

Sword and Spirit

The Journal of Itten Dojo

December 2025



— Why Budo? —

Regardless of the times in which you live, or the circumstances of your life, success largely depends on things you can control:

- **Building a foundation of strong relationships in a community of mutual support and achievement.**
- **Forging a disciplined and positive mindset.**
- **Enhancing your physical health and capabilities.**

These are exactly the benefits membership in an authentic dojo provides.

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701 W Simpson Street, Suite C
Mechanicsburg, PA 17055-3716
www.ittendojo.org

2025 Year in Review

In addition to our normal training schedule of a dozen or more classes per week, members of Itten Dojo regularly participate in a variety of special events. These include seminars at our dojo or elsewhere, typically at the Japanese Martial Arts Center in Ann Arbor, Michigan, or at Legacy Martial Arts and Fitness in Kitchener, Ontario. We also stage demonstrations and other presentations at Japanese-themed festivals or local community events. On occasion, we have dojo-organized trips; sometimes local, sometimes out of state, and in 2025 even international. Overall, this past year proved to be one of the most active in the history of our dojo.

A very pleasant consequence of an active schedule is the number of new friends and acquaintances that are made. We now enjoy an expanding circle of friends across the United States, in Canada, and even in Japan. For those friends we don't frequently see in person we maintain regular correspondence.

Another positive outcome of all we've done, recently and in the past, is the growing recognition of our dojo. We are increasingly known and respected, not just locally, but within the worldwide community of groups focused on preservation and propagation of heritage Japanese budo. Although receiving respect can be personally satisfying, a much more important aspect is that doors may be opened, and opportunities offered that otherwise would have remained out of reach. Rather than focusing on recognition as an ego-boost, I am instead focusing on gratitude for the considerations that have been extended to us.

I thought about listing everyone to whom I'm especially grateful for all that's happened in the past year, but I decided there are too many people to cite by name—and I don't want to take a chance on leaving someone out.

Allow me to take a more generic approach, and say thank you to all our budo "ancestors" that developed and passed on the arts in which we train, the instructors with whom we train (regularly and at special events), our families that allow us the time to invest in training and support our efforts, colleagues in related fields of endeavor (such as fitness or publishing) that have helped promote the dojo, and finally to the staff and students of Itten Dojo—past and present—without whom the dojo would not exist.



JANUARY



Practical Fighting Camp

Hosted at the dojo of James Fries Sensei in Kitchener, Ontario, this event brought together Hanshi Gary Legacy, Nicklaus Suino Sensei, and Randy Dauphin Sensei for an intensive look at applications of striking and grappling.



Daisho Zume Seminar with Reg Sakamoto Sensei

Daisho Zume is one of the five sets of paired techniques in Muso Jikiden Eishin-ryu. The two sets of armed jujutsu, along with the three sets of kumitachi, are the preserved fighting techniques of the ryu—the *tandoku waza* (solo techniques) are primarily a methodology for developing structure and the generation and application of power. Sakamoto Sensei, who received the full

transmission of this style of swordsmanship, has very graciously agreed to share the portion of the Eishin-ryu curriculum that had been lost from our line.

FEBRUARY



Kagami Biraki

Our dojo celebrates the samurai observation of the New Year with demonstrations of the arts practiced in our dojo and a luncheon at a local Japanese restaurant.



A Visit from David Goldberg Sensei

Goldberg Sensei, in addition to being a highly-ranked instructor of aikido and iaido, is a master swordsmith. I met him years ago at a seminar we hosted, and I was delighted to discover that he had moved into our area.





A Visit to JMAC

Our first visit to the Japanese Martial Arts Center in 2025 included instruction from Suino Sensei and his assistants covering iaido, jujutsu, and judo, as well as rank testing. Bailey Sensei presented a *shodo* (calligraphy) class for members of JMAC.

MARCH



Sakura Festival

Each spring there is a cherry blossom festival held on the campus of Franklin and Marshall College in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, about an hour's drive from our dojo. This was the third year that we'd been invited to

demonstrate, and the first year that we were able to do that inside (which was a lot better).



Bailey Sensei had her usual shodo booth—always a very popular attraction—at which she writes people's names or other *kanji* (characters) that they request.



Iaido Training Camp

Once again we headed north to Kitchener, Ontario, for this event that includes the Yamaguchi Katsuo Memorial Iaido Tournament. Training is provided by Suino Sensei and his cadre of superbly talented assistant



instructors, who then also serve as judges for the iaido competition. This is an event that all members of our iaido program should make an effort to attend.

APRIL



Iai-Nihonto

I met with Goldberg Sensei at his home to discuss modification of my *iaito* according to the recommendations of Suino Sensei. *Iaito* are alloy-bladed training swords that cannot be sharpened—an evolution that was required by the Allied Occupation of Japan following World War II. As we discussed the matter, it became apparent that the best way to achieve Suino Sensei's recommendations would be to forge a steel sword from scratch. Goldberg Sensei has allowed me to experience every step of this process, hands-on, something I never dreamed I would ever be able to do.



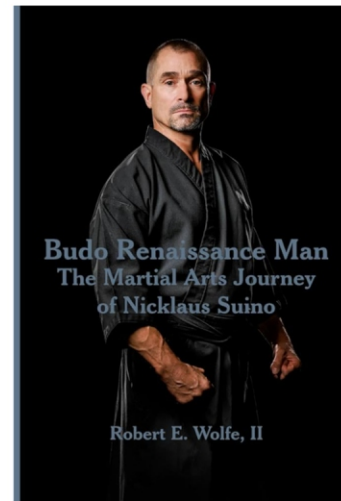
Iaido Training Camp at Ohio Budokan

It's been a real pleasure to reconnect with our friends at the Ohio Budokan in Dayton and help them establish an iaido study group under the direction of Suino Sensei.

Robert Wolfe and 2 more

Budo Renaissance Man: The Martial Arts Journey of Nicklaus Suino

Top New Release in Martial Artist Biographies



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Budo Renaissance Man


My second book was published in April and debuted on Amazon as the “Top New Release” in its category. The book is a biography of Suino Sensei that originally was to have been the cover feature in the July 2023 issue of *Bugeisha Traditional Martial Artist* magazine, but that plan died along with the publisher, Angel Lemus. Going the book route was suggested by Mike DeMarco of Via Media Publishing (another good friend).



MAY

**Visit from Rod Uhler Sensei**

We trained for many years with Uhler Sensei and his wife Mitsuko Hashimoto Uhler Sensei (she is the senior student of the late Okabayashi Shogen Sensei). We did a bit of aikijujutsu with them at various times, but our primary focus was Ono-ha Itto-ryu Sokaku-den—the branch of that style of kenjutsu passed down from Takeda Sokaku through his son, Tokimune. Uhler Sensei grew up in our area and let me know in advance that he would be back to visit family—we enjoyed another session of swordsmanship and sharing memories.



Daito Ryu Muden Ireland

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This is worth a read as it addresses serious injuries in budo dojo. They are often caused by stupid behaviour that ignores the instructions in practice and are invariably committed by people who are trying to "win" by proving how tough and effective they are.

This mindset fundamentally misunderstands the nature

International Reach for Sword and Spirit

When a new issue of our monthly dojo journal is published, I post an announcement on various social media. The issue of *Sword and Spirit* with my essay on dojo injuries, titled "Loaded Guns," drew an unusual amount of attention and was shared multiple times, including by this budo group in Ireland. While some injuries are "stuff happens," many are totally unnecessary.

JUNE

**IMAF Americas**

JMAC hosted this conference of the *Kokusai Budoin* (International Martial Arts Federation), with an all-star lineup of instructors from Japan and the U.S. Among them were Sabastian Velilla Sensei and Chelsea Velilla Sensei of the Florida Budokan. They provided an introduction to *kyudo* (Japanese archery) that resulted in the establishment of study groups at JMAC and, in 2026, Itten Dojo.

JULY

**JMAC Crucible**

Our second time to meet the challenge of this 12-hour, locked-in, exceptionally intensive training. We didn't just survive; we prevailed.



AUGUST



Iai-Nihonto Quenched

A major step in the process of forging a traditional Japanese sword is the heat-treatment that hardens the edge and produces the characteristic curvature of the blade. The sword is heated to a critical temperature and then plunged into a tank of water. A lot can go wrong at this point, so it's definitely a "hold your breath" stage of the forging.



Carlisle Barracks Welcome Day

The U.S. Army War College, the graduate school for senior American and allied officers, is located in the town of Carlisle. Bailey Sensei, being a military spouse (her husband is retired from active duty), is very involved in special programs conducted at the War College. When members of the new class arrive in the fall, there is a fair set up with booths of local vendors and activities, since many officers bring their families along. Our booth included information on the arts taught at our dojo.

SEPTEMBER



JMAC at Itten

One of the weekends we most look forward to is when Suino Sensei and the JMAC assistant instructors visit our dojo for iaido, jujutsu, and judo training. Rank testing is also conducted, and we always do a dinner out.

OCTOBER



Dojo Expedition to Japan

This trip, coordinated by Bailey Sensei, was almost an entire year in planning, and she did a spectacular job. 17 of us, including family members, made the ten-day trip, a highlight of which was visiting the *Hayashizaki Jinja*, the shrine where iaido was created, and training with the members of the Shinbukan. Details are in the 11/25 issue.



A Journey of Sword and Spirit

Itten Dojo Through Three Decades and Lessons Learned Along the Way

Authors & Illustrator

Author: Robert E. Wolfe, II



Second Place Award

Nonfiction - Memoirs - Transformational

Book Award

The same day we trained at the Shinbukan, while we were enjoying a fantastic *soba* noodle lunch, I received email notification that my first book, *A Journey of Sword and Spirit*, had been awarded a literary prize.



NOVEMBER



Pennsylvania Karate Hall of Fame

I was honored to be one of the 2025 inductees to this Hall of Fame, on the basis of service to the martial arts. A unique aspect of this Hall of Fame is that it's a non-profit corporation and not something that one pays to get into—truly an honor.



Seminar with Scott Taylor Sensei

Taylor Sensei is a Canadian instructor of jujutsu, and is known as the “Dirty Demon Wrist Locker” for his adaptation of aikijujutsu *kansetsu-waza* (joint-destroying techniques) to ground fighting. Taylor Sensei taught a segment of the JMAC Crucible and we decided we would like to know more of his approach. Because of our background in aikijujutsu/aikijutsu/aikido, Taylor Sensei’s applications are something that make immediate sense.



DECEMBER



JMAC “Residency”

In early December, Alan Starner and I trained for three very intense days at JMAC, with a broad focus on iaido, jujutsu, judo, and grappling. We attended regular classes as well as had multiple sessions of private instruction from Suino Sensei and his assistants. Two of

the regular classes were my first time to train directly with John Gage Sensei, who now leads Nihon Jujutsu. When I say this training was intense, Alan and I agree that neither one of us have ever been so sore and exhausted even after just the first day. The second day wasn’t any less intense, and at the end of that day we tested (successfully) for *nidan* (second-degree black-belt) in iaido.

In the judo photo, Alan is training with Will Starks under the watchful eye of Richard Monroe Sensei. A student at JMAC, Mr. Starks is a professional MMA fighter scheduled to take his first shot at a UFC title in February. As I’ve discovered on many occasions, some of the most intrinsically dangerous individuals are some of the safest people to train with, and that applies here.



A New Advertising Effort

Many potential members visiting to observe a class tell us, “I had no idea this place even existed.” That’s despite a lot of advertising of various kinds. With this new “wellness kiosk” with disinfecting wipes placed for the next year in the entrance to one of the highest-volume grocery stores in the area, we hope to inform many more people of the existence of our dojo and add to membership with steady, managed growth. 🌀



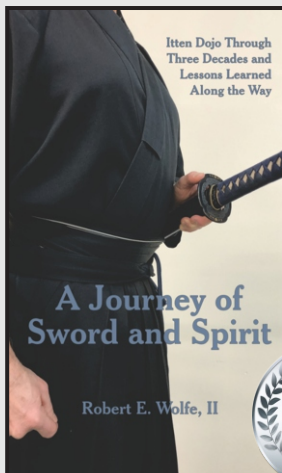
Robert Wolfe, chief instructor of Itten Dojo, began martial arts training in 1975 while attending Bucknell University, where he earned a degree in Japanese Studies. Mr. Wolfe has taught since 1985, and founded Itten Dojo in 1992. His articles on martial arts have been featured in publications such as the *Journal of Asian Martial Arts*, *Bugeisha*, *Aikido Today Magazine*, *Inside Karate*, *Martial Arts Training*, and *Martial Arts Professional*. He is the author of two books: *A Journey of Sword and Spirit — Itten Dojo Through Three Decades and Lessons Learned Along the Way* and *Budo Renaissance Man — The Martial Arts Journey of Nicklaus Suino*, and a 2025 inductee to the PA Karate Hall of Fame.



Available from Amazon.com

A Journey of Sword and Spirit

“In an age that has largely lost touch with many of the traditional values that built the world we all currently inhabit, this work (and the dojo from which it sprang) serve as a welcome oasis of wisdom, strength, and serenity.”



Winner of Second Place in the Fall 2025 BookFest® Awards, in the category of Nonfiction-Memoirs-Transformational

Budo Renaissance Man

“For more than three decades, thousands of people have become more centered, happier, and more successful with Nicklaus Suino’s guidance. Suino has been called ‘one of the leading martial arts instructors in North America,’ but his influence radiates far beyond the dojo. This concise biography of Suino presents a profile of an inspirational leader whose accomplishments in martial arts were a springboard to success as an author, attorney, entrepreneur, life coach, husband, and father.”

