

# *Aikido in Australia*

Aiki Kai Australia National Newsletter

Volume 3 Number 5



**Aiki Kai Australia Founder  
Seiichi Sugano Shihan 8th Dan  
Honorary Patron  
Yoshimitsu Yamada Shihan 8th Dan**

**President: Tony Smibert 7th Dan Shihan**

179 Mole Creek Rd., Deloraine, TAS, 7304

Tel: (W) 03 6362 3326 (H) 03 6362 2474

**Vice President: Tristan Derham**

tderham@gmail.com M: 0420 336 134

**Technical Teaching Committee**

**Tony Smibert, 7th Dan Shihan, Robert Botterill, 7th Dan Shihan,  
Hanan Janiv, 7th Dan Shihan, John Watson, 6th Dan,  
Andrew Dziedzic, 6th Dan.**

**TTC Contact address:** c/o National Coordinator for the TTC, **National Area Representative, Andrew Dziedzic**, 5 Bertram St. Eastwood, NSW, 2122.  
Tel: 02 9858 5241 e-mail: dziedzic@bigpond.net.au

**Area Representatives**

**ACT: Hanan Janiv, 7th Dan** 23 Crest Rd., Queenbeyan, ACT 2620.  
Tel/Fax: 02 6297 8258

**NSW: Austin James, 5th Dan**, 29A Yarran Road, Oatley, NSW 2223.  
Tel: 02 9580 2627. M: 0417 435 949 email: ausjam1@gmail.com

**NT: Marie Petery, 6th Dan.** PO Box 131 Alice Springs, NT 0871.  
Tel: 0413 376 299 email: marie.petery@gtat.com.au

**QLD: Graham Morris 6th Dan.** 1 Inala Avenue, Tugun, Qld 4224.  
Tel: H. 07 5559 5483 Mobile: 0412 602 873.

**SA: David Scott 6th Dan..** PO Box 81. Norton Summit, SA, 5136  
Tel: 08 8390 3322

**TAS: Kaye Jenkins, 5th Dan.** GPO box110 Hobart Tas, 7001.  
Ph: 03 6229 7743,0418 569 314, email: kaye.jenkins@dhh.tas.gov.au

**VIC: Linda Godfrey, 4th Dan..**

Tel: 03 9802 7211 M: 0418 381 674 email: linda.godfrey@iinet.net.au

**WA: Nick Archbold, 53 Allanswood rd.**  
Greenwood WA, 6024. Ph: 08 6262 2996, 0422 920 206

**General Editor and Publisher John Litchen.**

PO Box 3503. Robina Town Centre, QLD, 4230  
Tel: 07 5578 8748 e-mail: jlitchen@bigpond.net.au

**Registrar:Kathy McCarthy.**

Registrations and information: PO Box 799 Warwick, Qld, 4370

**Webmaster: John Rockstrom.** phone: H 03 9757 2926,  
mobile 0411 115 235.

**Aikido Foundation** senior teachers and advisers hold **Rokudan** certification or above.

**ACT: Hanan Janiv. NSW: Andrew Dziedzic, Roger Savage, George Lo,  
Steven Armfield. NT: Richard Barnes, Mike Petery, Marie Petery.**

**QLD: Graham Morris. SA: David Scott. TAS: Tony Smibert.**

**VIC: Robert Botterill, David Brown, Felica Birman, Ray Oldman, Geoffrey  
Savage, John Rockstrom, John Watson. WA: Hugh Derham.**

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**NEW EQUAL OPPORTUNITY POLICY**

*Aiki Kai Australia has had an equal opportunity policy drawn up. The policy contains procedures to be followed should, for example, any person feel that they have been victimised or sexually harassed. This policy is posted on the website. Should anyone experience or have a matter of concern, they should contact Andrew Dziedzic to find out the appropriate officer to speak to. All enquiries will be handled with the strictest confidence and should discussion be needed Andrew will phone back at Aiki Kai Australia's expense.*



**Soon to be released**

**A special documentary film**

**Report by Tristan Derham**

Last year, Rob Castiglione approached me to talk about making an Aikido film. Not a film to be watched by existing students and then archived but something that could bring the heart of our Aikido to a wider audience. A man of diverse talents – lawyer, lecturer, Aikido student and passionate filmmaker - Rob has made several award winning documentaries and dramas through his production company, New Editions. Rob wanted to make his next film centred on our unique style of movement, on the people that love Aikido and the legacy of Sugano Sensei. Filming began earlier this year.

**How do you think Aikido is seen by the general public?**

I think Aikido deserves a better rep. It has been shy to promote itself. This shyness probably has complex roots to do with the fact that Aikido regards itself as a “way” and not say a sport. I had an Aikido photograph up on my editing screen and some film students immediately asked – ‘what’s that?’ Seriously, not one of them had heard of Aikido, whereas everyone knows what Karate, Judo, Tae Kwon Do are. I showed them some footage and they were just blown away. They couldn’t understand how people were being thrown, couldn’t interpret the movement. I guess the film is partly to introduce people to Aikido and Aikido movement.

**Young people?**

Well I think a lot of young people want to know about the martial side of the art, how effective it is physically, for example, but my interests lean towards more spiritual aspects. That won’t suit everybody. My first recollection of Aikido was grainy black and white images I saw when I was about twelve. It made a powerful and lasting impact on me. What impressed me was the effortless way in which *nage* threw his partner, such an enormous distance with apparent ease, I was so amazed. I guess you have to find people and attract them at the



level where they're at. If you only gave a very sophisticated spiritual account of Aikido you are going to lose some people completely.

**Do you see the film as being a way to promote Aikido?**

Every person we've spoken for the film to date has given us quite a significantly different account of what Aikido means to them and where it's going to take them. I'm a bit shy about giving grandiose philosophical explanations, or a pedagogic notion of what Aikido is.

I certainly have an agenda to be honest about it. Someone once said to me that Aikido is like the Ganges, a mighty river, you can dip your toe in and get it wet and that's enjoyable or you can immerse yourself in something so enormous it will overwhelm you. No single person is ever going to be big enough for Aikido or to dominate Aikido or to control or define it, no matter how great a practitioner they are. Our aim in the film is obviously not to explain Aikido but if you can impart something of that sense.

**If you're looking at the spiritual side of Aikido, will you be looking at Shinto ideas?**

Broadly speaking the film will explore the spiritual dimensions of Aikido. However, it is not going to try and explore O'Sensei's religious tradition. He had a very specific spiritual tradition that Western Aikido practitioners don't usually subscribe to. What I am interested in are notions of breath, the power of breath, linking heaven and earth, misogi, being centred and relaxed. It might sound a bit harsh but there is no point getting on the mat unless you're willing to invest in those notions. I don't think you have to be an adherent of Shinto to believe those things. The film explores some of those notions

**So you've now interviewed a number of people, including our three Australian Shihan, and you are hoping to film students in Melbourne later this year – do you take a particular approach to the interviews?**

I use a pretty intuitive approach. Aikido principles are not just about the mat. Everyone knows that. Trying to apply Aikido principles, for example spontaneity, to film-making are of great interest to me. I try to be responsive to someone's particular atmosphere. With the Shihan, for example, you can be absolutely confident that there is something substantial there, something deep to explore. It is just so interesting to see how the three Australian Shihan are so fundamentally different as people and how their Aikido is so different as well.

I have specific questions, of course. We have a spot interview segment in the film where we ask people 'where did your interest in Aikido originate?' – Everyone has a different story. For our senior teachers, I have been asking what techniques or ideas they are exploring at the moment. We're all interested in how these people became inspired to train in Aikido, how they continued and endured for such a long time. It's tremendously impressive for any martial artist to get to those levels. People maybe don't fully appreciate how difficult it really is. It's well beyond what people might imagine, compared to, say, getting a PhD. It's really important to have people at that level in this country teaching. It's a great resource for people wanting to learn Aikido.

**So there will be a number of themes throughout the film?**

I see the structure of the film being very much like



a rope, not a modern synthetic rope maybe, an ancient rope made of natural strands of fibre – there are a number of strands that will come together, appearing and reappearing in the film. An important strand is about this great teacher – Sugano Sensei who has a great story. Obviously he was a magnetic influence on his students, particularly on his core students. And that's great story to tell, especially with the archival material, showing Sugano Sensei and these senior people in their early stages of development. We'll look at the beginner's perspective and where they find a place in the Aikido community, Sugano Sensei's community and tradition in Australia, and also technique. We'll look at commitment in a number of contexts, for example, Clifton Hill dojo - something like our Australian *Hombu* – as well as more recently established dojos - the Leederville dojo in Perth, Martin and Bodhi's new dojo in Tasmania.

### **What about visually, technically – is the film going to be different from other Aikido films?**

This is not a technical film. It's important to stress that. At the same time, in order to make Aikido accessible and to show core underlying principles, for example *irimi*, it's important to examine a number of core Aikido techniques. It's hard to find good Aikido films. The movement is beautiful but it's very hard to capture those things on film. It's extremely challenging. There's a tendency to have a rather dull wide shot to bring out the technical aspects but we want to go beyond that. O'Sensei has a poem which is a paean to 'the beautiful forms of Aikido' and that's what I'd like to show, something deeper than the merely technical. If we can bring across the beauty, some of the formal beauty and the structure, it would be wonderful.

With funding from the Aikido Foundation and with Rob providing his time and state-of-the-art equipment *gratis*, we began filming early this year. We grabbed our Shihan as they came to Perth, conducting interviews and filming their seminars, experimenting with lighting and techniques at the Leederville dojo. Rob then travelled to Tasmania to film extensively with Tony Smibert Shihan, Linton Tuleja and Martin Bratzel Sensei both in the dojo and in the lake and mountain areas around Deloraine. We've begun to select archival footage of Sugano Sensei and early Australian students to splice into the film.

In July, Rob spent three days at the Winter School in Sydney, filming the Shihan teaching, the dawn training and pulling various students off the mat for a twenty second take (sweating, breathless, no makeup!) on what it was about Aikido that inspired them.

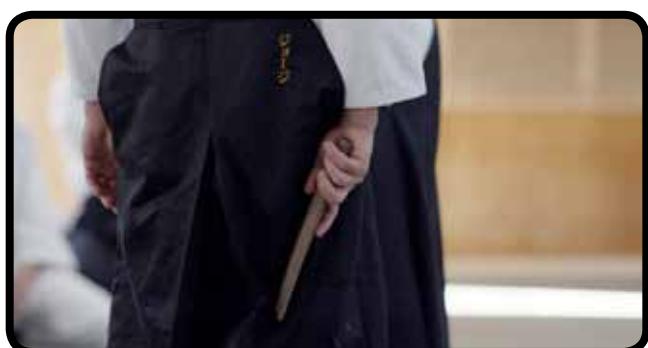
The next step is to film at Clifton Hill dojo. With our largest student body and several of our most senior teachers in Victoria plus a new generation of serious students coming through, it's an exciting opportunity.



*Images on pages 3, 4, and 5 are from the forthcoming film while in production... supplied by Tristan Derrham, Vice President, Aiki Kai Australia.*

*This is an exciting project and is one I am sure we will all be looking forward to seeing.*

*JL. Editor.*



## Don't stop here!

by Christophe Depaus

*As I leaf through "Aikido in Australia" the deep impression made on me by the quality of the articles and reports makes me aware of the honour involved in Tony Smibert's request to make this modest contribution to this publication.*

A few weeks ago, after a weekend school conducted by him on the Belgian coast, I was contemplating Tony Smibert's water-colours on show in Aziz Belhassane's private dojo. While discussing the links between his paintings and Aikido with Tony Sensei, as well as the considerable influence which Sugano Sensei had on his work, we reflected not only on the deep feeling of loss left after his passing, but also on the many questions which we would still have liked to ask Sensei today. I confide in Tony that despite the enormous amount of notes I had made, mainly relating to weapons practice and regarding the internal aspects of the art, that I nonetheless fear that the ravages of time may make those precious and fragile recollections fade away.

Nonetheless some of them will remain unforgettable, especially those linked to the opening of my own dojo, already five long years ago.... "REN SHIN KAN" is the name Sensei gave to my dojo, even before its actual official opening: "REN" to express the notion of "drilling", superior to the notion of simple training; "SHIN" for the Spirit; and "KAN" to signify the place. A series of kanji characters which can be read as the place where you constantly train the spirit; or else the location of intensive practice and of development of the spirit. I welcomed the name as a gift without ever daring to ask Sensei if it somehow reflected Sensei's image of me, for good or ill!

"It's important that you open a dojo, even if it is small and even if there already are a large number of dojo's in Brussels" – is how Sensei urged me on. That was in 2006, a year after I had obtained my 4<sup>th</sup> Dan. I duly obeyed,

opening a dojo a few months later in the gymnasium of a small primary school. This is a place of education, a place with a real heart and a place of real simplicity. A place where the good-will is so strong that you feel as if all the kami's had supervised the building since the laying of its foundations, and today still look after the well-being of all its occupants. Despite the modest nature of the premises, I dared to ask Sensei to give a course there. That was in May 2007. His response was immediate; however to make up for the shortcomings of the space, I decided to move all the mats into the playground and to call upon my friends Michaël Moyses, Michael Ameye and Benoît Toulotte to bring some mats from their own dojos to augment the available training area. Thus we had a haven of peace: the sun inundated us with its rays and its warmth, our faces were wafted with a light breeze, and everyone attending experienced the course as a memorable one. Sensei's comment made to several students attending was, "Training outside is a good idea, that's nice!"

However not actually having yet officially opened the dojo in which the day-to-day training took place, Sensei later returned to the Ren Shih Kan dojo, this time to the actual inside dojo. The class that he gave that day is engraved in my memory. I was swallowing his words whole as he spoke, while simultaneously translating them into French for the students. There are four major educational pillars in Aikido. *Kata dori tenkan* illustrates the principles of unity and connection, the idea of *musubi*. *Kata dori Shihonage* underlies the study of body co-ordination, in particular between the legs and the arms —since at its best it involves 'opening up' your training partner — involving as it does a change of direction. *Shomenuchi ikkyo* reflects the study of the whole Aikido system and in particular the *omote/ura* aspects of techniques. Finally *shomenuchi irimi* allows you to study timing, the moment when you should



*Sensei and me as uke with bokken, for the first class he gave in my dojo*



*Sugano Sensei and Christophe in 2008,  
JAPAN, IAF Congress*



*Jikou Sugano Sensei in 2011, in  
REN SHIN KAN, for the first class of the season*



#### **Pictures supplied by Christophe Depaus**

*...I started aikido in 1985 at the age of 11. I receive all my aikikai dan by Sugano Sensei (1992: shodan;...; 2005: yondan; 2011: godan still registered under Sugano Sensei's name because he signed personally the recommendation in 2010). Together with the two Michaël, I receive the "certified teacher hands & weapons" from Sugano Sensei in 2008.*

perform the technique. To say that these educational pillars are crucial doesn't mean that the other techniques are not important. The study of these other techniques allows you to focus on other detailed aspects of training. Thus *Nikkyo* and *kaiten-nage* are examples of these more minor techniques.

For some years before this I had been following Sensei on all his travels around Europe; around Belgium, of course and in the Netherlands, without having ever missed a course, but also in Spain, in Sweden, in Portugal, in France etc. I also went to the New York Aiki Kai to see him, and I went to Japan during the IAF Congresses so as to spend some time there with him and to attend his classes. Everywhere he went, I felt at home, and every dojo seemed to make me welcome. But I must confess that my being able to welcome Sugano Sensei to the Ren Shin Kan dojo involved something even more precious and inexplicable. Perhaps this was because this involved me being given the opportunity to create a space which could hold the instruction that Sensei had given to me. I was no longer content with just "following": I had created the right atmosphere for a space that would generate enormous good-will between all the students.

It was in November 2009 that Sensei gave his last class in my dojo, four months before he gave the last course he ever gave, a joint seminar with Christian Tisser Shihan in March 2010, also in Belgium.

A year after Sensei's passing; I had the signal honour of opening the New Year of training in the dojo with his son Jikou Sugano Sensei. Although scheduled at very short notice, this class turned out to be a big success. We really experienced some magic that day! This class involved not only paying homage to Sensei but also welcoming his son - already known to me as an aikido practitioner, but now also revealed to me as a teacher. Beyond the quality of his very presence, even if it had familiar echoes, Jikou Sensei was quickly able to establish his own credentials by virtue of his own personal qualities, quite apart from issues of heredity. Of course there couldn't be any doubt regarding his obvious heritage, taking into account such things as his vocal qualities, his good-will, his inherent power (which some refer to as his real genetic inheritance), but what brought it home most was the way in which he too embodies the constantly curious and open student, always hungry for more knowledge.

While still saddened by his absence, I can't help constantly marvelling at the way in which Sugano Sensei's Aikido has penetrated our hearts and left us with sufficient nourishment to still sustain us, in as much as so many of us around the world still take inspiration from his teachings — as can be seen in the teaching of the many exceptional masters who have visited us. I don't believe that there is any fixed form of transmission involved, but rather that there is an underlying drive, one that tells us to never stop.

We have all heard Sensei say "Don't stop here!"

This injunction should still resonate in our hearts today, and indeed today more than ever before.

## AIKIDO: A TOOL FOR SENSIBLE LIVING AND HEALING IN A VIOLENT WORLD

by Paul de Beer, 5th Dan



Pretoria, South Africa

2012-07-23

I feel honoured to be connected to your Federation through my friendship with Tony Smibert Shihan and George Lo Sensei. Smibert sensei kindly asked me to share some of my thoughts on this forum and it is my pleasure to do so as an extended member of the International Aikido family.

I became the unfortunate victim of a violent armed attack which happened in front of my house in Menlo Park, Pretoria earlier this year. The incident forced me to do a lot of questioning and introspection.

The criminals started their senseless killing spree a few blocks away from my house. It was late January 2012. They first shot and permanently maimed a neighbour, then fled the scene and came past my house as I returned home from Aikido practice that evening. As I was getting out of my car in the dark I was struck over the head, knocked unconscious and summarily shot. My forehead was smashed, my left ring finger broken and the humerus of my upper right arm shattered. After four operations I am recovering well and hope to be back on the tatami in another six months! Unfortunately the mental scars and general anxiety this left on my family and community is not so easily healed.

By practicing a martial art we are expected to learn how to defend ourselves and by studying a Budo this notion and expectancy is raised to an even further level -- that of also defending our family and the broader community. The ultimate defence is therefore, arguably, to safeguard the perseverance of our race. To do this in a sustainable manner we obviously need to align ourselves closely with the universal laws of nature, live in harmony with one another and care after the environment. To promote Aikido as a way of harmony, we as practitioners each have a personal obligation to set an example for peaceful, happy and level-headed living.

I realised after the attack how blessed I am to be alive and to still have the basic functions of my arm and hand intact. I also regard the fact that I do not bear unnecessary grudges and do not suffer from fear or panic attacks after the incident as a wonderful gift. I would like to think that this can be partly attributed to my Aikido training and Budo-mentality?

Judging by the point of entry and trail the bullet left on my clothing, it is evident that Aikido saved my life that evening. The outcome was totally different from what we normally see in the movies, though: I was in an unconscious state and unable to overpower my attackers. However, because of my training, I subconsciously moved out of the line of fire (irimi style) and miraculously sidestepped a bullet that was intended for my heart. Unfortunately it was not the perfect technique and the bullet still managed to smash my trailing arm!

*This emphasises that we should never underestimate the importance of good basics, the aikido methods of engagement and proper ma-ai.....*

On a deeper level and after experiencing some life-changing encounters in hospital, the brilliance of O'Sensei's philosophy again shone through to me: I realised that to bring about meaningful and lasting change in South Africa and to counter the disrespect, misconceptions and hatred that are currently sparking high levels of brutality and murder, these delusions have to be rooted out at its origin.

To match aggression with counter aggression is of no avail and to fence ourselves in is also not a permanent solution. The stream must be cleaned at the source and in this case it involves all the parties!

We need to become sincere and compassionate before we can gain any insight to make peace with, amongst others, the cultural differences that trouble human relations. In hospital I experienced how the motherly care of the nursing staff rubbed off and could miraculously bridge cultures and heal wounds. This made me realize that the spirit of loving kindness and loving compassion that we talk about in aikido is best explained by motherly care and the love for our children! It is this vital component that brings motivation and understanding to our work. It also brings deeper meaning when we share things with one another. It works through our deeds and through our techniques in the same way as the oxygen that feeds our blood!

Even though the church, schools and State /i.e. politicians are the custodians of a country's social health, we as individuals also have an obligation and equal influence to make a difference. As practitioners of Aikido we must develop the practice of harmony and respect in the dojo, then share it with our families and spread this emotion and compassion for God's creation in our daily encounters.....

In the words of O'Sensei:

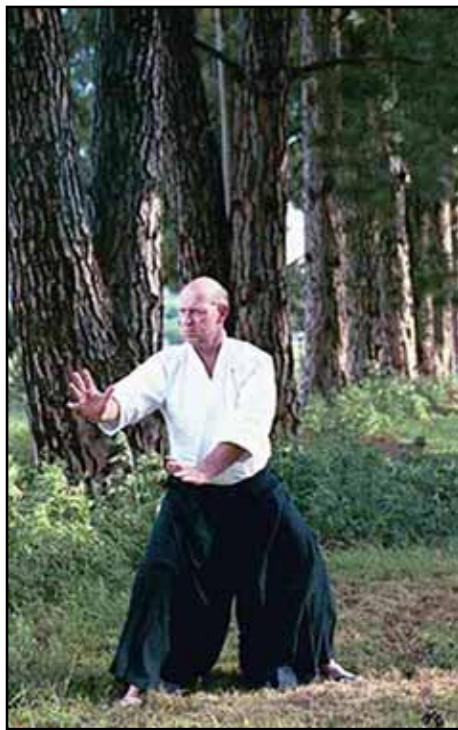
*"True budo is a work of love. It is a work of giving life to all beings, and not killing or struggling with each other. Love is the guardian deity of everything. Nothing can exist without it. Aikido is the realisation of love." and "It is not for correcting others; it is for correcting your own mind."*

**Paul de Beer (5<sup>th</sup> Dan)**

Chief instructor of the Aikido Federation of South Africa



*Paul de Beer in hospital  
and below how he will look when he  
recovers.*



*This article arose out of an email I received from an Aikido friend in South Africa - someone I know from the International Aikido Federation and very much admire - Paul de Beer. Paul wrote of a terrible experience he'd been through related to Aikido and how it has impacted on his life perspective. When I asked him, he then kindly agreed to write this short article.*

*I think it speaks for itself.*

*Tony Smibert*

*At the recent IAF Congress I trained with one of the most remarkable achievers I have ever encountered in Aikido: Jonathan Griffioen from the Netherlands. His focus and effort in training while coping with the severest effects of a disabling disease greatly impressed me. Where Aikido always requires co-ordination of mind and body, it seemed to me that Jonathan's achievement had to be at least ten times more than mine – and he was having just as much fun as I was – so I asked him to please write about the role Aikido plays in his life.*

*Tony Smibert*

## Fear of losing one's mobility

Aikido for me has been a struggle from the beginning. I was 28 years old and just quit my job because of my condition. Three years before doctors told me I had Parkinson disease and it was progressing quite rapidly, I could do nothing and await my 'fate' in fear, or do what is a lot harder, make the best with what I could do.

I got the tip from a friend in a bar, and on a Wednesday afternoon I attended an Aikido session with Niek Sensei at the Heinzestraat. Niek took an open approach to my condition and let me join in. Instead of avoiding me, people patiently gave me space to practice. In the first year, I came to know a little about Aikido, it offered me a way to exercise doing something that I liked and it seemed I did learn new movements even as the Parkinson progressed. I met Pieter, a blind aikidoka who also practiced in our dojo. His handicap was of course different to mine and it surprised me how well he performed with his limitations. Pieter accepted to be my Uke on my 6th kyu exam and I, or should I say we, passed just like anyone else. I met more people who train with different kind of limitations not always as clear to the outside, some of those people made me realize it takes a lot of hard work to get somewhere in my situation but if I showed I put effort in my Aikido others would help out. In the following years my condition worsened but Aikido gave me a better sense of my limits and possibilities, made me more sure of myself, so I continued to practice whenever I could.

When I heard of the IAF congress I saw a great challenge to train with a wide range of people from different places around the world at Seminars from some of the most interesting teachers available, and that in a place at the other side of the world, located from the Netherlands. It posed some interesting obstacles. Renee came with me and covered the 'care' part. He's really a great guy, brought me from place to place and took care of almost everything. Communication was the biggest challenge, not everyone spoke English and Parkinson's shows, but luckily I already knew some people on the mat and after a while more and more people felt confident to train with me. On the second day this wasn't an issue anymore. I had a great time, met a lot of new people, learned a lot and my encounter with Tony I will remember for a long while.

Aikido was no miracle cure, it didn't heal me and I don't know if it delayed the progression of my condition but the awareness of your own body and knowledge of what it can do has proven to be one of the greatest assets in dealing with Parkinson's. That said Aikido has become important to me, so have the people at the dojo that take the time and patience for me to train, and my friend and mentor August Dragt who also did a great deal for me outside of the dojo.

**Jonathan A. Griffioen**  
**The Netherlands**

*Editor's note: As a result of Jonathan's participation in the IAF Seminar, Doshu heard of his achievements and awarded him shodan.*

## TTCs and Special Training Events in Queensland

Report and photography by John Litchen 4th Dan



*Mudgeeraba  
TTC June 2012  
with  
John Rockstrom  
Sensei, 6th Dan  
Shidoin*

Despite miserable wet and windy weather, (for days on end), quite a few people turned up for this event.

We began on Friday night (1<sup>st</sup> June) with an intensely interesting session that covered basic structure and correct movement which leads into a proper finish of a given technique. Rockstrom Sensei was very particular about correct hanmi, Nage having proper body position in relation to the Uke and moving in such a way as to maintain extension and control over Uke. There was no need to rush things as this tended to cover up mistakes, so the emphasis was on careful and slow movement so Nage could see the effect the proper position had on Uke, and Uke could feel what was happening as control is lost. The emphasis was also on Uke receiving properly and moving with the technique to minimise its final effect. It was a most interesting session attended by people from Warwick and Toowoomba, Gold Coast and Samford, with many new students from all four dojos experiencing a TTC for the first time.

Saturday (2<sup>nd</sup> June) began with the usual morning class at 8am. Although this wasn't a part of the TTC the numbers were excellent with many of those visiting for the TTC attending this class, including our guest instructor John Rockstrom Sensei. This gave many of the beginners an opportunity to practice with Rockstrom Sensei as a partner, He would, of course, be the instructor for the rest of the day from 10-30 onwards. Throughout the day the students also had the opportunity to practice with Graham Morris Sensei 6<sup>th</sup> Dan, the Queensland Area Representative, since he attended every TTC session as well. This was a wonderful chance for the newer students to actually practice with a couple of very senior instructors on a more personal level.

The first class in the afternoon was an introduction to training with a bokken where etiquette and proper handling of the bokken was explained, (along with some history regarding the origin of the sword style practiced by O Sensei). After a number of basic exercises, the forms Ichi no ken, Ni no ken and San no ken were practiced in detail.

The emphasis was on both participants shadowing each other's movement, of being in harmony with each other, of maintaining proper maai at all times, and of being able to





enter without fear of the striking sword doing any damage. I think for many of us who have been studying the bokken forms, this session opened up new aspects to be considered over time which will no doubt improve our performance as well as lead to much discussion and analysis among the senior students.

A number of people were expecting to test for various Kyu grades after the TTC sessions were finished so the last class focussed on some techniques to be asked at gradings, during which Koshinage was introduced to some people for the first time. Rockstrom Sensei's emphasis was for us to roll out of Koshinage but many of us found this very difficult and preferred to take a breakfall. It has always been the custom in Queensland to breakfall out of Koshinage rather than roll, and personally I feel the break fall is much safer especially since Nage also assists by holding Uke up to lessen the impact on the mat. I have injured my shoulder attempting to roll out of Koshinage and after many attempts each one leading to some minor injury I switched to taking a breakfall out of this throw and have not been injured since. But then students will find their own preferred way of receiving Koshinage, after which they are less likely to injure themselves.

When the three TTC sessions were finished there was a short break. But before anyone had a chance to cool down the grading panel was convened and those testing for 5<sup>th</sup> kyu were called up first. They were then followed by a 3<sup>rd</sup> kyu test, a 2<sup>nd</sup> and a 1<sup>st</sup> kyu test. For the students, most of whom had attended the first 8am class and the three sessions of TTC training, it was a very long day. Yet they surprised everyone including the panel with their excellent spirit and enthusiasm for the tests they were undertaking. It was 6-30 pm when certificates were presented it was all over and the mats had to be put away. A very long day indeed! And it was still raining outside.

Quite a lot of the newer students commented afterwards that the classes they had attended were the best they have been to so far in their training experience.

Thanks to John Rockstrom Sensei who spent a lot of time '*hands on*' with everyone, it was a TTC weekend that will be remembered for a long time.



**CAIRNS – Images from the official Dojo opening**  
with Graham Morris Sensei 6th Dan Shidoin.



As can be seen from the photos, quite a spirited opening was held, with Morris Sensei taking the students through a series of exercises and techniques from basic to more advanced weapons applications. The idea was to give the few but very enthusiastic students an overview of what they would be studying during the time they would be kyu grades. The pleasure and satisfaction gained can be seen on their faces in the group shot above...

**Bursary holders...**

*...see their reports pages 20 and 23...*

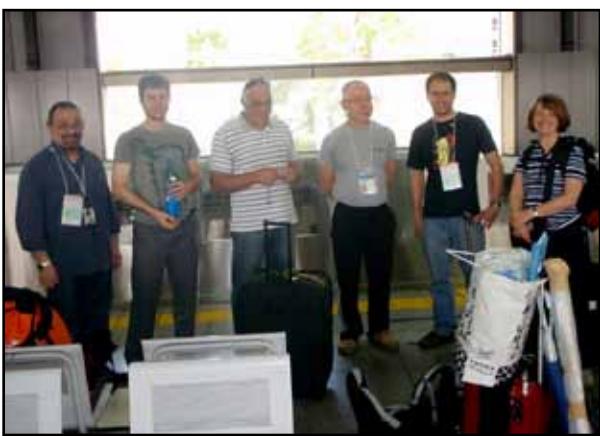
Sugano Sensei's Aikido Foundation initiated these bursaries in order to support those senior kyu holders who represent the future of Aiki Kai Australia. By substantially assisting these bursary holders to attend our National Schools, the Foundation is looking to not only give the recipients the opportunity to work on their technical skills, but to deepen their appreciation of the function and importance of national schools, in part through direct contact with our most senior teachers and through the fellowship to be experienced there both on and off the mat. So the Foundation asked the Area Representatives to nominate senior kyu grades who had not only demonstrated commitment to training, but who had made significant ongoing contributions to the running of their local dojo or their state.

In the case of Irena Krol from Victoria, she does everything she can to support her husband Rodrigo Castellanos, who teaches at the Warrandyte dojo, and together Irena and Rodrigo do everything they can to support the Victorian state organisation, with regular visits from senior instructors and with participation in all state events. We were fortunate to see the results of Irena's hard work both before and at the school - with a very special shodan grading, for which she received many congratulations.

In the case of Travers Hughes from Queensland, a keen student whose attendance at training and special events is exemplary, he also donates his financial expertise for the benefit of Aiki Kai Queensland to smoothly run its accounts and its financial affairs, as well as acting as Registrar. Having seen his training at the School, we are looking forward to seeing the results of Travers hard work when he does his shodan test soon.

Andrew Dziedzic, National Area representative.

Some of the tour group about to board the Shinkansen (bullet train) to Kyoto.



## The International Aikido Congress: Tokyo, 18 - 22 September 2012.

Report by Andrew Dziedzic  
National Area representative.

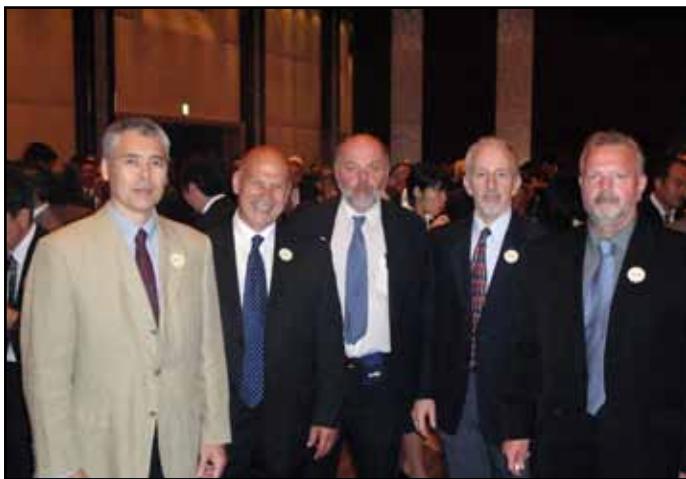
official languages (English, Japanese & French) but some important issues were dealt with including Aikido's participation as a demonstration sport at the next SportAccord Combat Games in St Petersburg next November, the acceptance of new members to the IAF, as well as agreement on the venue of the next IAF Congress to be in Tokyo in another 4 years time.

A number of Australians also attended the training sessions at the Congress in often steamy and crowded conditions on 1200 mats in the Yoyogi Olympic Memorial Youth Centre, with classes by a rarely seen combination of the top Shihan from around the world, including Waka Sensei (Doshu's son), Asai, Yamada, Isoyama and Tada Senseis, as well as our own Tony Smibert Sensei. There was barely room to move on the mat for Doshu's concluding class on Saturday afternoon.

The official proceedings were topped off by our attendance at the official celebration of the 70th anniversary of the founding of Hombu Dojo and the 60th anniversary of the Aiki Kai Foundation, and we were honoured to accept our invitation to this celebration held at the Keio Plazas Hotel in Shinjuku. It was of course attended by thousands of the most senior Aikidoka from all over the world and from all over Japan.

A small but keen group also attended as part of the Aiki Kai Australia tour of Japan and visited Kyoto, Himeji Castle, Nara and Mount Koya over the week following the Congress in Tokyo. Mount Koya was particularly memorable, with a stay in a very old and beautiful Rinzai Buddhist monastery; a real highlight. So if you have the opportunity in four years time, why not consider a trip to the next Congress in 2016?

*(Editor's note: Andrew Dziedzic Sensei was asked to present a short demonstration — required by Australia— which was watched by hundreds of Aikidoka, including the world's top Shihan, streamed live on the internet. This can be found on [youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com) under the title "Embukai at XI IAF Congress" at 19 minutes 40 seconds into the film. I assume it would have been a rather nerve wracking experience...)*



Jikou Sugano Sensei, Hanan Janiv Shihan, Andrew Dziedzic Sensei, Tony Smibert Shihan, Robert Botterill Shihan.



Janiv Shihan, Dziedzic Sensei, Botterill Shihan.

## Warwick and Samford TTC training...



*above:*  
Sankyo  
Omote

*Right:*  
Iriminage

*below:*  
Kokyun-  
age



As usual, the training in Warwick on the 14th and 15th of April was very relaxed and harmonious with John Watson Sensei taking us through the fundamental aspects of the principle techniques listed on the syllabus. Ikkyo, Nikyo, Sankyo, Iriminage, Kotegaeshi, Kokyunage, Shihonage and some variations on those. We also looked at aspects of those applications while using a Jo as well as a Bokken. A brief report on this event appeared in the last newsletter.

*Photos on these two pages: John Litchen.*





**Samford in December 2011**

Robert Botterill Shihan took this TTC in Samford in December 2011, which was Aiki Kai Queensland's first TTC for the current financial year. Although the focus was of course on technical details relating to fundamental applications we also examined



some more advanced methods of getting back to those fundamental techniques and applications... shown here is Ushiro Riotedori Ikkyo Omote. The finish is not shown since we all know the katame waza (Ude Osae) that is applied.



Samford , October 2012

**Shikko practice as part of warming up and body preparation**



A TTC course taken by Graham Morris Sensei, 6th Dan, at Samford on the 13th and 14th of October concluded the series of major events for the year in Queensland. This course covered basic Tai Sabaki and Shikko, followed by a variety of fundamental techniques expected for grading tests as well as some interesting kaeshiwaza from incorrectly applied technique during the morning sessions, while the afternoon session, after we all had a delightful lunch at the local pub, focussed on Bokken and Jo. There was some weapon taking and kokyunage, practicing the suburi required for Shodan and above, as well as the 7step Jo form and the first two Bokken forms, Ichi no ken and Ni no ken.

The training was relaxed yet focussed, and there was from time to time soft laughter or at least a few chuckles as Morris Sensei demonstrated some dynamic applications during weapons practice.

Immediately finishing the morning sessions we took a five minute break while we waited to see how many members of the public turned up to watch the advertised demonstration that Morris Sensei was about to do. There were about a dozen people and Darren introduced Morris Sensei and explained what he was going to do. Using at first one Uke, and then later two Ukes Morris Sensei gave a delightful demonstration which lasted about 20 minutes, after which Darren invited anyone amongst those who were watching to come onto the mat and try some basic applications. There were two who accepted and they joined the class for a few minutes. After that we finished with the usual bowing and acknowledgements.

Sunday morning was the usual preparatory class before kyu grading tests were taken for several students. All of them did well and are to be congratulated for their achievements to date.



*entering for shomen uchi ikkyo*



*moving tai no benka*



*nikyo applied to two people*



*Kotegaeshi application against two men attacking with bokken.*  
First step is to enter and control one to use as a shield against the other...  
Then as soon as the other decides he can get around the shield to attack,  
Sensei abandons the first attacker to deal with the second before the first can  
get back up.



*Kokyunage bokken and Jo ... Kotegaeshi*



*Photographs on pages 10, 11, 14,  
15, 16, 17, by John Litchen.*

## OPENING OF TENCHI FARM DOJO, TASMANIA

by Brian Ericksen

## Aikido Spring Training in Tasmania by Kaye Jenkins Area Representative — Tasmania

Martin and Bodhi Bratzel recently opened their new Tasmanian dojo "Tenchi Dojo" beneath the escarpment of the Great Western Tiers in Northern Tasmania. The first training, to coincide with the regular *Hanami Geiko* course was conducted there by Smibert and Botterill Shihans and attended by around 35 people. The following thoughts on the occasion were submitted by Kaye Jenkins Sensei and Brian Ericksen a former NY uchideshi and student of Sugano Sensei and Yamada Sensei.

### Reflections on Tenchi Dojo Opening.

*"There is nothing in Aikido technique that says anything about Aikido philosophy."*

Sugano Sensei told me this when I asked on how we are to understand the philosophy of Aikido from the practice. My memory is that he explained that Ikkyo is just Ikkyo and iriminage simply that. The technique says nothing about harmony, loving action or the any other Aikido philosophy. Technique is just technique.

Sensei said that O Sensei's philosophy grew out of his religious practice. If a person is to manifest the philosophy of Aikido it cannot be through merely physical practice but must come through daily living. If Aiki philosophy is to be loving one must act with love. If one wants to practice harmony then one must be harmonious with others in daily life. The Bible says, "By their fruit shall they be known." So too with Aikido. Only through deliberate daily action can Aikido's philosophical ideals be manifested in one's practice. I thought on Sensei's words at the opening of Martin and Bodhi's dojo. The dojo and the farm seem a perfect example of what Sensei talked about. To make our Aikido real it takes action in the world. Aikido is made in forward, positive action. Only when we have acted with Aiki principles in life can we truly exhibit those values through our practice.

This is exactly what Martin and Bodhi have done. They have manifested a place where harmony, love, good will and spiritual growth may be made. They are living true Aikido as true Aikido begins where the mat ends. Seeing their dojo was an inspiration reminding me of the need for concrete action to manifest Aikido in my life. I hope this dojo continues to inspire others as well. Domo arigato to Bodhi and Martin for their inspiration.



About 35 people have just had what I feel must have been one of the best experiences of their lives, having just been a part of the Aikido Spring Training in Tasmania. Tony Smibert Shihan and Robert Botterill Shihan led three days of excellent dojo training. We were also so fortunate that we could welcome in the new Tenchi Farm Dojo at Meander, a creation of Bodhi and Martin - 25 years in the dreaming and now a stunning reality – so much of a reality it has already become an entity itself. And now here I sit, in the still quiet of the dojo, after the event. Still drinking in the sensations.

It's really good for the soul.

*Space, light*

*Focus*

*Attentiveness*

*Quality*

*Clean lines*

*Swish*

*Hearty soup*

*Great company*

*Quiet*

*Blending*

*Unity of movement*

*Big Grandfather tree*

*Forest*

*Birdsong*

*Good memories linger*

A big thank you to Tony Sensei & Robert Senseis for such inspirational training. And a big thanks you to Bodhi and Martin for creating such an inspirational place. More events will be held in this space and I highly recommend a visit. Keep your eye on the state and national websites for future events and come on down and join us.



*Tenchi Farm Dojo photos on pages 18, 19 and back cover taken by Nicholas Blackburn.*

*Editor: This year the Technical & Teaching Committee asked instructors to focus on kihon waza (basic techniques) – so I asked Tony Smibert Shihan to write a few words about his perspective on the importance of kihon waza. This article is the interesting result.*

## The Importance of Kihon Waza

by Tony Smibert Shihan



*Kihon waza* (basic techniques) provide not only the foundation of Aikido, but also the columns that go straight up through ‘the building’. They hold the whole thing together and are just as important at every level. That’s why they are so important to study.

Actually, we don’t study Aikido in order to learn Aikido, we learn Aikido in order to be in a position to study it.

It’s all in the way you think about it. Aikido is a lifelong study, and our notion of what it is will change as we mature. One of the most important aspects is that it’s not fixed or defined. Each person comes to a different idea of what Aikido is as a result of their own study; and the basis of this study rests on our experience of training in the most basic waza including: irimi nage, shiho nage and ikkyo. They provide the core of our regular daily training and the foundation for all the other basic waza – including kaiten nage, tenchi nage, kote gaeshi, nikkyo, sankyo, yonko and gokyo. Training in them provides the structure for numberless other waza including the variations of the basics; and so we have a whole system.

Without a strong foundation it’s very hard to construct a *tall* building. Because the Aikido foundation is based on kihon waza and actually extends upward *into* it, each and every level depends upon the fact that we will maintain our understanding and training in the basics. A large building also requires a *solid* foundation, so this explains why the great teachers of the past made such a big deal of fundamentals, and particularly the importance of exercises such as morote tori kokyu ho, suwari waza kokyu ho, remaining centred and low, moving with a stable koshi (centre) and so on.

I remember as a teenager, thinking how great it would be to master such techniques and be able to rely on them to seamlessly occur whenever I needed them. It seemed to me that Sugano Sensei had that ability so I saw it as a

reasonable goal. Now, after so many years of training I’ve observed that nothing happens seamlessly or automatically. It takes effort to do everything; and Aikido still challenges me to bring mind and body together every time. An outstanding example of this was Sensei’s own life where, at the top of his game, he suddenly endured a radical change to his physical condition – he called it a ‘big challenge’ – requiring even *more* effort to bring mind and body together. And he succeeded magnificently, so that I may have learned more from him about this part of Aikido in the last years than ever before.

The thing about *kihon waza* is that it’s very easy to forget how important they are, especially if you’ve been training for a long time. Back in the 60’s and 70’s Sugano Sensei ensured we had a strong physical foundation through basics training. Remembering that this is still vital to Aikido’s structure seems to be one of the most important challenges that *we* now face.

Today, with the rapid growth of Aikido and the evolution of the art itself it would be easy to focus on the beautifully free and flowing movements, or the neat and nifty ones – or even the fascination of training in sword and jo. But the danger there lies in losing the things that actually make Aikido such a powerful and creative learning experience for every individual so that, like children at school, we each have to learn for ourselves. And it’s never been more important than it is right now to maintain awareness and practice of the grading syllabus - not simply to tick off the various levels as ‘learned’ or ‘passed’ but as the foundation and structure for continued study through life.

The so called higher levels of Aikido are very like ‘walking to Alice Springs’: if you keep going long enough you’ll end up there eventually – unless, of course, you get lost on the way! Sugano Sensei always found ways to counsel against becoming too excited about achieving higher ranks (by saying things like “another year, another grade”) and always found ways to bang you on the head if it started to swell. Yet, in other contexts he could also remind us of the value of the grades we held, if we sought to downplay them. After all, to undervalue a grade that Sensei had awarded was unthinkable. And so we’ve ended up with a lot of us with high grades all of whom seem to have ‘walked to Alice Springs together’ but are still mindful that this is merely a product of years of training.

Which brings us back to those first years in training: when kihon waza are deeply imprinted into us as both a system and an experience. That’s when the foundation for a lifetime is laid so that, by continuing to work with kihon waza in the years to come, we can discover how they introduce us to the ‘advanced’ techniques and lead us towards the heart of Aikido.



## Impressions of Aikikai Australia Winter School (01-07 July 2012)

by Travers Hughes (Ikkyu)



I was fortunate to be able to attend this year's Winter School, held at Narrabeen thanks to a grant from the Aikido Foundation. It was my second National School (the first being on the Gold Coast for Winter School 2010 at 3<sup>rd</sup> kyu). Two years on with my training and now at 1<sup>st</sup> kyu, I was able to look at aikido and the school from a different perspective – although still very much a beginner in aikido, I am beginning to gain a small amount of familiarity with the art, and confidence is building slightly. Of course, there is still so much for to learn and be exposed to – I am just beginning to question myself and search for new information more, rather than only rely on information from others.

I had a truly wonderful time, consisting of a myriad of new experiences and the changing dynamics of different and new training partners forcing me to constantly re-evaluate and critically consider my movements, actions and reactions that can easily become rote when training with familiar partners.

Rather than itemise each class and run the risk of omission, I can honestly say that each and every session held new opportunities for me. Particular memories than remain the strongest are both throwing and taking ukemi for Robert Botterill Shihan on several occasions, group sword exercises with Andrew Dzeidzic Sensei, feeling the kokyu of David Brown Sensei and his accompanying explanation that I (almost) feel like I am beginning to understand, and the time taken by so many experienced aikidoka who enthusiastically guided me, genuinely interested in my improvement.

With such an all-embracing activity as aikido, there are a multitude of reasons for studying this art, and a number of differing approaches to studying. Depending on one's personality, they may choose to initially focus on the physical

aspects (the martial applications of the techniques), or the spiritual (the manifestation of ki). One of the many advantages in attending a national school is in meeting and having exposure to aikidoka with different backgrounds, foci, and experiences from which to draw from and challenge one's perceptions and impressions.

As a first kyu with a background in combat sports (judo and kendo), I am still predominantly focussed on merely getting the body mechanics in place, and in understanding the distance and timing aspects (the physical aspects). Of course, while I am still relatively young, I want to test my physicality, and as a consequence, sometimes the subtlety and flow of technique is lost on me. I was extremely fortunate to train with such a number of experienced aikidoka who are investigating areas I am yet to consider (let alone understand), and for them to share their experiences with me was truly appreciated.

I feel that ability to be on the mat for 5 hours a day has given me the opportunity to condense and consolidate what I have learnt during the school. For example, initially I was concentrating on the waza itself in isolation (in essence only transacting with my aite), whereas throughout the week I was able to become more receptive (beginning to interact with aite).

I'd like to thank Aikikai Australia for putting on the school and creating the environment of sharing and shared learning. I'll definitely be continuing my aikido training and attending future schools – not only for grading purposes, but in an effort to broaden horizons and become a more complete aikidoka. Who knows – one day I may even be able to inspire new practitioners to push themselves further as I have been inspired to do.



Travers training at Mudgeeraba as Uke and as Nage. Partner is Ray Harris.



Photos from Winter school by Youz Iqbal





*Winter school 2012 grading results*  
**Shodan:**

Gerry D'Agostino (Vic)  
Michael Henderson (NSW)

Frank Kimble (Tas)  
Irena Krol (Vic)

**Nidan:**

George Osvald (NSW)  
Greg Tonowicz (NSW)

**Sandan:**

Marion Artis (Tas)  
Felicity Peters (NSW)

**Yondan:**

Matthew Lo (NSW)



*Photos by Youz Igbal*

## Winter School 2012

by Irena Kroll, Shodan.

This year will remain with me as one of my most memorable to date. Up there with my marriage and the birth of my daughter, achieving my shodan at this year's Winter School has been a deeply fulfilling experience and landmark of personal accomplishment. After 10 years since my first taste of Aikido in 2002 in a tiny country dojo in Queensland it has been quite a journey maintaining my training through the many changes that life can bring including changing addresses across states and countries, pregnancy and mothering. Although shodan is like having just learned the alphabet as opposed to writing poetry, for me it was a very significant milestone after many years of training with a real initiatory quality to it.

The experience of finally doing my shodan at Winter School was sweetened for me by the support I received from my Aikido community. I was very fortunate to receive the bursary scholarship from the Aikido Foundation and Aiki Kai Australia as well as a travel assistance grant from Aiki Kai Victoria, both of which covered the costs of accommodation, training fees, and travel.

When I heard about receiving the scholarship it was a great surprise and I was very grateful to be chosen. Not only did the bursary make my attendance to the School possible, it increased my incentive to study my aikido and prepare for my grading with greater diligence. My experience of training towards my shodan took on a new dimension as I felt the support and acknowledgement of the organization behind me.

This national school was satisfying for me on many levels. When Andrew Dziedzic Sensei opened the school he reminded us that the duel focus for

Winter School as defined by Sugano Shihan was 'fellowship' and 'study'. The intimate nature of Winter school with the majority of participants from the most senior to the most junior staying at the accommodation allowed me to get to know many interstate students who had previously just been familiar faces or some one I had practiced with fleetingly at summer school. I find it a constant source of pleasure and fascination observing how Aikido draws people from so many different walks of life. It creates such an eclectic and interesting Aikido family as we get to know each other over the years of training, and the live-in arrangements at national schools allow these relationships to deepen.

Living in at the school also allowed me an immersion in my practice that I hadn't had the opportunity to experience before without the distraction of coming home and going back again. Because of the nature of Winter School, it was much easier to approach and train with the most senior students and teachers while also watching each sensei's teaching from greater proximity. This made it a particularly good environment to study and I felt that at this school I began to get a sense of what it means to begin to study the techniques as opposed to just trying to learn them.

I wish to thank Aikikai Victoria and Aikikai Australia for the bursary that allowed me the opportunity to attend Winter School as well as the encouragement that I have received in my training throughout my years of being a member. I encourage those who haven't attended a National School to go if you can as it offers its own unique opportunities for training and sense of community within a personal Aikido practice.





## Aikido in Australia

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