not (yet) implemented separately as I feel no need. What is being done however is to spend enough attention in the normal classes to some specific points of care when working with seniors..

Both ways of teaching are very specific and require a lot from a teacher. I would even go so far to state that the basic teacher-levels in Belgium (initiator and instructor type B) would be better off giving the normal classes while the upper-teacher levels in Belgium (instructor Type A and Top instructor) would better use their knowledge and experience to properly teach those two groups...

The times are ending in which youth classes and/or senior classes were left to some lower dangrade or even kyugrade aikidoka *"to get some experience in teaching"*, while the higher dangrade took care of *"the serious training"*

This is becoming a serious challenge in the future...

Last words, Sensei?

I do not have some last words to say because hopefully my story has not reached its end yet, I still feel fully developing, discovering and growing into this wonderful Way of life that Aikido is, so with respect I would like to restrain from giving some last words ;-)

Sensei, thank you very much for this interview.