

Aikido 合気道 Australia



オーストラリア

Women in Aikido *Tony Smibert Sensei Christchurch Seminar*
Attending National Schools *Questions and Answers*

Spring - Summer 2001-2002

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Starting Aikido in Albany WA.

By Kim Tomlinson

Albany is a beautiful coastal town (about 30,000 people) in the South West of WA; 4-5 hours drive from Perth. I started the dojo a couple of months after moving down to Albany to live. In July this year the dojo will have been operating for 9 months.

When I started the classes none of the students had practiced Aikido before at all, so the instructing was pretty hard going with every student needing a lot of one on one attention. In the first three months the classes averaged about 6 people (5 men and one woman) per night and this hasn't changed much throughout the period.

About 3 months into the training, the classes started becoming a lot more enjoyable and inspiring for the students and me as their skills improved. I went to the summer school in Canberra and it was really helpful to do the instructor's course, to share my experiences and to seek advice from others who were running small rural dojos.

I don't really know why more women don't do Aikido. I'm sure though that having a female instructor does help to encourage women to train. The physical contact is something that I think is difficult for some women, particularly where self-image and body confidence is low. I also know as an instructor and as a student, I sometimes feel slightly less comfortable when I am the only woman in the

What I'm learning more and more as a female instructor is that I don't have to prove that I have the ability to instruct or to prove how wonderful Aikido is. All I need to do is simply pass on what I have learnt as clearly as possible. Those who are meant to find Aikido

class. Sometimes the energy can seem too harsh.

Knowing I am part of Aikikai really helps me in my teaching. I feel really supported by other people in Aikikai even if I only see them once a year at a National School.

Sometimes I look around the class and I think: "Wow I started this!" I feel really proud and excited to see the students doing so well. We are just starting to learn breakfalls at the moment and everyone is really excited by that. Many times I have come home from a class feeling quite euphoric. I feel so thankful for what Aikido has given me and it's even better when I can pass that onto the students.

I'm hoping that someone else will move down to Albany who can share the teaching with me, so we can train more often. I am reluctant to take holidays because it means everyone will miss a class and I don't want to break the continuity. I have been blessed with really great students down here who help out with the finances and other parts of running the dojo. We have a great time together. The whole experience has so far been very challenging, but also a very positive experience.

Albany Aikido trains twice a week Tuesday and Thursday evening at the PCYC. For more information Phone Kim: (08) 9842 6881.

Do-it-Yourself Autumn School in Northern Tasmania

by Wendy Albert

Three months time out can mean only one thing to an enthusiastic mature-age Aikido beginner. The opportunity to explore this amazing art and see to what degree a mature physical, mental and spiritual organism can discard established habits of posture, movement and thought to see and feel existence in a new perspective.

One of the elements of aikido that fascinates me is learning how to take a fall, accept defeat graciously and rise up and try again. An afternoon session at the last Summer School in Canberra run by Tony Smibert Sensei with Andrew Ross as uke showed me there was something special about the Tasmanian team. The session focussed on *Ukemi*. One analogy Smibert Sensei used was that of a chicken pecking around the ground as a preparation for rolling and receiving a technique, 'not to be afraid of the ground but to embrace it.'

Youthful memories of time once spent in Launceston, and the mild summer climate of northern Tasmania were also incentives. Living in the tropics on the edge of the desert is a wonderful way of life. But now and then one needs a break from the heat and humidity of the 'wet season' when sweat drips from the body at the thought of movement, and action on the mat has the added dimension of navigating the pools of sweat dripping from a wringing wet gi.

Compared to the Kimberley, Tasmania is a tiny place; easy to navigate, cool, clean, soft air, with accommodation cheap and comfortable. I found and settled in a beautiful mud brick 'cubbie' at the 'Hawthorn Villa' on top of a hill in the village of Carrick, midway between Launceston and Deloraine.

In Launceston I called John Karas Sensei to ask permission to train and find places and times. The adventure had started.

Karas Sensei emanates 'ki' from his whole being, encompassing all those on the mat with him, and leading them in safety to the experience of being united within themselves and their partners.

Andrew Ross flows like an elegant body of energy or tangible ki across the mat, either as uke or nage, blending with his partner so there is no choice but to 'relax and enjoy the technique and the movement.'

At the end of each session with these two men one is often left with the feeling that it would be quite possible to walk up walls with the power of their 'ki' like the characters in 'Crouching Tiger...'

In Deloraine Smibert Sensei firmly but gently ensures that each person understands how he or she is using their ki, leaving 'struggle' behind and finding the way to cause their ki to flow in harmony with their partner.

The Kyu grade classes on Tuesday nights with Smibert Sensei and Bodhi McSweeney give white belts an opportunity to hone essentials, ask questions and come to grips with the skills of rolling, tenkan, posture, etiquette, and the philosophy of Aikido. Bodhi provides a feminine balance amongst the instructors thus giving female students hope and inspiration in keeping pace with the men.

I had only a few sessions with another Deloraine instructor Martin Bratzil. He too provides a special experience of deep ki power drawing everyone on the mat into flowing exciting movement.

(Continued page 5)

Tony Smibert Sensei — Seminar in Christchurch.

This report from New Zealand courtesy of Andrew Williamson, Shinrykan Aikido Canterbury.

Photographs by Colin Pearson.

Aikido Shinryukan Canterbury hosted their annual spring seminar in Christchurch, 11th–12th of August, with guest instructor Tony Smibert Sensei, Rokudan, from Tasmania. Smibert Sensei is the senior Aikidoka living in Australia and resident head of Aiki-Kai Australia. He is also Vice President of the International Aikido Federation, and a long time student of Sugano Shihan.

The seminar was another step in building closer relationships between New Zealand and Australia which started with a visit to the 2000 Aiki-Kai Australia summer school by Andrew Williamson and Kevin Allen, followed earlier this year by Takase Shihan as the guest sensei to the 2001 Aiki-Kai Australia summer school.

During the weekend participants completed 9 hours of training leaving everyone tired but uniformly inspired and enthusiastic. A huge range of waza was covered along with bokken, jo, some nerve points and the kotodama. Smibert Sensei was able to impart much of his philosophy and ideas on Aikido in a simple, accessible and straightforward way. The enjoyment of all was evidenced by the question from many participants: when can Tony Sensei return?

Probably the highlight of Smibert Sensei's visit occurred on Tuesday morning 7-30 am after the weekend, when 10 very keen people assembled at Castle Rock on the Port Hills for mountain training. During this training a bitterly cold southern front set in bringing 50 km wind gusts, rain, sleet, and as we finished, snow. The training, sunrise and weather ensured this was an unforgettable experience for all there.

A total of 59 people attended the seminar with visitors to Christchurch from around New Zealand and even a couple from Australia.

It is our wish that all visitors, and especially Tony Smibert Sensei and family, enjoyed the week as much as the members of Aikido Shinryukan Canterbury, and will return soon.



In August, with permission from Takase Shihan and Sugano Shihan, I travelled to Christchurch for an Aikido seminar along with my family and all their ski gear.

What a wonderful place! And what wonderful people! Andrew Williamson Sensei and his wife Irene Williamson Sensei really went out of their way to make us welcome.

The Aikido there is great, with a large group of people attending every class — a credit to Takase Shihan, Andrew and all the instructors. Along the way I made lots of new friends, travelled through some of the most beautiful countryside I have ever seen and had the best family holiday imaginable.

My special thanks must go to Kevin Allen and Debbie who along with Andrew made it possible for us to visit some of the most idyllic spots on the planet. It seems to me that Kevin is wonderful ambassador for Aiki-Kai (Australia) in New Zealand.

Thank you New Zealand!

Tony Smibert.



Where Are the Women in Aikido?

By Linda Godfrey.

(The thoughts and ideas expressed in this article are mine and do not necessarily reflect those of Aiki-Kai Australia. Those people I do quote are with their explicit permission and I thank them for their contribution.)

The Statistics of Women in Aiki-Kai Today as at January 2001*

Whilst the percentages can be somewhat misleading, due to the relatively small numbers of students training in NT, TAS, ACT and SA, these graphs confirm what many of us already know anecdotally.

- Women are greatly under represented in Aiki Kai.
- States with the highest overall number of students have proportionately the lowest number of female students.
- ACT is the most successful state in terms of retaining female students as evidenced by the 25% female yudansha ratio. Possible reasons for this are explored below. However, the first graph shows that they are not so successful in attracting them.

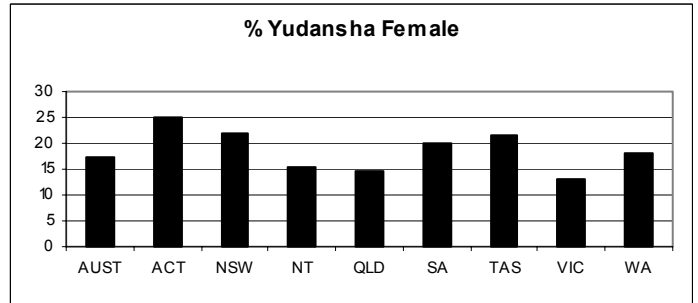
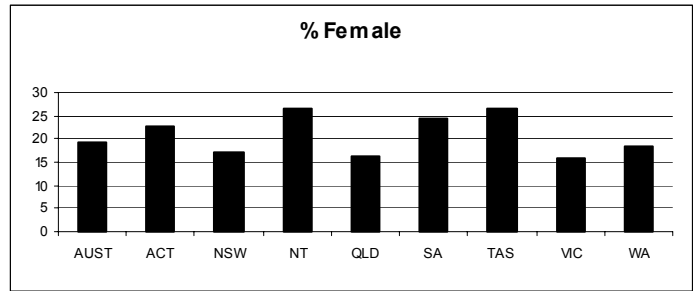
* Statistics supplied by Michael Nagle National Registrar

How the ACT Has Succeeded in Retaining Female Students

Those of us who have trained for some time have always felt the positive influence of the Canberra women. I know personally that I have received considerable support and encouragement from these ladies at the various national schools. Hanan Sensei and his students believe the reasons for their success are:

- Hanan Sensei's teaching where he emphasises flow not strength. Hanan Sensei told me that some years ago now he deliberately refocussed his teaching when the number of female students started to reach 60%.
- The strong presence of a core group of women, who not only trained but were instructors too. These women were seen as role models for other newer women.
- The beginner classes held at ANU attract a high proportion of female students.
-

Before Aiki-Kai can improve upon this situation we need to answer a fundamental question. Namely "Do we really want to take steps to address the situation?" If the answer is yes, then a policy direction needs to be set at a National level. Once this policy is established, then it is up to the States to take action at a local level. The only way to get women students is by having women students, while this sounds a paradox; the truth is that women will train where other women train.



Simple Options to Attract, Encourage and Retain Female Students Are:

- Appoint a female student at each dojo, who will act as a mentor to the women especially new women students. While this role is often done now, it is on an ad hoc basis generally in the changing room. The mentor would be the contact point who would, for instance, follow up with a female student who has missed classes for a few weeks.
- Run 10-week beginner classes a few times a year and have these overlap, into the main sessions. Women are attracted to courses, especially where everyone starts on a level playing field. Many women have done little sport involving physical contact sport and may have experienced physical abuse and can easily feel overwhelmed by mainstream classes where they might be the only beginners.
- Actively encourage female students to go for gradings. Women tend to wait to be told they are ready rather than asking.
- Encourage women to instruct, this creates positive role models. In Victoria, there is only one female teaching in contrast to the situation in Canberra. Women may be unable to commit to a teaching a regular session due to family commitments, however they may be able to teach once a fortnight or month, some flexibility is required.

The national statistics clearly show that Women in Aiki-Kai are under represented. I believe that copying and enhancing the successful practices of the ACT as outlined above can vastly improve this. What is obvious is that doing nothing will simply at best preserve the status quo.

women in aikido



(Do it Yourself Autumn School continued from page 2.)

Each one of these instructors has their own unique and powerful expression of Aikido technique and spirit. Their respect and affection for each other is obvious. Their special gifts blend easily with the modest and inspirational leadership of Tony Smibert Sensei.

I feel privileged and inspired by the learning experience provided by these people, and the other Yudanshas – Lindsay, Peter, Nathan and Luke, who all embody the ethos of Aikido and are unfailing in their enthusiasm, skill and kindness in bringing the kyu grades along the learning path. My white belt companions also, reflect their seniors' spirit and dedication. They made a stranger in their midst feel welcome and provided great support and encouragement in the learning process.

Editor: Anyone can do what Wendy has done, in any state. The people to contact for info are the Area Reps listed on page 8.

Attending National Schools By John Litchen

Summer School is just around the corner.

Isn't it time you started to think about making arrangements for discount travel to Melbourne? You need to plan now for time off, and to save enough funds to allow you to take part in this intensive week of Aikido.

Why should I go to a national school, especially if I am a beginner? You may ask.

Apart from the fact that it is a requirement for senior students to attend at least one national school a year, the schools are open to students of all ranks.

The most important reason for attending a national school is that you will be able to practice aikido under the supervision of Sugano Shihan (8th Dan). If you are unsure of something, you have the opportunity at a national school to actually ask Sensei how he wants you to do it. As he moves

through the dojo watching the students train he is quite relaxed about this, and will happily demonstrate what he wants you to do. Regardless of what rank you hold Sensei is always willing to assist you. If you have questions of a technical nature you would like answered, Sensei holds periods during which you can ask and he will answer. He may even use you to demonstrate the point he is making to answer your question.

It's worth being particularly observant at National schools, watching carefully everything Sensei demonstrates. He will usually demonstrate something fast at first, so you can see effect of the technique as a whole. He will then show it several times at slower speeds, and once quite slowly so you can clearly see the parts that make up the whole. He will not break it into steps but will keep it slow enough to allow you to see the various stages while still maintaining continuous movement. He may demonstrate a series of techniques that are very similar and will want you to do all of them. So you must watch carefully. The teaching at National schools is different from that of a regular class. There are no explanations. You must simply try your best to emulate what Sensei does. This means your concentration and focus is very important.

Another reason to attend a National school is the opportunity to practice with many different people from all over the country. This includes many senior people you would not normally see or have the chance to practice with. All of these people, like yourself, have only one goal, and that is to learn from Sensei, to observe how he does things, and to refine what they have been practicing and teaching throughout the year. They also have the opportunity to take ukemi for Sensei.

By taking ukemi they learn exactly what Sensei expects a technique to feel like. They feel and begin to understand with their whole body what the technique is supposed to be like. Later they can analyse it from a practical or even a philosophical point of view, and thus improve their own general knowledge of Aikido.

At a National school it is worthwhile taking every opportunity to train with someone senior, or if not, then with someone you do not know or only rarely see. Being with someone unfamiliar you will be unable to predict or anticipate how they will move, and as a result you will be more sensitive, more attuned to your partner, and certainly more focussed. By the end of the week's training your Aikido will have improved enormously.

Another wonderful thing about National schools is the camaraderie. The joy of meeting friends you don't see often enough, and making new friends with whom you can share ideas and concepts after the training in the evenings. It's very exciting, and this often carries over into the next day's training with everyone giving their best to make the training truly memorable.

One of the highlights of a National school is the Yudansha grading test. Even if you can't be involved directly as Ukes, you are involved as participants of the National school. You should be properly dressed and seated on the mat to lend support to those taking the test. The test is not a test as such (though technique must be performed correctly and to the best of one's ability), but it is an affirmation of their understanding of Aikido to that point in their life. All of those testing are of various ages and physical abilities, but what they all have in common is their dedication to studying Aikido, and their willingness to do their best, no matter how tired or exhausted they become.

Of course there is generally a party of some sort the evening after the test, sometimes official, sometimes not, where everyone can have a great time, and even socialise with Sensei in relaxed way.

Another important reason for attending National schools is that Sensei and the Technical Teaching Committee can keep track of your individual progress form year to year. If you think you will not be noticed, then think again. If you are not there, you will be missed.

Editor: *I'm always asking various senior students questions in the hope of generating ideas for contributions and articles which could be published in this newsletter/magazine. When*

David Scott Sensei suggested we do a question and answer column, I jumped at the idea. So to kick it off, David is the first of the very senior students to get a question to answer. He and I both hope other senior students and instructors can be persuaded to contribute.

Question and Answer. By David Scott Sensei

In recent years Sugano Sensei has spoken of Aikido training as having three aspects:

1. Aikido as we have always practised it. While this probably requires some explanation I do not intend to go into it at this time.
2. The Master offers the Student something as a "package". By way of illustration, examples here would include a particular sword (eg. "Ichi no Ken") or jo sequence (eg. the 22 count Jo "Kata").
3. Question and Answer. While Sensei was referring to the opportunity to ask questions of the master, I think there is value in us asking questions of each other and sharing our answers.

I find answering a question in writing is more difficult than answering a question in class. The question and answer lose their context. The moment has passed. It is however, one of the features of language that it enables communication that is not contextually based. We should be able therefore to find ways to say things worth saying even though an answer for print will require more thought. Only a small amount of effort is required to write in to such a column and I would encourage all Aikidoka to do it. It will help us all to hear what others think and everyone can make a valued contribution.

Question: Sensei in this class we have been training tai jutsu (empty hand techniques) can we achieve the same results from training at home with the jo?

Reply: The only way to realise the training we have just done is to have been here and taken this class. This opportunity is lost. The training available in each class is unique. Aikido training is predominantly a matter of relationship and precious little Aikido can be practised on your own. Training with the jo is however, an important part of Aikido training and individual training with the jo is possible. Training with the jo is good training indeed and some of the aspects of training in class can also be found in solo practise at home. It is, for example, physical exercise and does require us to bend our knees! I would recommend people train with the jo (actually symbolic of the spear) and encourage them to consider doing this practise at home and in the dojo before class.

(continued page 8)

Women and Aikido.

By Kathy McCarthy

Warwick Aikido Club, Qld
(Nidan, Assistant Instructor)

Women – okay I'm female but I spent my formative years in a male dominated family (by this I mean numbers). My five brothers and I were best friends and best enemies while we were growing up, hence I relate much better to males than females and therefore feel comfortable in a male dominated activity.

Aikido – what can I say after ten years of constant, regular training?
While fascinated I still feel I'm struggling to get a firm grasp on things.

Women and Aikido - Put these two words together and it isn't any easier. Those women senior to me that I met occasionally during special weekend training sessions as I came up through the Kyu grades have mostly disappeared. Shodan appears to have been their goal. I also don't see many more newcomers. At national schools I have always felt there was a club there that I didn't belong to. (But I take responsibility for that. See my comments above).

Why did I start doing Aikido?

My kids wanted to learn "karate or something" and a member of the then not very old Warwick Aikido club suggested Aikido to me. (The kids dropped out after about six months. I think children prefer to learn to kick and punch.) I was to say the least, intrigued. I'm not the sporty type. I never willingly did any sport at school. I wasn't looking to learn self-defence, I don't see the need, but I have discovered there is something deeper to be found in Aikido.

Introduction - a positive move.

My friend picked us up and took us to training and introduced us. This was easier than walking in off the street into a strange place full of strange people.

Involvement – another positive move.

I didn't have transportation. They said if I looked after the bookkeeping, they would make sure I got to classes. I'm still the treasurer.

Simplicity.

Eyeing off a couple of teenagers (who incidentally stopped training not long after) playing on the mat throwing each other into spectacular rolls, I innocently asked how long it generally took to be able to do stuff like that. Six months I was told, anyone can learn. It took me considerably longer but I got there.

The carrot.

Imagine a small group of enthusiasts (most of whom stopped training years ago) with 3rd kyu the most senior grade in a 200 kilometre radius. It's male dominated and I'm the token female. We train three times a week. I'm the klutz with three left feet and I'm scared stiff of being thrown. Approached in an apprehensive way I was told 'they' would like to make

Saturday classes for seniors only. I nodded disappointedly, I understood. After thinking about it and looking at the profile of other student in our club, I realised a simple sex change would have got me admission under what senior meant at that time. Next Saturday I turned up for class and have seldom missed one since.

Our Club.

We have had very few women in our club. Many only stay a short while. One or two have done their first grading before leaving (but men are the same). Over the last few years we have only had 3 new women through our doors two trained for awhile and decided it wasn't for them and have gone on to do the gentler art of tai chi. The other still trains but finds it hard with 3 young children. Occasionally we have more females on the mat than males.

My Personal View.

I think it is only the very rare adolescent (male or female) that can bring the commitment needed for Aikido at time when they are exploring the big picture of life. From personal observation of ages and where people are at in their Aikido I would assume most people start training seriously in Aikido during the years between twenty and forty-five. This is when many women are bearing and raising children, and juggling a career. To be able to put in the time and energy to make a commitment to Aikido would require support in some form. Older women like their male counterparts are intrigued by Aikido but tend to feel that it is beyond them physically and seem to prefer tai chi or yoga.



Kathy having fun at Winter School.

Please note:

Next Summer School in January 2002, is to be at Melbourne Uni. Details will be available soon in a special bulletin to be released closer to the time. (training from 7th to 12th January – registration 6th January at University college.) Also Winter school 2002 is to be held on the Gold Coast in July (8th to 13th) 2002.

David Scott Sensei answers (continued from Page 6).

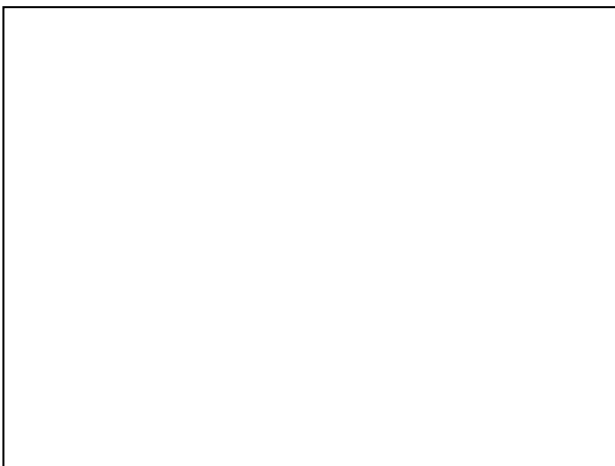
I think the best way to think about such practise is to imagine you are taking instruction from the jo. Allow the jo to instruct your movements. In this way, we are training in relationship with the jo and our surroundings. It is not a simple matter of "when the jo goes up our body does also". In fact sometimes when the jo goes up the body movement is down. There is however a coordinated relationship between our body movement and that of the jo.

There is value too in imagining we are training in relation to others even though they are not present. As we train with this weapon we can develop a sense of the movement of energy in the space around us - up and down, left and right, forward and back. Free movement, learning specific sequences, practising them on both sides and going through these movements in relation to different orientations in space (ie. to the different points of the compass) are all good forms of practise. They do not however seem to prepare us well for training with a partner. Thus there are "dangers" in training on your own. You can be at risk of simply training inside your head as if to some pre-determined pattern. Having learnt a pattern it is best to break it up and put the movements together in different sequences.

On your own, it is also possible to imagine all kinds of achievements only to find that these are not realised in training with a partner on the mat. In class, we train with each other and have to adapt to our training partner and to the changes taking place within the space of the dojo. Aikido training is potentially at its best when we train in a group with others, and our accomplishments are likely to be greater when we train with a variety of partners. It is also in our relationships with others that the aspects of Aikido other than the physical/technical can develop.

David Scott Sensei, a Clinical Psychologist, believes that inquiry and self reflection are essential to Aikido Practice. David is the Area Representative for South Australia. phone / fax on (08) 8390 3322.

Questions for this column should be sent to the editor.



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