



David M. Valadez
Senshin Center
Dojocho

Only Our Skill
by **David M. Valadez**

Deshi: Sensei, I was told today by an instructor from another school that my rank is not real.

Sensei: She was right – it is not.

Deshi: And what of your rank then?

Sensei: I have no rank. I have only my skill.

Deshi: Is this because we are an independent dojo?

Sensei: I suppose that has something to do with it – but only very little.

Deshi: If I went to another dojo, an affiliated one, will my rank be real?

Sensei: I suppose in some sense, yes.

Deshi: In another sense, no?

Sensei: In the main sense, the only real sense, no.

Deshi: I am confused.

Sensei: No matter where you go, no matter what federation you belong to, no matter who your teacher may have been, no matter what title you may hold, no matter what rank you may don, no matter how many followers you may eventually have, when you are defending your life or the life of another, when your children require someone to lean on, when your friends need someone that can catch them, when your parents will need you to grieve for them, when God has His full weight upon you and is clawing into your chest, you will only have your skill in Aiki – nothing else.