

Aikido in Australia

Aiki Kai Australia National Newsletter
Volume 5 Number 2



*Next Generation Summer School
Special guest Dojo Cho Ueshiba Mitsuteru
Melbourne January 2017*

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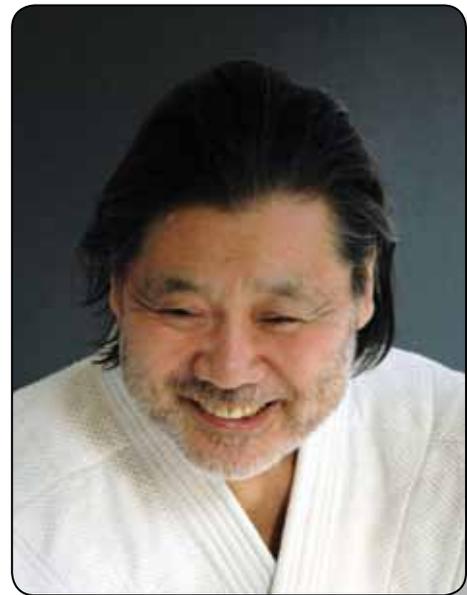
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NEW EQUAL OPPORTUNITY POLICY

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.



Summer School 2017 Dan Gradings

Shodan

Lindsay French	ACT
Mark McLaughlin	NT
Lam Nguyen	QLD

Nidan

Charles Addison	Vic
Julie Boydell	Vic
John Claxton	Vic
Gerry Dagostino	Vic
Irena Krol	Vic
Fumiko Noguchi	Vic
Wilson	Vic

Sandan

Adrienne Cleaver-Leong	Vic
Patrick Connor	NSW
Anna Magetts	Vic

Yondan

Colin Saville	Vic / Sweden.
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Kagami Biraki Promotions

Godan

Duncan Stevenson	ACT
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Rokudan

Guy Fripp	ACT
Ruth Treyde	ACT

Apologies for the lateness of this issue. We wanted to include material from the *NextGen Initiative* - trip to Japan. Editor.

**Front cover images : Jose Sicurella
Other summer school images by Wyman Young,
Dianna Hope and Marc MacLaughlin.**

Summer School with Dojo Cho Ueshiba Mitsuteru report by Andrew Dziedzic

Our invitation to Dojo Cho Mitsuteru Ueshiba to attend our 2017 Summer School was intimately linked to our NextGen initiative (see the article directly below). However such an invitation was of course always going to be made by us to have the future Doshu to attend and teach at one of our national Summer Schools. (You can see photos from that school spread through-out this issue.)

Ueshiba Sensei arrived half way through the school, but was able to get on the mat to teach on the same day as his arrival with his assistant, Sho Umetsu Sensei from Hombu Dojo – despite him being a little under the weather with a cold.

However no-one could have ever picked there was anything that might have been hampering him, as the grace, power and precision of his Aikido was instantly clear for everyone to see, from his first class to his last. This was an Aikido teaching style that relied on dynamic and clear demonstrations, rather than on any verbal explanations – and this was just what was needed for a school where the focus was on the next generations of Aikido practitioners. This in turn immediately stimulated a more energetic and focused style of practise on the mat for the whole school. What is more, all these personal qualities of Dojo Cho's Aikido were soon clear to everyone – through his adoption of the custom common in Hombu Dojo for the instructors to move around and to throw everyone in turn in that immediate area of the mat. In this way, many people got to experience Dojo Cho's Aikido directly – and everyone who experienced this were given an instant personal demonstration of the authenticity of the Ueshiba family's Aikido legacy.

Our NextGen initiative is being generously supported by an annual donation from Philip Lee Shihan from Singapore, who also attended the School with his two sons; in addition, as well as by Takase Shihan who came from New Zealand and brought a group with him to take advantage of this Next Generation initiative.

We were also very grateful to have classes from both Takase Shihan and Philip Lee Shihan, as well as of course from Louis Van Thieghem Shihan – again giving us a wide variety of instruction supplementing the solid foundation of instruction from our own seniors, including our own Sugano Foundation Trustees, Shihans Smibert, Botterill and Janiv. Given the NextGen focus, other dynamic classes were taken by our own younger instructors from the NextGen category, and they were terrific.

Finally, at the celebratory dinner at the end of the School, there was a real spirit of relaxed friendship and goodwill which permeated the whole evening. It was great to see that Dojo Cho felt relaxed enough to move around the room and to talk to everyone, even without the aid of an interpreter, and to share stories and jokes, and answer questions.

The day after the School, he then enjoyed being shown around the sites of Melbourne, which included a visit to Melbourne Zoo and a relaxed lunch at a bayside restaurant – and it was great to see that he obviously enjoyed this short break.

It was truly reassuring for us to see that the future of Aikido will be in good hands, exemplified with his direct, sincere and open style, both on and off the mat.

We look forward to inviting him back to Australia at the earliest possible opportunity.

Once again thanks to the splendid team in Melbourne for another wonderfully successful summer school. Thanking them brings to mind an idea that from now on we will have a section devoted to the often unsung heroes of the organization, who like the people on the Summer School team, make things possible for us, and are often well behind the scenes

(You can read a very interesting interview of Dojo Cho by Mike Clarke in the current issue of Blitz, available at many newsagents and I'd like to thank Mike Clarke for making this possible by coming across to Melbourne to conduct the interview.)

Congratulations to NextGen delegates NextGen Delegation to Hombu Dojo, Tokyo in April, 2017

Andrew Dziedzic - National Area Representative.

During the 50th anniversary school the Foundation developed an idea which would pro-actively help to continue the ongoing close relationship that Aiki Kai Australia has always enjoyed with Aikido World Headquarters in Japan. Loosely termed the '**Next Generation Initiative**', the proposal was enthusiastically taken up by the Doshu during the 50th Anniversary Summer School. The idea - which became a reality - was that if we could invite the Doshu's son, now Dojo Cho of Hombu Dojo, to come to Australia, he would meet the Australian Aikido community and particularly our younger population - which hopefully includes future generations of teachers and leaders.

Following that event with funding provided mainly by the Foundation, Aiki Kai Australia and relevant states to send a small group of 'younger' students to Tokyo to train for a week there, including attending Dojo Cho's class. As Tony Smibert Sensei describes it, "Training together at Hombu and making friends during the process was really important to many in our first generation. We want to encourage the same opportunities for others now, and hope this will contribute to the future."

Applicants were invited from all over Australia - with an ini-

tial group to be led by Jikou Sugano, representing the Foundation, Tristan Derham as the Aiki Kai Australia Vice President, and Felicity Peters, as the Group Organiser. Initial funding from the Foundation was augmented by a contribution from Aiki Kai Australia, the states and territories and then, very generously, by a further personal contribution from Phillip Lee Shihan of Aikido Shinju-Kai (Singapore).

Given so many fine applicants it wasn't possible to fund them all, and so it was terrific to see that the funded group was ultimately swelled by further trainees who went under their own steam and absolutely contributed to the success of the initiative – so I want to thank them as well.

It was with great excitement that we heard so many fantastic reports of how that group made the very most of this wonderful opportunity, while at the same time we remain fully aware of the fact that they were representatives of a much larger, talented group. The Trustees are grateful to the official delegates for this stage of the NextGen initiative:

In January 2017 the Trustees were pleased to announce the selection of the following delegates for this stage of the



Special guest Dojo Cho Ueshiba Mitsuteru



NextGen initiative:

Jikou Sugano, (Foundation representative)

Tristan Derham (AKA representative)

Felicity Peters (Group leader)

Bruce Roberts (WA)

Bernard Dowd (WA)

Monica Tschochner (WA)

Mark Mc Laughlin (NT)

Annalise Bennett (Tas)

Alex Rojas (Vic)

Alex Raytsin (Vic)

Josh Taaffe (Vic)



The Trustees of the Foundation thank all of those who have helped with or applied for its 2017 **NextGen** Tokyo Delegation, which is intended to assist and encourage the building of friendships and personal connections between Aikido students in Australia and Hombu Dojo. They hope this will help to underpin the formal relationship between Aiki Kai Australia and Hombu in the years to come and pave the way for future groups and individuals.

Selection for participants in the 2017 Tokyo Training Visit was made entirely at the discretion of the Trustees and they sincerely thank all those who applied. The standard of applicant was very high and although the Foundation did not have funds to support as many people as they would have liked this time around, the Foundation hopes to be in a position to continue this sort of initiative into the future.

In addition to the official delegates, three other Australians (Luke Derham (NSW), Sharon Stewart (SA) and Jessica Ngan (NSW)) also decided to attend Hombu for the same week under their own steam, and who significantly added to the impressive reputation of the Australian contingent.



The NextGen delegates in Japan

Jikou Sugano, Felicity Peters, and Tristan Derham

Aikikai Australia and the Sugano Foundation have recognised the need to plan for the future to insure continued support and cultivation of Aikido in Australia that began more than fifty years ago. NextGen initiatives are a way to support generational progression, to provide opportunities for a rising generation so Aikido in Australia may prosper into the future.

The concept of generational progression has been structured into Aiki Kai Headquarters in Tokyo ('Hombu') for some time. For example, a standard retirement age is set for senior instructors and after they reach this age they are expected to focus on their teaching outside of the main Tokyo dojo to allow younger teachers to come through. One of the important goals of the recent NextGen trip to Hombu was to grow and cultivate new connections with Hombu dojo as well as to strengthen our connection to Hombu and the Ueshiba family, a connection that has been built up over decades.

The recent delegation to Hombu was a great success. Fourteen Aiki Kai Australia students spent five full days training at the dojo as well as attending a celebratory dinner on the an-

niversary of O Sensei's death and a private dinner with Hombu Docho-cho, Mitsuteru Ueshiba. It was the week leading up to the Aiki Festival at Iwama, with spring sunshine and showers and even some late blooming cherry blossoms in Tokyo's parks. For many, it was the first time they'd been to Hombu dojo, indeed, the first time they'd been to Japan. Our expectations and spirits were high and we were not disappointed.

We trained at every class we could, which meant up to five one hour classes per day for the week. We kicked off the week with Doshu's 6:30am Monday class. Morning classes with Doshu and with Dojo-Cho were jam-packed with students from their teens to their eighties and there were barely two mats per pair to train on. Ukemi and waza were necessarily restrained and conservative, which made for physically and mentally draining classes: It took a lot of energy to avoid throwing or rolling into other people. As it turns out, getting up from vertical ukemi is much harder than rolling to your feet. The traditional tatami mats were much harder than we were used to training on in Australia, which took a toll on most during the week.

The level of focus was very high, with all students silent and lined up three or four minutes before any class began. The training effort was sustained for the whole hour by everyone, even if someone's physical capability meant they had to train slowly: few people took a rest and no one stopped to chat. Teachers tended to focus on basic waza: attacks were almost exclusively katate dori. Kokyu ho, ikkyo, shiho nage and irimi nage were practiced in almost every class. Explanations were rare and the demonstrations were very physical, despite the lack of space for the students to try it themselves.

Unfortunately, the policy at Hombu is that no photographs are allowed during training so we don't have evidence to bring home, but trust us - we were sweating! By day three, the daily five hours of training began to show and many were having afternoon sleeps to recharge. Washing gis and finding food and coffee were all we had time for during the day but we did manage to find some great places to gather together in the evenings: After one spectacular day of training with Dojo-Cho, Yasuno, Sakurai and Suzuki Senseis, we found an izakaya close to Hombu and proceeded to eat them out of rice and drink them out of beer!

One of the goals of the trip was to reaffirm our relationship with Hombu dojo. Not only with Doshu and Dojo-cho but also with those Hombu instructors who've visited Australia recently. During the week we trained with and caught up with Hino,

Suzuki, Uchida and Umetsu Senseis. On the Thursday night, Dojo-cho kindly took us out to dinner at his favourite Italian restaurant, along with Umetsu and Suzuki Senseis. With a lot of help from Felicity's translation skills and with a lot of laughter, he patiently addressed our questions about Aikido, Hombu, the places he's visited around the world for Aikido, movies, manga, religion and even his take on Japanese mythology

One of the highlights of the trip was the festival at the Aiki Shrine in Iwama. Held every year on the anniversary of the death of O'Sensei, the festival draws more than a thousand people to watch the dignified and captivating Shinto ceremony, to watch polished Aikido demonstrations by Doshu and Hombu Dojo-cho and to hear a speech by Doshu. Afterwards, sharing a picnic lunch sitting under trees on the old Iwama farm, eating bento and drinking sake in the spring sunshine with hundreds of Aikido students we were feeling privileged and grateful to have experienced something very special.

At the end of the day we gathered together in the grounds of the Iwama Dojo where we said our final farewells to Doshu and Dojo-cho. Despite it being a long day for both of them Doshu was cheerful and keen to know that everyone had had an enjoyable time, which we certainly had. Dojo Cho was in good spirits too, we said thank you and look forward to see you again, to which he added "Soon, *ne!*".



Monika Tschochner



For me, the 2017 Aikido Next Gen trip started with the preparation for the trip in January after the announcement of representatives at Summer School. Being selected was something very special to me, but suddenly I felt also a lot of pressure to be a worthy representative. In addition to my regular Aikido training I started running, and going to the gym for strength training — in particular leg and abdominal muscles. Apart from increasing my physical fitness, I felt that I wanted to really engage with Japan. I practiced Japanese in my car from a language CD on the way to work every day as well as reading more about Japan. But how much preparation will be enough? The closer the trip came the less I felt prepared for it. I arrived in Japan two days early to wind down from work and mentally get ready for an intense week of training.

Finding the Tokyo accommodation was the first hurdle. Finding a friendly local guide who drops you off in front of the door, helps immensely when you do not have mobile phone data or a map indicating street names in both languages. The accommodation we shared between eight of us was spacious and not just by Japanese standards — what a great find by Jikou Sensei! More and more of us took residence and exchanged first impressions. I also quickly found out that I was not the only person having concerns about not knowing whether our preparation was enough. Before I met the rest of the Australian delegates I felt quite alone with my thoughts, but this trip was about all of us supporting each other. It



became clear to me that I had prepared as well as I could, that it all would be well since Aikido is a way of life and that focusing on my preparation only was narrow-minded thinking. We have a great Aikido community and Aikido is so much more than training. Once I had this clear in my mind, I was now open to fully enjoy the trip, engaging with it and seeing where it led. For me this was a very special part of the trip on my Aikido journey, before I had even set a foot on the mat.

The first day that the whole group got together was Sunday evening. The social dinner was full of laughter, excitement and exploration of Japanese food. As you would have guessed, ordering food from a menu you cannot read can be exciting, that is, if you do not have food allergies, intolerances or choose not to eat certain foods. It was utterly delicious.

Training at Hombu dojo was something we were all looking forward to but I was a bit nervous. Somehow I had expected the dojo to be on a busy street and was surprised to find that it lies in a quiet street of houses. We met the first Aikidoka and practiced our rudimentary Japanese. On first impression I loved the white mats, making the dojo light and welcoming, but I soon learned that sitting in seiza on those hard tatami would become one of the biggest challenges of the trip. The dojo was big but so was the number of people training, leaving often just a single mat for each training pair. I remember one particular class we counted more than 120 students on the 90 mats and Hombu staff had to put newspaper in the entrance of the dojo to fit all the shoes.

One very important aspect to learn at Hombu for me was that training with that many people, trains your spatial awareness; and that and you have to commit to trusting your tori to throw you in a safe manner. A great benefit was also to be able to train with huge variety of Japanese students as well as visiting students from different cultures and backgrounds. Some instructors even translated for us visitors. We all were soon known by everyone as the Australian students who train every class.

Initially I thought I would write down the exercises we practiced after class. It turned out that I only wrote down the very first warm up. This was not because the exercises were unknown to me, but because they were just what we practise in Australia. Furthermore, I found it difficult to write down different aspects and insights I got from the techniques. Noting down position, distance, extension and direction is very hard to describe in words, so I decided to learn with my body and keep the images and the feeling of the movements in my mind. The first time I experienced one of Doshu's classes was in 2005 as a 5th Kyu and here I was twelve years later, still trying to understand the

basics... It all felt familiar but still very different at the same time and studying Aikido for me is still as enjoyable as it was in the beginning. Most techniques were demonstrated omote and ura once only but during our practice the instructors would usually train with everyone on the mat to give us the opportunity to experience the exercises they demonstrated. I particularly enjoyed the free training in the end of most classes which was often used as revision and to practise particular aspects of exercises. The other thing I remember very fondly was that Dojo-Cho was always smiling when he was on the mat. It was very special to see all three generations of the Ueshiba family at Hombu as he would regularly bring his young son on the mat after class. Wednesday night was a special night for us and the Ueshiba family as it was movie night at Hombu, a yearly event on the day of O Sensei's passing. Many students and guests gathered for a memorial movie night with special black and white footage and a shared meal on the mat afterwards.

After an intense week of training, we were all a bit sore and tired and were looking forward to taking part in the festival at Iwama. After seeing the beautiful mountains I could understand so much better why O Sensei felt connected to this area and chose to build a dojo there. The ceremony was in the sunshine under trees and the cherry blossoms were still in bloom due to the cooler climate. It was great to see all teachers and their families coming together for this special event. The ceremony was followed by an Aikido demonstration and with the picnic afterward, the day was something amazing and special to remember.

Connecting with Japan for me happened not only through the training but also through meeting lots of wonderful people. We made new friends but also connected with my Australian friends, getting to know each other better and sharing the experiences of this trip together. It was great to see again those Japanese friends who had visited Perth last February, not to mention all the amazing things that we did and saw in Japan: the beautiful Shinjuku park, the Samurai Museum, collecting stamps at Tokyo train stations,.

I hope that there will be many more initiatives like this. Firstly, to continue to nurture the connections we made and also to give other Australian aikidoka the opportunity to experience a journey like this and to train with our Japanese friends in the future. So thank you to Aiki Kai Australia and the Aikido Foundation for enabling me to bring back so much more than souvenirs.



Alex Raytsin

First and foremost it was a great experience in being able to attend Hombu dojo for training as a group with my peers and have this shared experience. It gave all of us a chance to get to know each other better on a personal level off the mat. This makes it all the more enjoyable spending the time together in training.

Overall the five days of training spent in Hombu was physically demanding. Although the classes in Hombu are one hour long, the level of training is more focussed and intense. You need to be really attentive to instructors' demonstrations. In Doshu Sensei and Dojo cho's classes you only get to see one demonstration per technique. These classes were always full with limited mat space, so taking care of yourself and your uke and being aware of what was happening around you were paramount.

Since Alex Rojas and I were sharing accommodation, I was up at 4:45am to allow enough time to shower, have breakfast and pack a gi in order to be at Hombu by 6am. We would arrive, dress in a very crowded changing room, get onto the mat, warm up and line up for the first class of the day. Those first classes were taken by Doshu Sensei or Dojo cho and everyone was on the mat, sitting and silent some minutes before they entered the room. After the two morning classes the day was taken up with washing, finding lunch and an afternoon nap before heading off to the dojo for the afternoon and evening classes. The last class for the day finished at 8pm and then the race was on to shower, get dinner, shop for provisions and prepare for the following day.

The training was made even harder with the traditional tatami mats at Hombu dojo, rather than the gym mats that we were so accustomed to in Australia. If there was not enough space on the mat, some people would train on the wooden boards skirting the tatami - I was impressed! My knees were certainly not used to the tatami surface and if it were not for knee pads, that a number of people had luckily warned me about, I would not have been able to physically survive the training for the week.

Despite the physical hardship, I was thankful for my experience under our instructors in Australia, especially being constantly reminded by my seniors at Summer and Winter Schools to pay attention to what guest instructors are showing: trying to follow what they do rather than relying on the way that I have been previously taught. That came in handy at Hombu when trying to follow diverse instruction from multiple teachers each day.

Hombu training for that week was largely from static form with a lot of emphasis on techniques from kata te dori, focussing on precision of movement, technique and ensuring that uke's balance was taken before the technique could continue. This also requires a high degree of proficiency on the part of the uke to provide a sincere attack, stay connected and remain sensitive to nage's movement. By contrast, my experience of Aikido in Australia has been one that emphasises continuous movement with precision of the technique derived from the 'right feeling' in the movement rather than precise foot/body positioning at a particular snapshot in time. Nevertheless having returned from the trip I have started to think more about feeling the connection between ukei and nage.

The other aspect that is unique to our way of training in Australia is the spiritual part of our training which we practice in every class and that some senior instructors devote part of their instruction to. The biggest realisation from the trip for me was that, despite the Australian group having trained in different states and under different instructors that the character of our Aikido was both unified and unique.

One of my other take-aways was a comment from Kuribayashi Sensei who said that "copying what I do is only one level of training" and that "you should not necessarily be copying what I do. When I do a technique



you should pay attention to why I am doing it this way. Is my uke, tall, short, big, small? How is the uke attacking me?”. That was a good reinforcement for me that Aikido will be something that is personal to one’s self and perhaps will be unique between the nage and uke that are training together. My task over the coming years is to obtain a deeper understanding of the principles that are the cornerstone of Aikido techniques rather than to simply emulate the instructor’s movements.

Ben Dowd

I wish to express my gratitude to all those who made the delegation to Tokyo possible, from its inception, to the planning, to the execution, thank you.

It was a truly momentous opportunity, not only to attend and practice aikido at Hombu dojo, but to experience, albeit briefly, Japan. It was wonderful to meet and train with people from Japan and all over the world, but also to get to know our fellow Australian aikidoka better. Of course it goes without saying that it was a great honour to meet Doshu, Dojo-Cho and other instructors.

Reflecting on the training my enduring memory will be of Doshu’s 6:30 am class.

For those of you who are fortunate enough to have the opportunity I highly recommend arriving early, before the masses arrive. There is truly something special, being on the tatami with only a few other early birds present, each methodically going through their personal warm up routines.

With so few people present, one can really appreciate this crisp, bright, open and airy space which has an enveloping feeling of peace and tranquillity, but with a distinct vibration of underlying energy. I have this feeling in every dojo - but here, at Hombu, it appeared to be magnified.

Each morning I would spend a moment in seiza and reflect on how fortunate I was to be here.

The space quickly fills until, for those at the back of the dojo, it is quite literally ‘standing room only’ and some of Doshu’s classes had 150 attendees. Five minutes prior to the commencement of class we form rows and silence fills the dojo, but the energy and anticipation is almost palpable.

Doshu enters, and after formalities, we spread out for the warm up. Once the rows start moving forward it becomes apparent how cramped the rear rows must have been.

Doshu signals the end of the warm up and demonstrates the first technique, an energetic shomen uchi irimi nage. The immediate thought is ‘how can we possibly train, this many students, in such a small space?’ but train we do. There is an intense sense of cooperation and awareness of not just yourself and your training partner but of the multiple training partners in your immediate vicinity. Each pair, without apparent communication, coordinates space on the tatami to complete the demonstrated technique.

The class progresses very quickly, and before it seems possible Doshu calls the last 15 minutes and it is time for jiyu waza. Once class finishes and Doshu leaves the tatami it is time to have a conversation with your training partner and other acquaintances, time to reflect on the class just completed, and time to consider only four more classes to go today.

A truly wonderful experience, I am already contemplating my next trip. Once again my sincerest thanks to all those involved in making this trip possible.

Luke Derham

We hit Japan a week and a half early to see Kyoto and visit some old friends in a fishing village called Shingu. O Sensei had established a dojo there in the 1950s and Dad had lived there twice when he was a younger man than I am now. Flicking through some old photo albums in the Aikido Kumano Juku Dojo, I was almost surprised to see a photo of dad, holding a baby me with a little Mr T looking on. We figured some of the western students must have been sending in their family photos from all around the world after training there, sharing photos of their new families with an old one. It was a warm reminder that Aikido and family go hand in hand.

When we got to Hombu Dojo in Toyko a flood of memories came back. It had been 13 years since I had trained here as a kyu grade. I would have been 20 years old and at the beginning of a world trip. I was happy to be back, this time with a great group of souls. We took off our shoes and headed up to the mat.

Classes were generally crowded in the mornings and we trained shoulder to shoulder in both the Doshu and Dojo-Cho’s classes. They both had a warm feel and managed to make their way around the classes so that students felt they had a personal connection. It was great to be there all together. More than once the instructors there made reference to the Australian group, and many were aware of Jikou Sensei and clearly excited to see him there.

There was no weapons training, which I found surprising, considering the emphasis Sensei and the Teaching Committee here in Australia have continued to place on this aspect of training. But there was a strong spirit on the mat and in the dojo which you couldn’t help but be swept up in, knowing that this was the place O Sensei established as the headquarters for Aikido worldwide, and the training ground of so many influential Aikidoka.



Some Thoughts, Experiences and Delights from Tokyo by Annalise Bennett



Magic on the Mats – watching training (*mitori geiko*)

Watching class at Hombu was a beautiful and challenging form of training. Early in the week my body gave me a clear signal that I needed to pay attention to my practical limits (migraine), and so I relaxed into my own pace for the week, watching nearly half the classes for the week. At the back of the main dojo is a beautiful section of wooden flooring. The boards are level with the tatami surface. There are no seats or cushions, so this wooden floor is where people sit to watch. The paper sign on the back-wall requests watchers to sit in a ‘polite’ posture, that is, seiza or cross-legged. Now, I confess, I struggled to always sit politely, especially once I was a little battered and bruised from the training. And yet, the harder it became for me to sit correctly, the more Zen this mitori geiko became for me. From these various states of Zen, there was a potential moment each day that took my breath away.

At about 5:45pm each clear evening, the setting sunlight would begin to shine through a window on the western wall. As it did, it would bathe the entire space in a vibrant orange hue as in a daydream. Gracious and energetic Aikido glowed in this magical haze for a mere ten minutes each day. Lines and edges became soft and blurred, and sound just faded away.

The afterglow of this phenomenon had an interesting effect on me too. During the peak of the glow, the hazy light was so bright in my eyes I couldn't focus on technical details, so I started to watch movement, almost like watching energy flow. Once the sun had set below the window and the glow had passed, I would often stay watching movement rather than technique for quite some time. It was almost like I couldn't refocus my eyes to technical detail.

This way of watching didn't last too long either, before the left half of my brain took control again and I started watching for details again, but the enrichment from the glow and afterglow were my most memorable moments of my entire Japanese experience on this trip.

Magic!



Magic in Japan (for me) is in the quiet moments when you sit back and admire the view, the feeling, or simply pause to smell the flowers!

(Photo by: Mon)

Gomen...?

During one class at Hombu I blundered badly enough to have the teaching Sensei chasten and correct me. As I was thrown by this Sensei during class I accidentally clipped his head with my elbow as I rolled past – for which I instantly felt terrible! Mid-air, by default I garbled “Gomen!”.

As I finished the roll and turned to face him again, he stopped and looked at me.

‘Gomen’ is not something you say to a teacher. I would never say ‘Gomen’ to Doshu. The correct words would be ‘Gomennasai’, ‘Sumimasen’, ‘Shitsure shimasu’. Just ‘Gomen’ is impolite and can only be said to those of equal or junior standing.

You can perhaps imagine my horror in that moment. And it didn't stop here. The teacher then stopped between techniques and lectured the entire class, first in Japanese, then in English, expanding on what he had already told me directly.

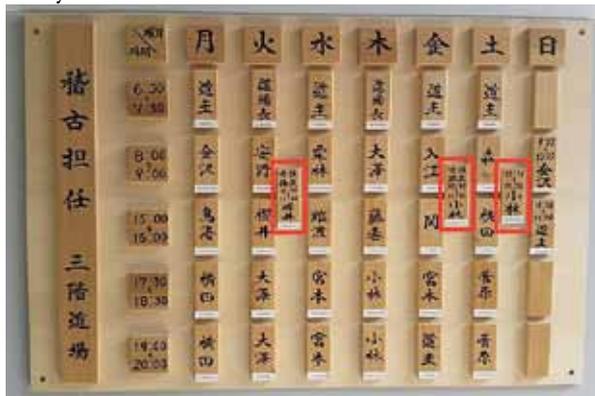
During this lecture, beyond what he'd said to me at the time of incident, he continued on to say that trying to speak by copying Japanese language is a good thing – but certain attention must be paid to specific styles and phrases of speech. This incident had quite an impact on me. In honesty, I was mortified with myself to the point that I nearly lost all confidence to even attempt speaking in Japanese. But as I stewed on this lesson, I began to recognise the honour in it. How fortunate was I that I made this mistake with a teacher who would honestly and openly correct me – so that I could grow.

It also curiously opened me to another spiritually impactful moment during the week. After class one morning, I was helping a local woman clean blood off the tatami, and we got chatting. I confessed I was the one who had said ‘gomen’ to that instructor but I then went on to say that I was very grateful for the lesson. She was more surprised at my gratitude than I expected.

She herself had an experience with this same teacher previously, which had left her very discouraged. As we discussed first my experience and then hers, I could see her beginning to understand what had actually transpired with much more clarity. She had asked a question about a technique, and had been given no direct answer by the teacher and had felt deliberately ignored. The very next morning, he had lectured the class about the subject of questions. She'd been left feeling chastened and discouraged, nearly resolving to never ask a question of him again. Yet by the end of our conversation, she had begun to see the lesson he had tried to teach, and outright acknowledged the flaw in her original question.

This incident and following conversation reaching for clarity became a crystal-clear memory and spiritual moment that I expect to remember for a long time to come. Firstly; pride

in myself for giving myself an opportunity to learn a beautiful lesson, and secondly, in sharing that lesson, seeing clarity and peace spreading across features of a new friend. It warmed me to the very soul.



The red boxes highlight the women's classes through the week. Something about their staggered positioning had left them unnoticed to me all week, until this moment! (Photo by Bruce)

Women's Aikido Class

On Friday morning, our last day at Hombu, I once again stayed after class to chat with my new Tokyo friend and to practice together. As chance would have it, we stayed so long that the next scheduled class began to approach – the “Women's Class”. Until this moment, I had completely forgotten these classes existed! She kindly introduced me to some of the women who were attending the class, and asked on my behalf if I could join them for training. The women's classes at Hombu seem to be on a different fee schedule than the main classes we Aussies were attending during the week visit, so I had to pay extra to attend this class, but it was worth it.

All week my desire had been growing to see a beginner's class at Hombu. The 3rd floor advanced classes had such concise demonstrations that it was a powerful test of focus just to see the attack, throw, and versions to be practiced. I wondered whether the beginner classes operated similarly, or if there were longer, more descriptive demonstrations. The women's class gave me the answer, as the rank of the students training ranged from beginner to yudansha.

I found the class was gentle, warm and fun. And I mustn't neglect to mention that it was also wonderful technical training, as every class I witnessed. The teacher during this class was much more descriptive in his demonstrations than I had seen at all in the advanced classes. I also really enjoyed seeing him nurturing and helping the beginners as he moved around the dojo.

Conversations with local and international Aikidoka

(a couple of my favourite moments)

Early in the week I trained with a lovely man from Israel. He wore an old black belt that had faded almost entirely to white, with just some tattered black edging. As I often do when encountering such magnificent belts, I complimented it, to which started an awkward and hilarious joke – as he responded by saying “I thought you were about to compliment my Aikido, not the belt!” Of course, his Aikido was also lovely, which I promptly complimented, and we became friends, training together many more times through the week.

He then went on to introduce me to a local Tokyo man and the 3 of us hit a cafe for a chat one morning. The man had originally lived close to Hombu and had trained regularly, but had now married and become a father. To better accommodate his growing family, they had moved far out of the city into a larger home. Where he now lived was a full 1.5-hour commute from Hombu, crossing a mix of buses and trains.

He spoke how this new distance from Hombu had challenged him – as he lost most opportunity for his most favoured stress relief (Aikido). His stress had actually progressed to the point where, when we met, he was on a full month of paid stress leave from his job – and he was fully capitalising on using the time to get some extra training in, despite the commuting time and complexity.

At one point during our conversation, he mentioned he was really keen for his daughter to train Aikido too. Out of curiosity I asked him to elaborate his reasoning. For him, Aikido teaches women confidence and self-defence, marvellous skills for a woman to have in a still largely patriarchal society. He truly wanted this for his daughter, and I appreciated how closely it matched reasons some women have for joining Aikido in Australia.

A friend from Taipei.

At the completion of the women's class, I got talking with a yudansha who turned out to be from Taipei. She'd studied in America and her English was flawless, so we had a really good chat. She was in Tokyo for a week due to work, and had scheduled her meetings to allow her to attend the women's classes. I was curious to hear the reasons why these women only attended these women-only classes, so I quizzed her for her own. As anticipated, it was a “confidence thing”, but not in the shape I'd expected.

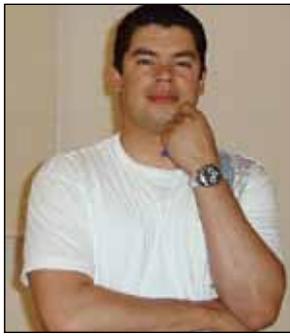
She had graded to shodan some years earlier, then a life event had stopped her training completely for a number of years. She had returned to training in recent times and now lacked confidence in her technique. She avoided training with men as she had the impression that men felt limited/held back and thus didn't want to train with her. She'd also briefly tried the beginner classes which had also left her very uncomfortable. The beginners had mimicked her movements as she trained with them, and she was left feeling horribly lacking as they followed her even when she had done something quite poorly.

Left feeling caught utterly in the middle, the women's classes were the safest option, as the broader range of grades participating and the smaller class numbers left her feeling more supported and less likely to lead juniors astray. I felt her story was worth sharing here, as a very specific and fascinating example of why someone would attend the women's classes. She was quite capable of attending the advanced classes, and had no fear of men. She simply wanted a safe space to re-familiarise herself with Aikido.

It's a WRAP!

Ultimately, my entire time in Japan was delightful, challenging, and a complete and utter joy and honour. I met wonderful people from all over the world, while getting to know some fellow Australians a whole lot better too.

Thank you!



Alexander Rojas

Not long ago I read an article written by Anja Marzuki from Victoria, recipient of the 2017 Beverley Webster Bursary Award. She wrote about her Aikido journey and her first experience of a National Summer School. I was surprised at how nerve wracking it was for her. Although Anja believed that it would be an opportunity “to live and breathe Aikido” she also had several concerns which resonated with me and my first trip to Japan. The same questions Anja wrote about in her article populated my mind: Who would be there? What would happen? Was I good enough to train with these people?

It was interesting for me to realise that despite our differences (me being uglier, bigger, older and more experienced than Anja) we both shared similar concerns. Despite my 15 years of experience I found myself with a similar nerve wracking sensation. Isn't that odd? I started training in Aikido in Venezuela in 2002 under the auspices of Yamada Shihan, then moved to Australia in 2005 and continued training in Aiki Kai Australia which allowed me to obtain my shodan from Sugano Shihan in the Summer School of 2010.

Reflecting upon my Hombu experience, it would appear that my questions were an indication that I wanted to excel, and moreover, leaving Aikikai Australia's reputation at Hombu dojo in good regard. Anja's article helped me realise that as long as you keep the inquisitive mind of a student and crave for self-improvement there will always be nerve wracking thoughts in your Aikido life.

To give you an idea about how intimidating it can be training at Hombu, imagine rocking up to train for the first time at 6am on a Monday (and the ungodly hour at which you need to wake up). After you have registered and gotten ready for training, you step into a beautiful and immaculate dojo with the mat literally flooded by a sea of black belts. Aikidoka coming from all over the world, all ready to give their best, as well as the local Japanese Aikidoka and scary Hombu deshi. The military precision of the place is made evident when five minutes before the class begins everyone is sitting in seiza awaiting the entrance of the first instructor of the week: Sandai Doshu, Moriteru Ueshiba. Needless to say that the class always starts on time. Do you start to get the picture? It was truly a new experience. Each time I thought I had control of my nerves the class began and my excitement kicked in as I stepped onto the mat never knowing who I was going to train with (anyone from a 1st kyu to Shihan).

It all began on Monday when I was picked up by a mature, serious looking Japanese Aikidoka and I thought to myself: Great! This week is going to be easy! I soon realised how wrong I was and how tough just that hour was about to become (FYI, you must stay with the same person the whole class). Funnily, I always see myself as a 'teddy bear', nonetheless my partner's assessment of my six foot height and 95 kg weight proved different. My partner felt somewhat keen to play and to make some space around the overcrowded mat using my body. 55 minutes

into the class and Doshu himself sees me struggling with suwariwaza kokyu ho. He approached me with a smirk and told me: “Don't worry about trying with him, he is an old man”. At that moment I realised my chance to succeed was nil. The silver lining of that session was when my partner asked where I was from, and when I said: “Australia” he replied: “Oh, you are from the NextGen group?” As I nodded he welcomed me and kindly left me with a smile on his face. I later found out that his name is Masaki Tani Sensei - a very important individual in the Aikido world!

In six days I attended: 22 training sessions, the Shinobu-kai (commemoration of the passing of both O'Sensei and second Doshu), the annual Aiki-festival followed by a great picnic in Iwama; and an amazing Italian dinner with Mitsuteru Ueshiba Hombu Dojo Cho and his deshi's Suzuki and Umetsu sensei's.

I cherish great memories of this trip, particularly the camaraderie resulting from my Australian team. Without their motivation I would probably have not enjoyed the trip as much. It was a really tough but wonderful week.

The experience was a dream I'd had since I first started training in Aikido and it became true. This trip also assisted me in confirming the quality of Aikido in Australia. We have an enormous resource in our senior instructors. Therefore as Aikido students we should strive to spend as much time as possible absorbing the heritage that they are leaving to us. I probably will never get to train with the regularity and determination of Hombu dojo but as a member of our next generation I feel compelled to strive toward passing along some of the great teaching that I have received from my seniors.

Arigatou gozaimashita.



Bruce Roberts

How do I describe such an experience? Tokyo is an invasion of the senses, a claustrophobic sea of people and an eclectic, often incongruent mix of sights, sounds and smells. The training schedule at Hombu dojo was busy. The dojo was full, often almost overflowing, especially for the first morning class with the Doshu or Dojo-Cho. The need to source substantial food seemed ever-present and the need for rest was not too far behind. For me, the trip was a paradigm-changing experience and, like (I think) all good Aikido experiences, it left me with more questions than answers. I'd like to share just a few of the experiences and ideas that impacted me most.

Let's start with culture. I had, of course, always understood Aikido as being Japanese. A lot of what we do is obviously Japanese or has obvious Japanese connections; from hakama to suwari waza and bokken to bowing. But having never visited Japan before, I failed to appreciate just how different the culture is and how strong its influence is. Of course, my culture is strong too, it's just invisible to me most of the time, an invisible filter on everything I experience. I feel like I've now had a little glimpse into Japanese culture, a little peep into another world. Like noticing an optical illusion, it doesn't stop it happening but now I can be aware of it.

We had great opportunities to train with Doshu and Dojo cho Senseis, see Dojo-cho sensei's youngest son doing a little Aikido in the dojo after his father's lessons, attend an evening commemorating O Sensei's death, have dinner with Dojo Cho sensei and watch the entire Ueshiba family participate in a ceremony at the Aiki Shrine. All these things connected with a very strong sense of family. Here, O Sensei is respected as The Founder. More than that, he's a grandfather, great grandfather and great, great grandfather. I also got a small insight into the level of commitment generations of the Ueshiba family have invested into making Aikido what it is today. They are in some ways like a royal family and along with that comes serious commitment and obligation.

We had a week packed full of training with some truly fantastic instructors. Taking nothing away from the experience, I was also struck by how blessed we are in Aiki Kai Australia. We have great local instructors, regular visits from senior instructors, regular intensive national schools and, even with our geographic isolation, a good number of guest international instructors. Locally in Perth, we have a permanent dojo with morning and evening classes. Of course, I'm biased, but I really feel like we have a world-class organisation in Australia and it's a privilege to be part of it.

Through these experiences, I also got to thinking on a host of big ideas and, perhaps more importantly, questions. It's great to have your feet on the ground. Sometimes it's also freeing to explore a world of ideas and possibilities. Sometimes we need to question our assumptions, habits, established norms, biased perceptions, etc. In the light of that thought, I'll leave you with two questions to think on:

How am I connected to O Sensei?

How can I strengthen that connection?

Mark McLaughlin

NextGen Japan Trip Reflections

Thirty minutes to go in our final Aikido training class at Aikido's headquarters. It was 7:30pm on Friday evening at the Hombu and the Doshu was closing off a fantastic week of training. With this short time to go, feelings of both satisfaction and sadness flowed into my thoughts. Satisfaction, because I had survived a physically rigorous and challenging week of Aikido training, consisting of five days with five classes per day, but also because I had taken away so much; and sadness because I didn't want to end the training. I felt I was getting loads out of every class, even though it was all happening very fast with little time to consolidate the material learned. Putting these thoughts aside, like all other training sessions this week I really wanted to focus and push myself, putting every bit of energy into it.

This trip was really awesome to be a part of. Firstly the training was incredible, especially for a freshly minted Shodan like me with so much to learn. It provided a channel to experience and gain a lot of knowledge in a short space of time. There was also so much to enjoy about the training at the Hombu. It is a revered Aikido Dojo for thousands of students around the world but for many lucky ones it is simply their local Dojo. For me it was a place characterized by its amazing atmosphere and sense of spirit. You knew that when you walked in the door, it was a place for Aikidoka serious about their training. Everyone arriving for training really had strong desire to be there, to learn, train hard and continue their personal development, as well as participating and drawing off the abundance of energies that were present around them.

I thought the teachers were fantastic especially the Doshu and Dojo-Cho Senseis. They demonstrated very sharp and powerful techniques making them look very easy but extremely polished. They offered so much in terms of their deep knowledge and understandings of techniques and they interacted beautifully with the many students. It felt good to be with a great Australian group, second in number only to the Japanese students on the mat, making us a noticeable bunch and commented on regularly by the teachers. In terms of building relations, I thought the size of the group made a big difference as it helped show a strong commitment by Aiki Kai Australia to Aikido and the NextGen initiative. Whilst the instructors were excellent and much was learned from their teaching, I also found all the ukes I had the pleasure of training were very impressive. They were respectful and helpful while being very keen on perfecting their own Aikido and, of course, at the same time having fun. One experience that I recall in particular was training with a much older Japanese man with an appearance not dissimilar to O Sensei. When I trained with him as nage he would chuckle in a cheeky sort way that was easily understood to mean that I had it all wrong. I could tell he was enjoying himself! He was very helpful and would explain through technique. When his turn to be nage I could feel and understand the difference. Still, I could not seem to find the correct way, so the cheeky chuckles kept coming, giving me much to ponder.

We had such a great time on tour. It was not only the training but also getting to know and connecting with people that share this common interest in Aikido. The connection we made, both within the Aussie group and the people we met on the mat,

continued next page...

Mark McLaughlin continued.

was really special and one that will continue to develop. One of the highlights was the dinner we shared with Dojo Cho and two of his close deshi. It was a great chance to meet them off the mat and to develop the relationship with Hombu's next generation of leadership. In my opinion the tour was extremely well organised by the three leaders, Jikou, Tristan and Felicity. The large number of considerations and the fluid nature of the week's activities week made for challenging situations which were anticipated and handled very well.

It is also doubtful whether a better week could have been chosen to visit and train at the Hombu. To begin with, the spring season climate in Japan was perfect especially for me coming from the Top End heat. Secondly, the timing of the week coincided with the celebration of O Sensei's life on the 26th April, marking the anniversary of his passing and the week prior to Golden Week. This meant that both the Doshu and Dojo-Cho were in town. The additional ceremonies surrounding these special dates including a film night with photographs and video of O Sensei's life, followed by mini party in the main dojo. This helped us to nurture relationships outside of the training classes and at the same time provided the op-

portunity to reflect upon the spiritual aspects of Aikido, the importance of the Ueshiba family, and how and why we came to be training here.

The other very special and memorable event that stuck out for me was attending the festival at the Aiki shrine in Iwama. I was joined by my partner Eliza and my daughter Tori, who had come to Japan with me as part of an extended visit, so that they could be a part of this, as well as meeting our group. It started with the group journey to Iwama on the train. Once at Iwama station there was a short walk down an avenue of honour with flowering cherry blossoms on both side under a backdrop of beautiful mountains and with messages from O Sensei on stones by the path. The Shrine was set in a small but beautiful forest and here we watched an amazing Shinto ritual and Aikido demonstration with many hundreds of other Aikido students. The Hombu then provided food and sake for a wonderful picnic in the park adjacent to O Sensei's shrine. There couldn't be a better way to understand the dedication and devotion by many to the founder of this truly incredible art. I hope the next group of students from Australia get as much out of the tours as I did!



**Takeki Tsuboi Seminar February 2017
by Monika Tschochner and David Whyatt**



Aikido WA was proud to recently host a delegation of international visitors under the lead of Tsuboi Shihan Sensei, (8th Dan). The seminar in Perth was held at the Fremantle dojo on a hot February weekend. It was well attended not only by Aiki Kai Australia students but also other Aikido students from around Australia, as well as students from Singapore, and Japan.

Takeki Tsuboi Shihan initially trained at Waseda University Aikido as a student of Hiroshi Tada sensei (9th Dan) but he also trained at Hombu dojo under O Sensei Morihei Ueshiba. Currently, Tsuboi Shihan teaches at Tada Sensei's Gessoji Dojo and is additionally the chief instructor at Waseda University Aikido in Tokyo, where most students of his delegation train.

The seminar covered a lot of different exercises with room for practice with different students and there was plenty to learn for everyone attending. Amongst others, we performed a series of breathing exercises, taking in a deep breath and then exhaling slowly, making the vowel sounds and later without the sound. While initially Tsuboi Sensei's explanations were translated from Japanese into English, to our delight he soon began explaining techniques in his own very good English.

Our own organization has been planning its NextGen initiatives and it seems that Tada Sensei's students have been doing the same. The seminar was a deliberate effort on the part of their seniors to encourage more junior students to meet and train with their counterparts internationally.

We established warm friendships that weekend thanks in good part to the generosity of Jack Sato Sensei, who kindly hosted a barbecue and party at his house, and played the host for a tour of Perth and the surrounds. We're looking forward to

seeing our friends again in both Perth and in Japan.

Amongst the techniques examined, on the second day Tsuboi Shihan demonstrated ushiro ryokatadori shihonage, and related techniques, focusing on extending one's partner through body movement. In the last part of the seminar, we practiced to use our extension while practicing with two uke's simultaneously, one doing ryokatadori from the front and the other from behind. These movements emphasized the importance of 'leading' one's uke(s) and maintaining correct body position relative to one's partner(s).

After an intensive weekend of training, we all enjoyed a barbeque at Jack Sato Sensei's home. Similarly to the uniting experience of training on the mat, the social BBQ reflected the open nature of our visitors. The visit by Tsuboi Shihan strengthened the connections with Australian and Japanese aikido students, by sharing and enjoying this special opportunity of getting together.

Photo credit: Mat Lawtie (Treasurer Aikido WA)





The NextGen Initiative

Andrew Dziejdzic National Area Representative

What next for the NextGen?

As you can see from this newsletter, the NextGen initiative has been a success so far, but it's only a beginning. When they returned from Japan I had the job of preparing a report for the Board, the Foundation and the TTC, as well as writing something for the newsletter. I was then asked to consider putting the report into the newsletter, so I am doing that here, even at the risk of repeating myself. If what follows has value to the wider readership, it may be because it helps us to consider how this might be continued and the specific benefits that might flow from his.

The NextGen initiative was an innovatory one aimed at creating links between the Dojo Cho of Hombu Dojo - who is the future Doshu of Aikido - and the next generation of students coming up in Australia. It was initiated by Tony Smibert when he met with Doshu at our 50th anniversary school - and in part involved a group of younger next generation students having contact with Doshu when he came to teach at our 2017 National Summer School, and then later that group travelling to Hombu Dojo to train there in April 2017 for one week. You can read their own accounts of their visit in other articles in this issue. As National Area Representative, I had a role making the arrangements with the Doshu and Hombu's International Department with meetings there last year and at the IAF conference.

Part of my role in the NextGen initiative also involved contacting each of the chosen participants and asking for their feedback about the whole exercise after their recent return from Japan. We have learned a lot and the feedback has been overwhelmingly positive, with great gratitude expressed by all participants for being included. All the participants were in favour of a continuation of the program - but it was acknowledged this would of course be subject to funding availability. However one helpful suggestion was made that some participants would have been happy to fully or partly fund their participation. In fact, the group's numbers were added to by three other Australian students who self-funded their trip to be there at the same time, who significantly added the impression we made there: Luke Derham, Jessica Ngan and Sharon Stewart. Interestingly several participants thought that the effectiveness of our delegation in part stemmed from the large number in our group.

The participants all believe that the whole visit was an unqualified success. All those chosen expressed their gratitude and deep appreciation, and asked for that to be passed on. In addition they asked that their thanks be passed on for the organization of the group in Japan by the three leaders, Jikou Sugano, Tristan Derham and Felicity Peters, who gave them flexibility where needed but also clear instructions as to plans etc.

Summarising the benefits identified included:

1. Getting the contingent known by Doshu, Dojo Cho, hombu instructors etc and acting as very effective ambassadors for Australia in Hombu by virtue of their regular and enthusiastic attendance at all classes en-masse. The younger instructors who had been to Australia with Doshu or Dojo Cho were glad to see the contingent and renew acquaintances with some members of the group and to make new ones.

2. Members of the group getting to know each other better and building friendships with each other - several said they would seek each other out at the next school they attend - and would always remember the experience they shared together as it forged a bond between them. This was also demonstrated by members of the group looking after each other and training with any member of the group they believed might at any stage be “hitting the wall.” This bond may well be a lasting and very important benefit of the whole initiative.

3. Especially for those who hadn't been there before, it was also the whole experience of training in Hombu with a whole range of people, especially the older ones who threw them around with great joy, in an atmosphere of great focus and seriousness, while some also had to cope with foreigners who were there to “prove a point”. All this opened up new vistas for several participants who particularly liked the atmosphere in Doshu's classes, while also enjoying the variety of the other instruction.

4. For several participants, they spontaneously offered me the realization that the experience also made them realize the value of the instruction in Australia and the fact that their training here had given them a wonderful foundation which allowed them to take the best advantage of the whole experience.

5. It seems obvious that some of the participants were actually physically challenged by the experience and that despite warnings and preparation, some might have overdone it a little in their training. This led to the realization that there probably needed to be a little more latitude to allow attendees to miss a class or classes - obviously a very difficult thing to manage when the participants who might have been affected themselves didn't want to admit they might have overdone it! There was even one comparison made with preparation for the Oxfam Challenge (a non-stop 24 hour 100km race), and the need for preparation on a higher scale, with mutual vigilance and care emphasized during the visit.

In summary, I believe that those who went were very grateful for being chosen the whole initiative and the support that flowed to it from Hombu, the Aiki Kai, the Sugano Foundation, state organizations and local dojos – and of course we are very grateful for the strong personal support it got from Doshu and Waka Sensei. The initiative clearly generated loyalty and a real appreciation for the organization's role in setting it up.

In turn, the organization and the Foundation owe the participants a debt of gratitude the way in which they so admirably fulfilled their roles in the initiative, and particularly to Jikou Sugano, Tristan Derham and Felicity Peters in their management of the Japan component. Really the future challenge is to maintain this momentum: that's the future. Those ideas shouldn't just come from the seniors and we want the younger generation to also come up with suggestions about what we can do.



David Brown Shihan's Teaching in Armidale Inspires...

by Chris Hutchinson

Although it's been a few months since the September 2016 visit by David Brown Shihan to the Armidale dojo, I still approach each class inspired by his teaching.

Over the four days of instruction Brown Shihan shared his deep knowledge and distinctive approach to aikido. This was the second Armidale Spring Seminar he has taught, and was again well attended by all the Armidale students and by aikidoka from NSW and interstate. My Armidale students benefited not only from the teaching but also, as we're such a small dojo, from the experience of having a crowded mat and so many yudansha to train with.

I found the classes insightful and mentally challenging. I wasn't alone in sometimes struggling to follow the details as technique flowed to technique to concept to explanation to technique, but came away with solid concepts to develop and quite a few technical errors identified!

The training was quiet and focused, apart from occasional exhortations from Brown Shihan: "No! Don't lean. Stand up straight."

Moving through fundamentals to more advanced ideas Brown Shihan demonstrated Kaishi-waza to highlight common problems in the approaches that many of us have to basic techniques and, after correcting those problems, to verify correct position and movement.

Beyond the technical teaching, we gained from Brown Shihan's example simply by his presence on the mat. The seminar was held just a couple of weeks before he was scheduled for a hip replacement operation and these were the last classes he taught before the operation. Despite sometimes clearly being in pain, he gave unsparingly of his time and understanding so we could all benefit in aikido.

Our thanks to David Brown Shihan and to everyone who attended to make the seminar a success. We are hoping and planning for the next seminar in spring 2017. If anyone is interested in attending they can contact me at chris@armidale-aikido.org, or phone 0415 859 664.



INTERNATIONAL AIKIDO CELEBRATION BELGIUM, OCTOBER 2016

by Bob Hill

The weekend of 22-23 Oct 2016 saw perhaps the largest gathering to date of aikidoka in Europe, perhaps in the world. 1500 of us assembled in the monumentally huge Tour et Taxis warehouse on the side of the canal running through the Kingdom of Belgium, from Charleroi in the south (near the Maredsous Abbey where the Global Inner Aikido Schools are held) via Brussels to Antwerp in the north, a key factor in the industrial and imperial history of Belgium at the Port de Bruxelles. The spectacularly large spaces were a perfect location for the celebration of 150 years of diplomatic relations between Belgium and Japan.

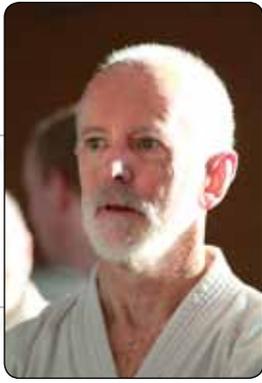
In 2014, the newly appointed Japanese Ambassador to Belgium, Mr. Ishii, noted the long connection between Japan and Belgium and presented the idea of a celebration to interested groups. The Belgium Aikido Federation, in the words of the Ambassador, was one of the quickest and most enthusiastic groups to show interest. Two years later the idea became a wonderful reality.

I flew in from Bristol on Friday and went to see the set up. An army of volunteers were laying the 2500 square metres of tatami, erecting stalls, installing showers, putting up signs, doing all the things usually done at such events but clearly the scale of this event was bigger than any I had seen before.

At my hotel the next morning I ran into some old friends from Belgian Aikikai, some folks from Newcastle in the UK who practice in a dojo originating from Nocquet sensei, who I believe was the first European to practice at Hombu under OSensei, and a mother and daughter who had travelled from Berlin. The scope of the event was becoming even more apparent. We headed off to the dojo after breakfast and on arrival immediately realized, with hundreds of people arriving, the organizational arrangements were now under maximum stress. I was fortunate to run into Frederick Heylbroeck, President of the Belgian Federation, who some of you may know - if not you can see him on YouTube taking ukemi for Smibert sensei at Takasi, IAF embukai. Fred and Luc Vermeulen (VAV President) were the men with overall responsibility for implementation of the plan. He looked cool, in charge and alert. I congratulated him on the smooth operation:

"Good - so far", he said.

But he had no reason to worry.



Remember, only months before Brussels had suffered murderous terrorist attacks, so security at key points like airports and entrances to public buildings was tight. I reflected that the atmosphere was similar to London in the late 1970s during the IRA bombing campaign. As then, remarkably, people coped and went about their business, perhaps with more caution, but undeterred. Fred's team checked us in and directed us to the appropriate changing and bag storage areas. When you consider the numbers involved this was a massive logistical undertaking but it worked seamlessly. The dojo area, as a result, was free of bags, litter and other extraneous materials. I regard that as a major achievement in these days as Aikido spreads west and traditional ways meet new cultures; But more of that later.

Sessions were taken by Doshu Moriteru, Christian Tissier Sensei and Dany Leclerre Sensei. I have attended several events over the last few years where Doshu has taught – Cardiff, Paris, Melbourne, Belgium – as well as visiting Hombu dojo and I find the consistency of his teaching over those years to be most reassuring. I have also attended similar events where Waka Sensei and other senior Hombu teachers have instructed and once again been struck by the consistency of technique and explanation.

I want to record my observation because I think that after the great era of expansion which saw the modern masters such as senseis Tamura, Yamada, Chiba, Sugano, Kanai take Aikido and introduce it to the rest of the world, we are now in a period of international consolidation. It is not simply that those masters are gradually passing from the scene but a new cadre of teachers is taking their places, teaching a common curriculum with a common approach.

Irimi, tenkan and kokyū are the basic elements taught. From these arise techniques with a constant reference to the common tai sabaki. As Doshu put it, 'if we all do these same things we can all practice together'.

To make that work, three large screens had been set up so everyone in the dojo could see and hear the instructors, a simple innovation that added immensely to practitioners' enjoyment of classes. Teachers could teach; students could learn.

Tissier Sensei echoed Doshu's remarks and personally I found their words hugely positive and encouraging. I have practiced Aikido in many places over the decades and inevitably, wherever I have practiced, it has been pointed out to

me, sometimes gently, often forcibly that "you don't do it the way we do". It was a steep learning curve at first I must say. But I hung on to my trust that if what I did was good enough for Sugano sensei to recommend my grade, I was on the right track. Always in the back of my mind was sensei (a master of precise technique as well as principle) telling us, "techniques artificial". I looked for the common things and ignored the differences. Maybe I changed but gradually what I do got accepted. I am so glad that I did hang on. When I visited Hombu dojo for the first time after nearly fifty years of practice, I had all sorts of feeling about what I was walking into, but I had absolutely no need to worry. What I do was what they do. I felt very much at home and realized that my sensei was truly a great master: He had taught me Aikido, not simply techniques.

Similarly, in the Tour et Taxis dojo this weekend, so many friends came out of the ruck and shook my hand or embraced me. I've just kept on keeping on and I feel now more than ever before part of an international Aikido community which is going somewhere and (perhaps) making a small, positive contribution to humanity. For me, the circle had finally been closed. More importantly, this Celebration of 150 years of diplomatic relationships between Belgium and Japan was a wonderful celebration of a new era of Aikido. Fred, Luc and the not inconsiderable army of helpers deserve nothing but praise and admiration for what was achieved. This weekend was not another Aikido weekend. This was a truly major milestone in the international consolidation of Aikido.

Laughing, Sugano Sensei told me once that he and I were of the older generation. Perhaps that is why I doubt I will never get used to students applauding teachers in a dojo. However, Aikido is moving on and that is how respect and appreciation are shown these days. Such changes have come with the growth of Aikido, its standardization and consolidation. In Sugano Sensei's opinion, OSensei had not completed Aikido and so, like Sensei, it will continue to change and develop.

Modern Aikido is being shaped around a new generation and this new generation is shaping modern Aikido. So, it is in this spirit of development and change that I want to express my support to Aikikai Australia for its innovative youth initiative. 2017 happens to mark fifty years since a few of us (then) young people had the truly once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to study with Sugano Sensei in Launceston in 1967. Our dream then was to learn from a master and one day get a black belt. Things moved on.

I believe that Aikikai Australia is offering the same sort of opportunity to young people now through the Next Generations initiative. This is a step into the future, but the future beyond Aikido's current international consolidation. I hope that as many young people as possible are able take the opportunity.

Bob Hill, Trowbridge Aikikai, UK.

TRAINING FOR TWO – in the Fourth age. by Janene Godden

When I started training in Bendigo Aiki Kai Dojo at the age of fifty I did not envision myself flying over a stack of prostrate individuals and landing safely on the other side. Nor did I think that I would still be flying, though not so high or so far, at the age of sixty two.

These activities, however, began many years before where I trained to Shodan-ho in Zen Do Kai before moving to Ashihara Karate, a style that has foundations in Aikido. Here I achieved the grade of Shodan at aged forty and Nidan some years later. My then baby daughter patiently spent years amusing herself with a range of toys in the corner of some dojo somewhere whilst her mother trained, fought or taught. I am grateful the dojo is part of her experience – observing and learning that women can be brave, succeed and be respected in a traditionally male dominated arena, giving her a sense that she too can aim to fulfil her potential in her field of choice.

But it was always Aikido that I aspired to study and was excited when I eventually found classes in Bendigo in 2004. My Aikido journey began.

Aikido is something to which I have to regularly recommit; regardless of when my body protests, my confidence fades, it seems too far, too many kangaroos, work or life get in the way. It also builds an understanding that everyone has challenges and triumphs when training, just as in life. Summer School is a Medicine for this. It highlights diversity but builds on the commonality of the Aikido community, nationally and internationally.

As an adjunct to my travels Aikido has taken me to some unusual places. Seeking out a dojo in Yangon, Myanmar (Burma) in 2012. Being mesmerised by an unknown Aikido practitioner leaning against a great column, performing hand warm ups on the mighty steps of the grand, golden Shwedagon Pagoda - looking straight at me. Him, smiling knowingly and me, bowing slightly in passing.

Crawling through the dusk with my travel companion, negotiating the chaotic evening traffic and bustling humanity, grabbing a banana from the sidewalk stall for sustenance and arriving in a particularly shadowy alley in the backstreets of Yangon where even the taxi driver questioned the wisdom of dropping us off unchaperoned. My friend also warily questioning my confidence at being so exposed in an alley in the huge, dark, mesmerising city. Knocking respectfully on a non-descript door to be greeted by startled young Aikido students, in the gloomy heat and humidity.

“It’s fine, we are quite safe.” I assured her. “It’s Aikido!”

There was training in Wellington in New Zealand in 2015 and in the far flung outer reaches of Tasmania in 2012 along with seeking illusive dojos in Samoa in 2014 and possibly later this year in North Western China. (Perhaps not-but there may be other martial delights to explore). Not to mention ukemi in the surf at the inaugural beach training weekend run by Bendigo Dojo at Port Fairy.

For me, Summer School provides rural clubs such as Bendigo the opportunity to contribute and belong. Experiencing diverse training with fellow students under experienced and legendary Sansei, fuels the inspiration to return home to share the enthusiasm for the study over the ensuing year.

I have attended a number of Summer Schools including some presided over by Sugano Sensei; however the 2017 Melbourne Summer School was special for a different reason. I was aware that I trained for two people. This awareness was a connection with someone whom I admire for her independence of spirit, her commitment and for her steely Nikyo. (Having experienced it years ago at a TTC weekend in Clifton Hill). Even though not on the mat physically, Beverley Webster was in the corner of my vision on most occasions. I trained to be worthy of her bursary, noting her attentiveness to each instructor’s lessons.

There are, however, many women and men on the mat who train in a zone that is neither ‘Next Generation’ nor ‘respected or revered generation’. So fitting somewhere can seem fraught with difficulty and unique challenges. We people too have aspirations and stories to tell that may surprise, inform and enlighten.

The Beverley Webster Bursary recognises such people. It also enables young women such as my joint recipient this year, Anja Marzuki, a clear path, unencumbered by past prejudice, with Beverley as a trail blazer and role model supported also by the light of the Aikido Women publication edited by Linda Godfrey.

My mother, Sylvia, at eighty nine years, said that such recognition and awards “bind women together.”

The Beverley Webster Award says just that: you can be an individual and express yourself in training despite your gender, world view, or age.

I am also reminded of and comforted by the article by Tony Smibert ‘Four Stages of Training’ found in Volume 3, Number 3 of the Aikido in Australia National Newsletter and also ‘Training at an Older Age’ by John Litchen where the reality of training and aging is practically addressed.

My aim now is to train dynamically and to aspire to the grace and fluidity that I witnessed in many women on the mat at this year’s Summer School. To ‘re-youth’, assimilate lessons from Summer School and to focus on my next Kyu grading.

The Beverley Webster Award is a legacy.

It is natural. Women are warriors.

Thank you, Beverley.



Reflecting on Summer School by Anja Francina Marzuki



Myanmar Aiki Kai (New Organisation)
Chief Instructor. U Mya Sein (5th DAN), U Soe Lynn Htet (Assistant Manager)
37 WarKhaema Street, SanChaung Township. Yangon. Burma (off Baho Road)



Serendipity perhaps



Malang Aiki-Kai at Museum Brawijaya



The journey to summer school was a nerve wracking one for me. This would be a chance to live and breathe Aikido (when you weren't waiting in traffic), but who would be there? What would happen? Was I good enough to train with these people? And what on earth was I (a mere 2nd Kyu) doing training with that 7th Dan Shihan?

You hear all kinds of things about national schools and I've been hearing them for years. It's exhausting! (True!) Hanan Shihan loves Koshi Nage (True!) A terrifying fact for someone who is terrified of receiving that technique. Aikidoka from elsewhere train differently, their ukemi is different, their technique varies (True!) I knew this already from when I trained with Aiki-Kai Indonesia in Malang in late 2014 during an In-Country Language program run by my university.

I think one of the biggest realisations that I got, was that, Yes, I can do it! I remember that back when I first started Aikido at Monash University Aikido Club in 2009, the morning after a class I could barely move. I wasn't someone who participated in physical activities. Give me a good book and I was happy. I honestly can't even say why I did go to my very first class, but I fell in love with Aikido and despite the pain, I continued. It was an opportunity for me to come out of my shell, to interact with other people and to do more with myself. Quitting, half-way to my 4th Kyu was devastating, but I had to pull out due to financial reasons.

In 2014 when I returned, I fully expected to return to the pain, but was surprised when, while I was tired, I could move! I fell back into hanmi (maybe not easily) but I continued. TTC weekends, Special Training Days and Gradings! But, never a national school. Again, finances played a part in that, but it was more than that. I didn't think that I should be there. I wasn't good enough to do Aikido with people of that calibre and I wasn't fit enough to survive it.

A few months before summer school, after a TTC training day, a couple of guys from Monash asked me "Why aren't you tired?" We'd been at it for three hours and usually TTC's knock me out. It came to me as a real shock what I'd been asked. Sure, I was tired, but I wasn't exhausted. Before being asked this, it had never occurred to me, that I'd changed and grown in this way. Summer School almost became a possibility (maybe I would survive it after all!).

There was still the doubt that I wasn't good enough to be there, but I think it was Smibert Shihan before Tasmania 2016, who said that everyone misses out when someone, not matter if they're a Dan grade, or a Kyu grade, doesn't come to train. That we miss out on learning something about how to work with one another when someone doesn't come to a training gathering such as Summer School.

I set myself a goal on the first day of the school. I wanted to test myself and I wanted to learn. I didn't want to miss a single thing. I was going to go to every single class. I wanted

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to prove, not only to myself that I could it, but also show that I was worthy of the faith put in me by my instructors and those who recommended me for the Beverly Webster Award.

To step onto the mat and be able to train with anyone from a 5th kyu or below, to one of our 7th Dan Shihan's was truly a magical experience. You never knew who you were going to train with or what you were going to learn in addition to the Sensei's class.

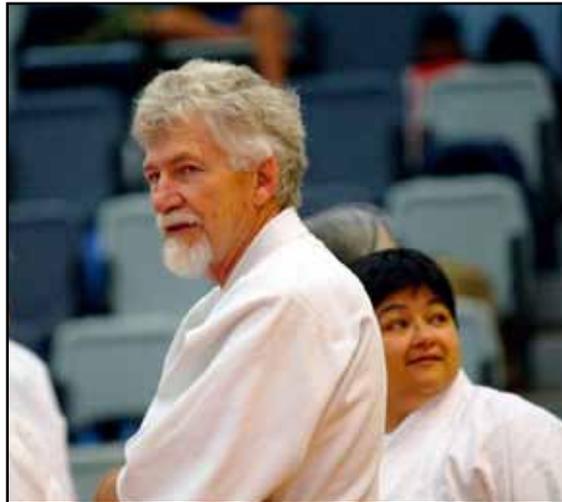
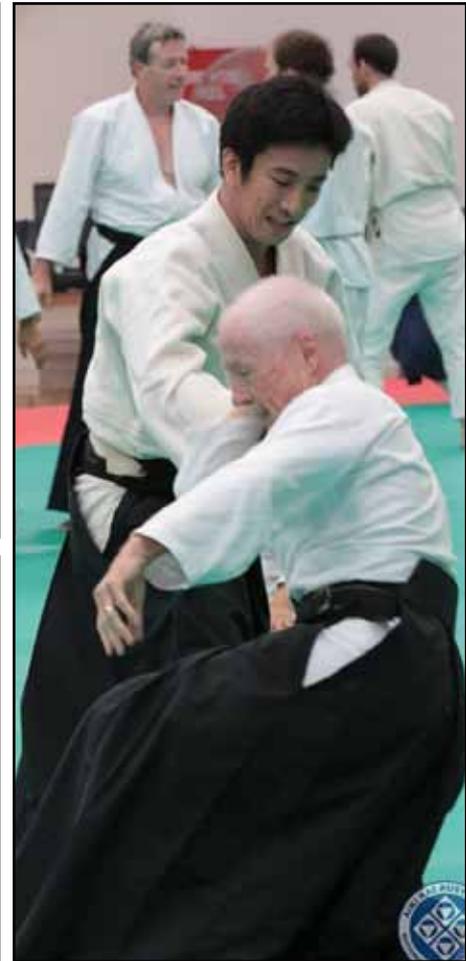
So, goal one: go to every class. Done. Goal two: not run away screaming like a baby when Hanan Janiv Shihan instructs on Koshi Nage. I did better than that, I let people throw me! Which might not seem like such a big deal to many, but to those who know me, they know what a struggle and journey it has been for me to not only work towards receiving forward ukemi,

but to actually receive a full Koshi (albeit very slow and clunky).

I am so glad that I went to Summer School and I cannot wait until I have the next opportunity to train at this level and with the same range of people again. It's truly an Aikido experience

I want to say thank you to all the instructors who gave their time to be there, from across Australia and internationally. To all the volunteers who made everything run smoothly, but most of all to Beverly, who, when I first started training, was an amazing training partner and I always wanted to train with her at TTC's and special training days. She's also an inspiration to all Australian Aikidoka, men and women alike, as to what can be achieved if you set your mind to it, no matter your age or gender. I can only hope to be half as good as Beverly in future, but onwards and forward, one lesson at a time, one grading at a time.





Images from Summer School



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