

## Short biography of our Sensei

By Chris Van San

In this interview we were hosted by Aran Shidoïn on Saturday 16 November 2013 in Wondelgem.



Sensei, Thank you very much for this interview in the series “short biographies of our sensei”.

These biographies are of great importance for keeping our archives in the VAV, but also for our next generation, so they would know who walked the road before them in our federation and how they have become our teachers...

### **Sensei, a first question, what does Aran Shidoïn stand for?**

Aran is my Japanese Kanji name. I use this kanji name in my Aikido life out of respect towards the person who gave me this name.

Shidoïn stands for a certain teacher level, as there is also Fukushidoïn and Shihan.

Personally I prefer to use these specific Japanese teacher level names.

I believe that teacher levels should be more emphasized. People with a certain dangrade are not automatically good teachers, these are two totally different things..

### **Sensei, when were you born and where and when did you start Aikido?**

I was born on 04/04/1965 and started Aikido in dojo Samurai Evergem in January 1986.

**Who were your teachers, sensei?**

Jozef Temmerman Sensei

Antoine Vermeulen Shido-in

Nobuyoshi Tamura Shihan

Seiichi Sugano Shihan (and in continuance of this teaching the 3 shihan of the Australian Aikikai)



Moriteru Ueshiba Doshu

Seishiro Endo Shihan

Hayato Osawa Shihan

I also take classes with other shihan on occasion and I certainly have a lot to learn from them, but I cannot consider them as my teachers, because occasionally taking a class is in my view insufficient to call someone your teacher... There needs to be more...

I am still from a generation who believes and works towards the development of a personal link between teacher and student...

**When did you start teaching, Sensei?**

In 1989.

**Please briefly describe your personal Aikido-evolution, Sensei**

After having practiced Ju Jutsu for a period, starting with 3 friends but eventually remaining the only one left, I had to stop this practice when I had to go to the army ( I was the last group of mandatory military service )

In the army I trained some close combat in the special forces where I had ambitions to enlist as a professional soldier at the time.. However things turned out differently, I did not turn professional soldier and returned to civilian life...

In Evergem I saw a flyer about Aikido and decided to try this...

I made quick progress, trained a lot, went to seminar immediately as I already had a good knowledge of ukemi thanks to my jujutusu period.

My first Aikido seminar was after only three weeks of membership and it was immediately under the guidance of Tamura Shihan in Merchtem...

It was also the period that Sugano shihan lived in Belgium and visited on a daily basis local dojo for teaching and spreading Aikido...

In that period we were so used to have these two shihan teaching us, we really had no idea how privileged we were... two such high level worldwide teachers... It was the period when we easily reached 250-300 participants on tatami when they were teaching...

In 1989 I was a little bit losing interest in the dojo where I was member and was seriously thinking about stopping Aikido (as noted earlier in this interview), I remember that on the summer seminar in Wegimont I talked about this feeling to Sensei Antoine Vermeulen, Prosper Hiel and Rudy De Klerck. All three were so kind to offer me to come train in their dojo now and then. In that way maybe finding new motivation to continue Aikido practice. And so I did... I can say that these three people kept me in Aikido at that time...

On top of that I also took private classes in Hakko Ryu Jujutsu with sensei Antonio Garcia – Menkyo Kaiden in Kermt Hasselt where I went on Wednesday nights.

The founder of Hakko Ryu Ju Jutsu studied around the same period as O'Sensei with Sokaku Takeda of the Daito Ryu, that's where my interest came from, I guess...

Mr. Garcia was very kind and hospitable towards me and I am still very grateful for that... (while I am writing this the thought enters my mind that back then it wouldn't have taken a lot of effort to get me to cross over to him... But ok...)



After my sandan again I was looking for something extra and I started full of commitment the study of the art of Eskrima-Kali-Arnis, first the Doce Pares style from the philippines and after that the IKAEF-style, where I reached the Kasama Grade (the first teacher level, comparable with shodan grade, I guess).

However the mental state was quite different from Aikido and a need to make a choice was pending... Sugano sensei persuaded me to continue the Path of Aiki...



I still remember taking quite some training time before agreeing to take my sandan test (6 years instead of 3 years) and also for my yondan test it was not so eager, this time for other reasons... here I also trained for 6-7 years instead of the minimum 4 years.

In case of Yondan it was more like refusing to take the test, despite repeated requests of my teacher at the time, Mr. Antoine Vermeulen (also president of the federation then).

It was only after that Sugano sensei, in september 2006, mentioned that *"it would be good if you did your yondan test"* that I ran out of excuses and prepared for this final technical test in Aikido.

I remember vividly asking Sensei: *"what do I have to know? What do I need to prepare for?"*. He answered with his typical smile: *"everything, just take care of yourself"*... so much for the info in preparing... Actually he just meant to keep attending classes and serious training and everything would go natural...

In fact I remember him always like this... Same on demonstration for example if I asked him: *"what will we do?"* He gave me a witty answer: *"don't know, just try not to get hit..."*.

After my yondan test the VAV-grading Committee was reformed, according to the freely given advice from Sugano sensei. Advice that I find more and more relevant as time passes by and I see things change here...

Now I am Godan Aikikai and as such registered in a list of higher dangrades ( I also refer to an article that was published previously in our quarter magazine in which some explanation was written about what being an higher grade is supposed to mean).

These higher dangrades should, in my understanding, feel an engagement towards Doshu and Hombu dojo. I have made a commitment to engage in this to the best of my abilities. And as such will promote Aikikai wherever I am asked to teach. In my view this is an obligation. Just as one sentence of the moral code, to which I try to comply, says: *"There is commitment and there is obligation..."*.



After my yondan test I have also continued, even more intensely, to follow the teachings of Sugano sensei during his last years. My respect and admiration towards his teachings and his engagement were and are still increasing as time goes by and study progresses...

In Cameroon I observed him as a pioneer of Aikido, in Japan I saw the enormous respect he received ... He was and is a true shihan for me, a model-teacher...

**What are your personal goals, what do you wish to achieve, Sensei?**

I don't think I really have personal goals or objectives for what Aikido is concerned; I hope to remain in good health and be physically able to continue daily practice. And as such allow things to evolve in a natural way... Let that be my answer to your question.

Besides this I would like to try to guide and motivate, to the best of my abilities, those people that consider me as (one of) their teacher(s)... I hope to reach at some time the level where Aikido and my life become one... Some say to me that this is already the case, but I do not have that impression yet...

I still feel a clear distinction between Aran on tatami and Alain off tatami... I would like to try to unify these two at a certain point in the future... I realize it won't be easy but fortunately I probably have a few decennia left to accomplish this... ;-)

**Do you wish to add something at the end of our interview, sensei?**

Thank you, I would like to offer my sincere feelings of gratitude towards the people I listed earlier as my teachers...

I would also like to sincerely thank the higher grades and the shihan who help me in the present (and will hopefully continue this in the future) to make progress along the Way of Aiki...

And of course I would like to thank the people who consider me as their teacher for their trust, without them there is no teacher...

Thanks to their trust I can make progress, much deeper than on a pure technical level...

Finally I would like to emphasize once more the moral code mentioned below, hoping and wishing that the readers thoroughly read this, think about this, and try to implement this in every class, as well while being a teacher as while being a student.

Aikido is a way.  
There is a commitment and there is an obligation.  
Do not abuse or misuse the art of aikido.  
Study carefully, honestly and humble.  
Respect your senior and take care of your junior.

**Thank you for this interview, Sensei.**

You're welcome.

Addition to this interview (at request by the interviewer): to give a short history of my efforts to help the “Vlaamse Aikido Vereniging vzw” – the Aikikai recognized federation in Belgium North:

In 1989 I was contacted by Mr. Antoine Vermeulen, president VAV at the time, to help keep the federation running properly. This is voluntary non-profit work where most people try to stay out. Sometimes using the excuse that “*It requires so much time and work*”, “*It is useless*”, more like that...

I can say from experience this is not the case. If everyone becomes involved and takes up a little bit of voluntary work, then it is neither so hard nor useless at all...

After all, if nobody wants to put in any effort to benefit the community, then there is no community, no??

So I committed myself to a minor function which allowed me to get familiar with “*that political mess*”... And as it turned out, between 1989 and April 2013, I have been an administrator for this recognized federation...

In those 24 years I have fulfilled every administrative function, every post the federation had to offer. So I can rightfully claim to have a proper idea and experience on what is needed to successfully run a federation. And in all modesty I may add that, Mr. Antoine Vermeulen not included, in those 24 years I have not seen any other administrator with a service record comparable to mine...

The last function I managed was president of the federation. This in my view completed the circle... Slowly I was confronted with more and more individualization in the federation, the formation of groups who were still under the same umbrella for the benefits, but hardly ever were training together on tatami. And more and more effort was used to only benefit its own group and its interests...

Because I considered this not the Path I wished to continue on as a president nor as an administrator, I decided to end my mandate period properly until April 2013 and then not to be a candidate for re-election... This way clearing the Way for others to step in...

I sincerely wish the federation all the best and hope she sees a Way to continue in a proper fashion, keeping all her earlier achieved prestige and recognitions...

I will try to focus my efforts towards the benefit of the Aikido community in general, inside as well as outside the federation VAV...