

Ceremony in T'souke for Kawahara Sensei



L to R: Joe Planes, Bruce Riddick, Barb Wolfe, Ed Wass, Hilary Dawson, Michael Richardson, Shirley Alphonse, Ralph Kopperson, Ishiyama Sensei, Chief Gordon Planes, Scott Macphail (photo taken by Kimberly)

The Ceremony

Boommmm. Boommmm. Boommmm ... Chief Gordon Planes beat the ceremonial drum and began his chant as the war canoe skimmed the cove just off the T'souke traditional cemetery. The drum beat, dense, with a velvety resonance vibrated through our bodies and Kawahara Sensei was again among us, his spirit cloaking



us like a warm, comforting and sheltering cloak.

The Canada Geese wading on the spit lined up along the shoreline and honked their





recognition and saluted Sensei as we passed. As the chant stopped, a large flock of seagulls on the spit off the starboard bow soared and Sensei lifted his cloak to soar with them, and plane above us in the war canoe below. Slowly and reverently Scott versed Sensei's ashes into the waves and they settled a meter below us in a grey patch as the

canoe rode over above and we all had our last look.

Ishiyama Sensei expressed his parting prayer made on the group's behalf when the ashes were being spread, "May Kawahara Sensei's soul



and spirit rest in peace and guide and protect us in our journey for years to come."

"Ah," said Kawahara Sensei, "my voyage complete, now the sea will take me

home," and his spirit disappeared into the sky.



As we quietly paddled back, I saw a seal crossing our



envelope placed it on the pebbles until there were only ashes remaining on the beach, to be washed by the tides.

path, head and shoulders just above the surface; it took a last look at us in the war canoe, dove, and I did not see it surface.



Returning to shore and beaching the canoe, Shirley Alphonse, the T'souke Healer, lighted the white envelope that carried the ash container. The rising flames reminded us of memories burnt into our souls. Ishiyama Sensei held the as long as possible then

The T'souke tradition recalls the legend of their women, tired of domestic strife, sailing off across the Pacific to Japan. Thus, Sensei knew it had been done before and he would travel home borne by the same currents as the T'souke had been centuries earlier.



The solemn ceremony started earlier with each participant receiving a cleansing smoke smudge at an altar of sacred T'souke objects.



Everyone blessed the envelope with the container of Kawahara Sensei's ashes with sacred water from the T'Sooke and from Japan waving cedar boughs over the envelope after dipping them in the sacred waters. I remember cedar boughs being used in a similar manner during a Shinto ceremony at the Aiki Shrine in Iwama during the remembrance ceremony for O Sensei.

Finishing back at the altar we all thanked Shirley the Healer, Chief Gordon Planes and their team before taking our leave of each other. Sensei cared for us, for years, and on

behalf of all Aikido practitioners he touched, we paid our last respects and honoured his last wishes, perhaps with even more symbolism than he, or any of us, might have imagined.

Background

These were not the only links between Aikido people and the T'souke Nation. Kaya Sensei, Chief Priest of the Tanashi Shrine and a physician (psychiatrist), is a close friend of Ishiyama Sensei's and he kindly visited and offered purification ceremonies at several dojo locations over the years. In 2006 Kaya Sensei visited Victoria Aikikai to perform a dojo purification ceremony, and that is where Kawahara Sensei and Kaya Sensei first met



and they became very good friends. Whenever Kawahara Sensei returned to Japan, he made a point of visiting Kaya Sensei's shrine in Tokyo.



Ishiyama Sensei arranged for a spiritual exchange event in 2008, in which Kaya Sensei performed a shinto ceremony and Healer Shirley Alphonse and Chief Gordon Planes did their traditional native rituals at T'souke Nation Band Hall. Afterwards, they had private

purification ceremony near the beach. Kawahara Sensei's ashes were spread about 30 feet off the same beach, right next to the T'souke Nation sacred burial site.

In 2009, Healer Shirley and Chief Gordon were invited to Japan by Kaya Sensei, and they shared their spiritual tradition with Japanese people. Since then Shirley Alphonse and Kaya Sensei remain in contact.



by Bruce Riddick

Contributions

Michael Richardson observed:

“About four or five years ago, Ed Wass and I were asked if we would assist Kawahara Sensei with his morning practice at the dojo in Victoria. We were strictly instructed that such practice was not about us and our practice but we were to assist Sensei in every way possible with his practice. As practice progressed, and Sensei being the consummate teacher that he was, he began teaching us and guiding us forward in our Aikido journey.

When he would be absent for a period of time, he would leave us a "curriculum" to follow in our thrice weekly practice. We did this practice standing on a part sheet of plywood and when Sensei was away, we always set out his plywood board so that he continued to be with us in spirit. Sensei's spirit was so strong that it was easy to visualize him, there, on his piece of plywood leading us through practice even when he was off on a seminar or in Japan.

Elements of the ceremony in Sooke were like that too. As the canoe glided near the T'Souke Nations sacred burial spot and Scott Sensei eased Kawahara Sensei's ashes into the sea there was the strength of Sensei's spirit with us as he moved on his final journey and we continued on ours.

As each day passes I feel his spirit and think of him. We still set out Sensei's plywood board.

“While I turned my head
That traveler
I'd just passed ...
Melted into the mist”

Shiki”

by Michael Richardson

Ed Wass observed:

“I was drawn to the moment when Scott Sensei poured Kawahara Sensei's ashes into the water along side the canoe. We were moving slowly forward with the ashes flowing in a ribbon, mixing with the water, mixing and flowing, which eventually will head with the out going tide into the Strait. The water was still (no ripples), Seeing the ashes flowing along side, I felt at peace to be there when his final wishes were carried out.

On our paddle returning to shore I thought of sensei,

His talking of cars,
His gentle slap on my shoulders telling me to relax, relax, and then saying
with a smile "ten years Black belt!"
Liked leather, touched my leather jacket and said, very old, but
very nice!

Smoke from shell,
fanned by feather
Drumming spirit.
Sensei's ashes,
mixing with water,
current, circular swirls,
flow, dancing, movement
Aikido."

by Ed Wass

"In my memory of that day I see only the lovely embroidered white fabric that had contained Sensei's ashes, crumbling to ash itself, nestled casually on the tidal shore. All that remains now of Kawahara Sensei in this world is his work: in our minds, as we remember him; in our bodies, as we strive to follow his teachings, and in our hearts. Domo arigato gozaimashita, Sensei."

by Barb Wolfe