

# How I started in Aikido

a story in pictures by Mimuro Shihan, Yokohama. June 2017





When I was a child we were very poor. My grandparents cut wood and sold it to restaurants and public baths. I helped to cut the wood by axe and push the cart. Sometimes it was a mountain of wood, but I still found time to play with a wooden and toy sword.

I grew up in Shimizu in Shizuoka Prefecture until the age of 12. I used to play baseball, football and later did gymnastics, especially the horizontal bar. I learned by myself how to do a full swinging rotation after seeing the Olympic games where a Japanese athlete got a gold medal. There was no gymnastic club at school and so I entered the swimming club.

At that time, my father had a company that failed and he borrowed some money so he could pay his employees and colleagues but he could not pay it back. One night, a very awful Yakuza came to our house and threatened us by sticking a tanto into the tatami and only left when the police came. It was dangerous so we escaped to Tokyo during the night.





When I came to Tokyo I was bullied because I was such a countryside boy. When I started to study I became top of the class and the best swimmer in school and so the bullies stopped. I tried to enter the Swimming and Gymnastic Clubs but there were no clubs, so I decided to enter the Judo club.

I did judo for four years and got shodan when I was 15 years old. However, I had some strange bone disease in my right humerus. The bone went rotten (infected) and I had to have an operation two times. At first, they removed the infected bone and then they replaced it with bone from my hip. I could not do any sport for two years.

I entered Meiji University in 1973 to study architecture, but I always say that I graduated from University Aikido Club!!!!!! I initially tried to enter the Judo Club but before finding the club an aikido student gestured me over and said: "Aikido is much more interesting than judo so why don't you come and see." So, I did. Immediately I felt that this is what I want to do and immediately I entered the club. I completely forgot about judo!



*Inside Meiji University dojo  
(4th Year)*



*Outside Meiji University dojo (4th Year)*

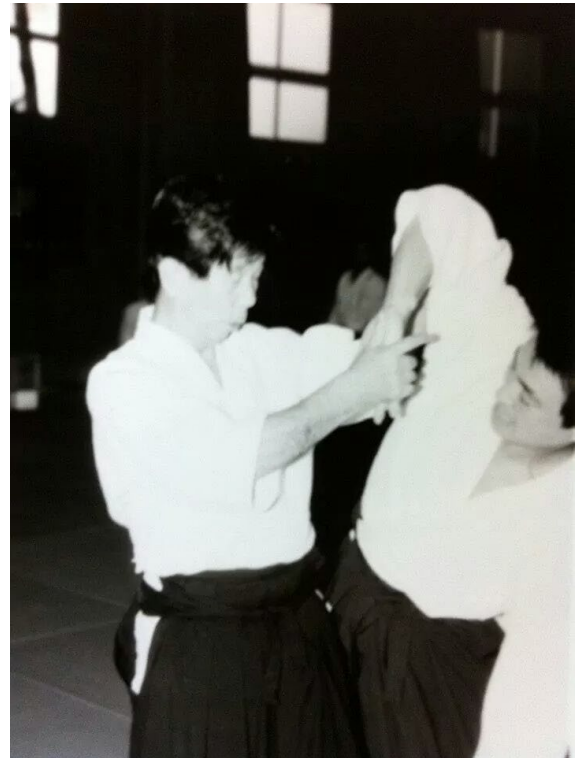


*With same year and one year kohai.*



Once a week, Yamaguchi Shiha came to the University's dojo. I never knew sensei before, when I was 19 years old he was 49, looking like a normal middle-aged man.

At first, I couldn't realise that he was great but year by year I realised that he was so great.



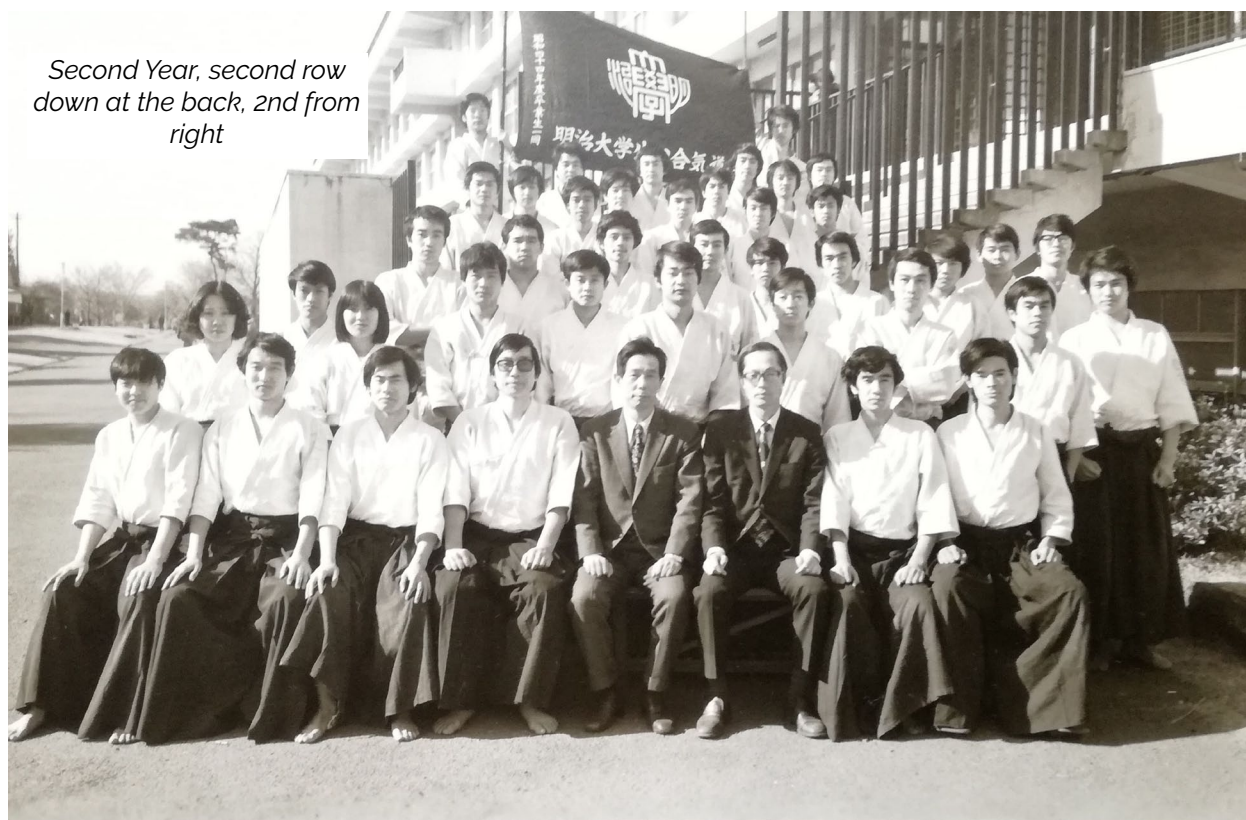
During my first year of University I practised nine times a week: one hour every lunch time Monday to Saturday; two times in the early morning for one hour; and every Saturday afternoon for two hours.

Just before graduation from Meiji University I got 2nd Dan.

Meiji University is a very big university with around 30 000 students with three campuses in those days. It was very famous for sports such as judo or baseball. We were at Ikuta Campus in Kawasaki, close to Tokyo and this is the dojo Yamaguchi Shihan taught at. There were three or four aikido clubs at Meiji University, one of them was Ikuta Aikido Club.

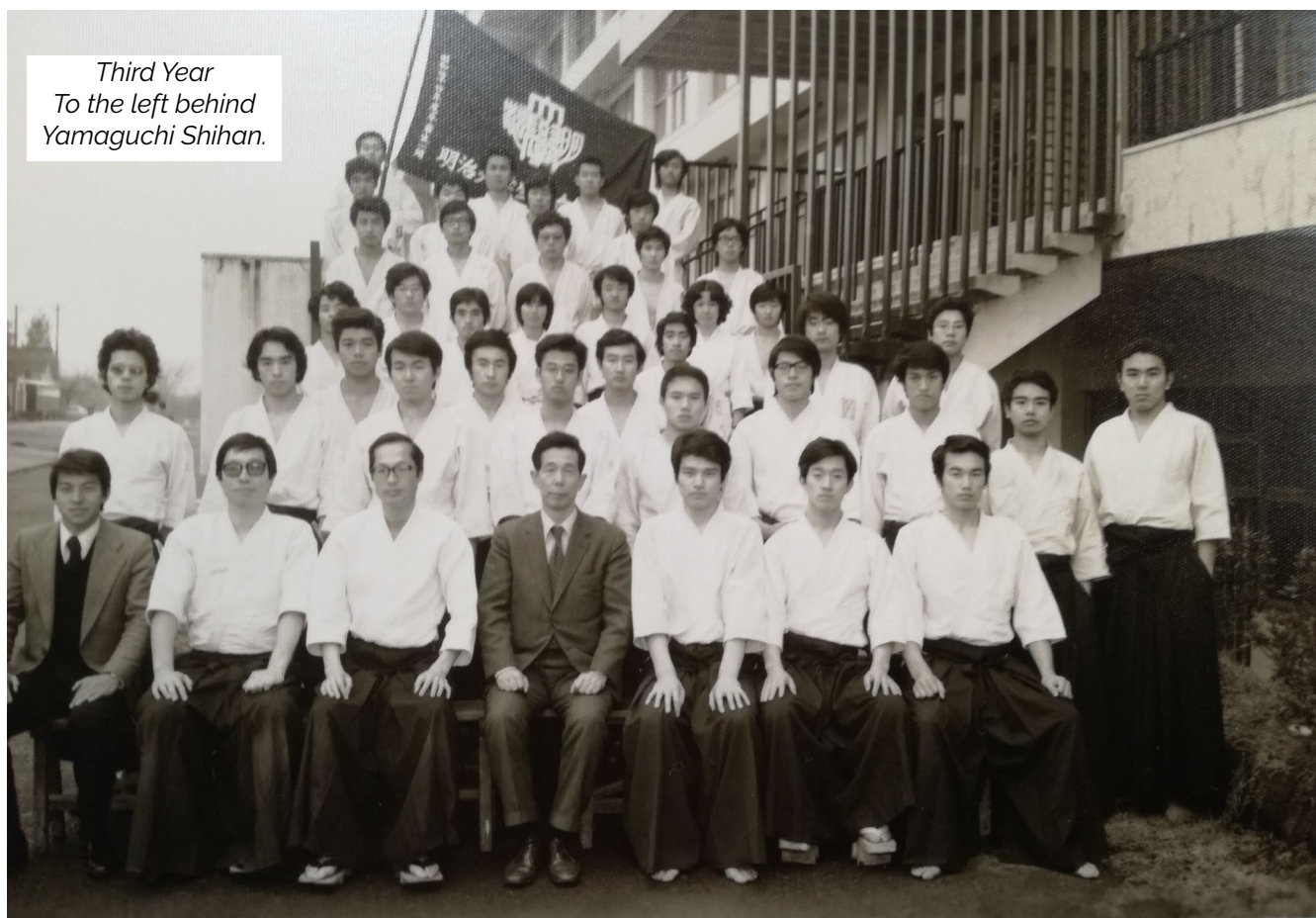
The photos below were taken every year at the Meiji University campus before senpai graduated.

In the first photo below, I am the one at the back far right with glasses. This picture was taken in my first year at Meiji University. It is interesting to note that new students are at the back, sensei and senpai are towards the front. You will find my position changes over the years.



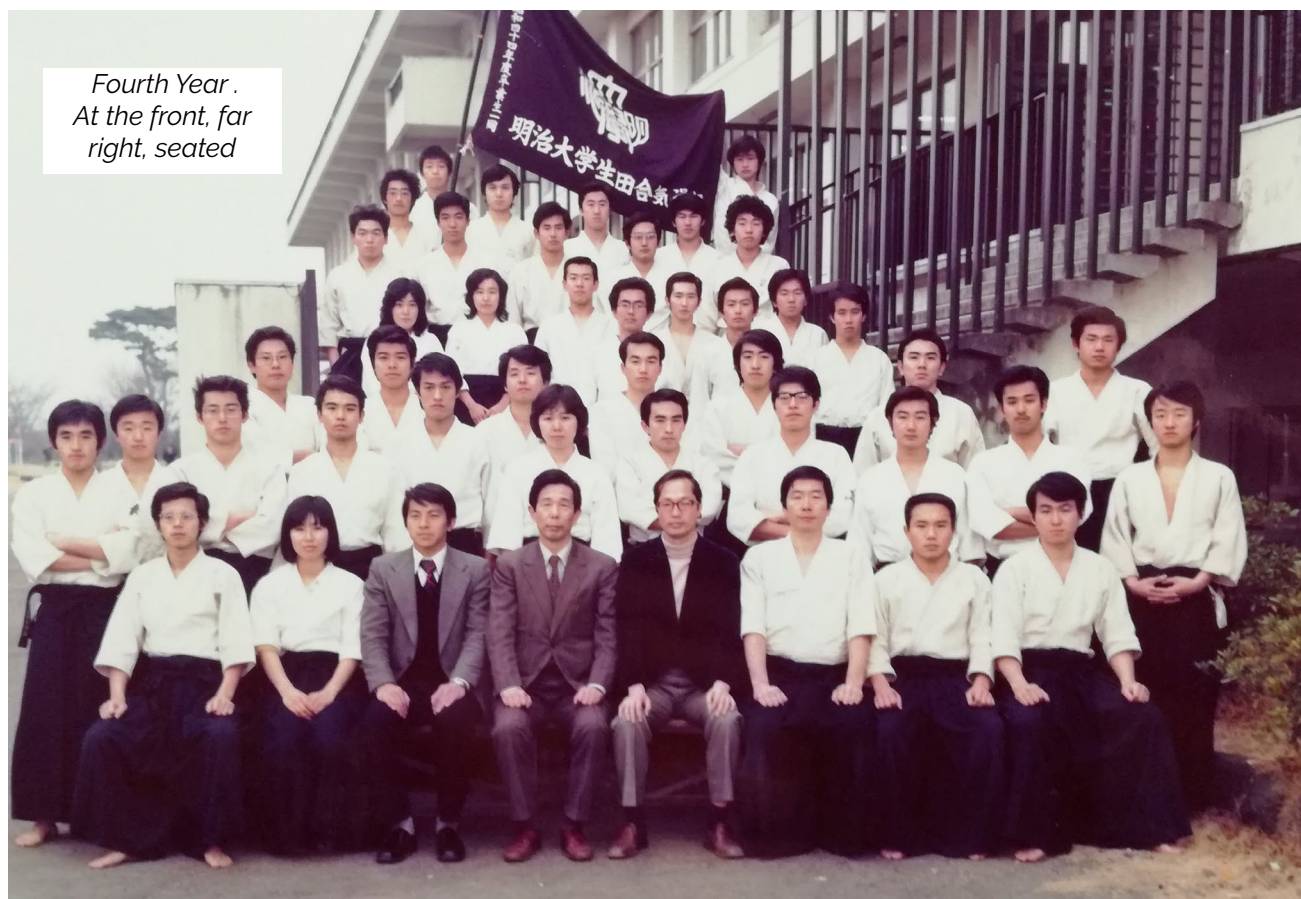


Third Year  
To the left behind  
Yamaguchi Shihan.



昭和51年度・明治大学合気道部一同 (S.52.1.24)

Fourth Year .  
At the front, far  
right, seated



昭和52年度・明治大学合気道部一同 (S.53.1.26)



Year by year my practice increased even more. In my second year, I wanted to learn more directly from Yamaguchi sensei so I attended all of his classes. He taught at Honbu every Monday night, Zoshukan Dojo in a shrine in Shibuya (a wooden floor dojo) on Wednesday and Sunday night and at Minatoku Sports Centre in Tokyo on Friday night.



Also, we learnt Kashima Shinryu Kenjutsu from Inaba Sensei, a senpai from our club at Shiseikan, Meiji Shrine. Two times a year for one week, we attended Spring and Summer camp (Gasshuku) in various locations with Yamaguchi Shihan. Here are some photos from those camps. I cannot remember all of the locations. We just concentrated to practice aikido, that is it! In total I attended 70 times.







After I graduated from University, I was so busy, I worked very hard for a construction company. I was an architectural construction manager. Only two times a week I could practise, Wednesday and Sunday night at Zoshukan Dojo in Shibuya. Sometimes I went to Honbu Dojo. I attended University gasshuku twice a year every time.

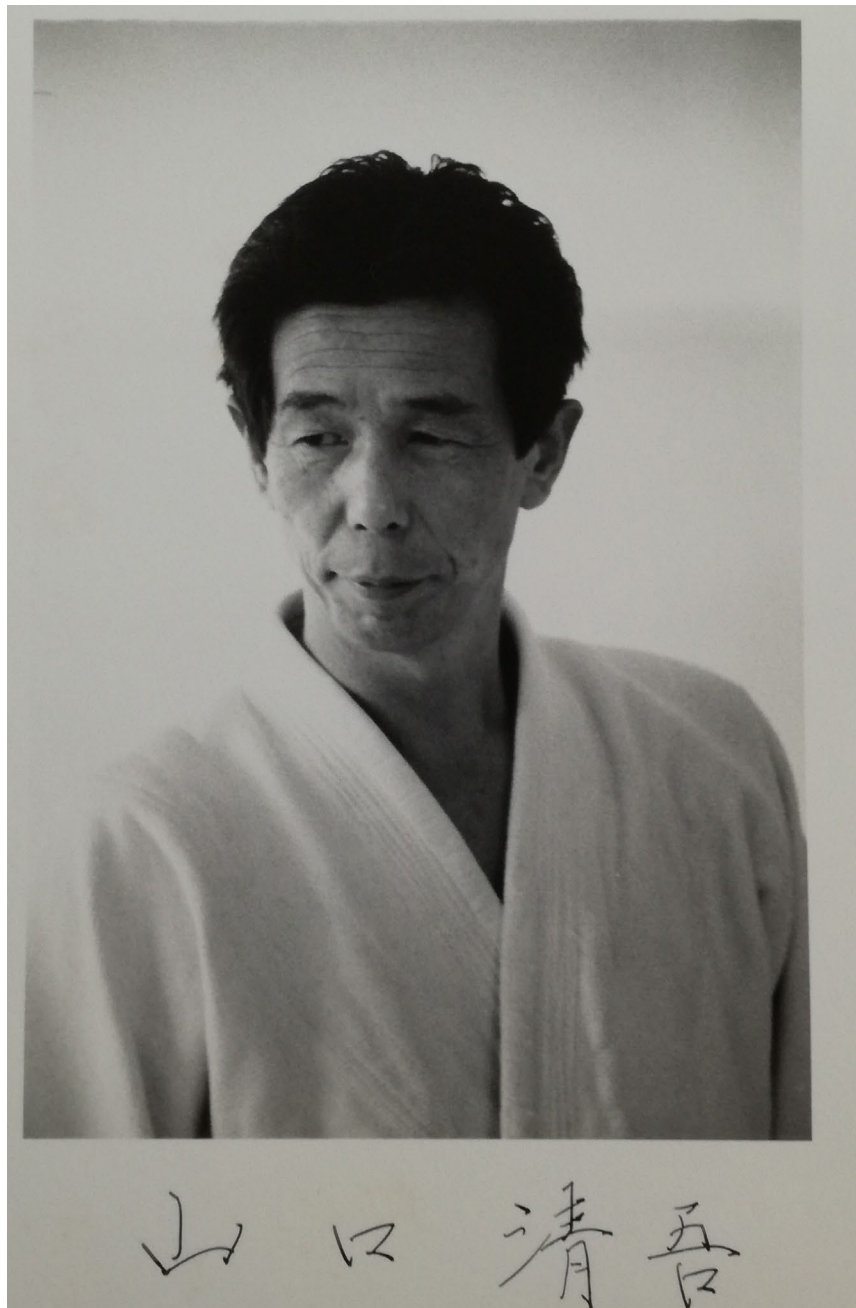
In 1983, I was uke for Yamaguchi Shihan in the All Japan Demonstration. I was very excited and nervous. Many times he did not attend the All Japan as he was in Europe. In 1992 he did but unfortunately I could not take uke of Yamaguchi Shihan as I was in Tahiti. I planned to have Yamaguchi Shihan's Tahiti aikido seminar but just before we decided to go, France did atomic bomb testing which created a lot of tension in French Polynesia so we had to give up. It was a big pity for me that we could not go.

Yamaguchi Shihan's health was not so good when I had started aikido. He was advised to stop smoking and reduce coffee drinking but he ignored. I did not realise that his condition was not good, he always seemed great to me.

One Sunday night I studied aikido at Zoshukan Dojo with him and the next day he was teaching at Honbu but he suddenly died early Wednesday morning. Three days before he died there was no indication to me that he was so ill. He died when he was 72 years old. There are many memories with Yamaguchi Shihan, at this moment I cannot write down but much later I will write in more detail.

Every time I went to learn from Yamaguchi Shihan, my eyes were like the eyes of a manga character - bright with many stars because it was like watching a very exciting and interesting movie. Every time I learnt a lot, was amazed and found something new.

*Atsushi Mimuro 23rd June, 2017*



*This photograph  
was given to me by  
Yamaguchi Sensei.  
This is his signature at  
the bottom.*

Mimuro Sensei