Aikido Works
By Carlo Fargnoli

*[Editor's Note: Carlo Fargnoli is a student at New York Aikikai. This article originally appeared in the Fall 1999 issue of Aikido East.]*

I am a New York City police officer. I joined the New York Aikikai in January of 1994. One of my wonderful friends there, Marc Olden, a kind hearted and extremely generous man, and a lethal one as well, immediately took me under his wing.

Because of the nature of my work, many times Marc would say to me, "Carlo, you need this, trust me it works, your life might one day may depend on it." Marc's words of wisdom have come to pass many times over.

Not only has Aikido helped in reducing the incredible stress that comes with being a policeman, Aikido has made me a more caring person. Aikido has also saved me many times: from losing street battles with criminals who refused to be taken quietly, and from having to resort to deadly physical force when a suspect is out of control. Is Aikido a cure all? No, but close enough to it.

I remember facing a suspect in the vestibule of an apartment building in a drug infested, high crime area of New York City. It was a hot summer day and I had chased the man down for several blocks. A huge crowd had gathered to watch as I cornered him and ordered him to lie down and put his hands behind his back. He knew it was fight or flight and with the crowd egging him on, he chose fight. I could see the anger in his eyes; this man was not going back to jail. He lifted his hands and charged at me. As he charged, I entered and stepped to the side, I extended my right arm, performed a kaiten and my elbow crashed into his throat. He fell to the ground pretty hard.

I could hear the sirens in the distance but it would be several seconds until help got there, and on the street that can be an eternity. As the suspect lay stunned on the ground, I quickly applied a nikkyo hold and was able to control him until help arrived. There was absolutely nothing this man could do to escape.

Subduing him happened so quickly, I couldn't believe it. The first thing I thought was "Wow, Marc was right. It actually works." And what worked wasn't one of those crazy moves you see in a movie, it was actuality something done every day as part of the warm ups. Aikido can be devastating. No blood, no brutality, no problem.

Another night in a torrential rainstorm, my partner and I were in our car, pursuing an armed man who only minutes earlier had held a gun to the head of another police officer and then managed to escape. We chased him out of the city up the Bronx River parkway and into the town of Greenburgh -- well out of our radio's range.

The intense rainfall continued as the suspect's car swerved all over the road in an attempt to make us crash. Somehow we managed to stop his car and he jumped out. I chased him down and we fell to the ground with me landing on top of him. I applied a nikkyo to his left arm and held him down with his arm tightly pressed into my chest. I yelled to my partner to handcuff the suspect's other arm.

The guy was but unable to escape the nikkyo. Meanwhile I'm thinking to myself "this stuff is great!" I could feel him trying to escape and I knew what would happen. Sure enough he let out a growl (not to mention several curses!) in an attempt to conjure up enough strength to get his arm out of nikkyo and fight some more. Then I heard a loud crack and I knew his arm had broken. He then went limp and decided to go peacefully.

Had I not been able to hold him, I honestly don't know what would have happened. He was high as a kite and incredibly strong. Marc was right again; Aikido had played a major part in saving my life that night and probably the suspect's as well.

Another night, my partner and I were cruised the streets of yet another crime infested neighborhood in New York City. We parked and observed three men talking; they seemed to be looking around nervously.

One of the men kept fumbling with his waistband. As we approached, the fumbler, who was 6 feet 3 inches tall, stepped back between two parked cars. I approached him while my partner went to the other two. I could clearly see the outline of a handgun he had tucked into the right side of his waistband. I didn't want to startle him, so I pretended I hadn't seen anything.

Then, when he wasn't expecting it, I grabbed his right hand and applied a sankyo and yelled to my partner, "he's got a gun!"

The suspect tried to grab the gun with his left hand but the pain from the sankyo was too much, there was nothing he could do. My partner then removed the gun, and with that sankyo casting motion I was able to easily place the suspect on the car and handcuff him. This was big guy, much bigger than I am; yet thanks to Aikido, another possible tragedy had been averted. You know the saying, "Marc was right."

One night, we had confronted an emotionally disturbed man. I could see he wouldn't go easily, he kept angrily yelling and waving his hands in our direction. I tried to calm him down, but he continued raging. The situation grew worse as the man grew more violent. I was going to have to try to subdue him. Dealing with emotionally disturbed people is extremely dangerous; they are completely unpredictable.

The man continued to scream at me and then stepped forward and waved his hand in the direction of my face. I stepped to the side, grabbed his wrist and performed a kotegaeshi. As he fell to the floor I grabbed his inner arm behind the elbow and was able to turned over and handcuff him.

These are just a few stories among dozens of how Aikido has worked for me. We live in a time when coming in contact with someone's blood can be extremely dangerous due to HIV and other blood borne diseases, and yet I have not seen any blood flow from Aikido techniques I've used on the job.

Here in New York City, police officers are under constant scrutiny -- especially when any type of force is used. Using Aikido can prevent civil and or criminal liabilities that might arise from the use of excessive force.

The New York City Police Department is implementing Aikido techniques into their training regimen. New officers are taught that utilizing a simple hold to control a suspect is far better than beating a suspect and can prevent further violence and possible death.

Many of the fellow officers from my department and departments around the country are sharing similar stories of how Aikido helped them. I owe so much to the wonderful people who train at the New York Aikikai, and Yamada Sensei and Sugano Sensei for allowing me to become a student. And a special thanks to Marc Olden for always being right.