

# *Aikido in Australia*

*Aiki Kai Australia National Newsletter*

*Volume 2 number 4 Spring 2008*

合  
氣  
道



*Remembering Ken Cottier Shihan....  
O'Sensei in Tanabe....  
International Aikido Federation Congress  
Reports....  
Training in New York....  
Aikido, Shiatsu, and Ukemi....*

**Founder of Aiki Kai Australia  
President & Technical Director  
S. Sugano 8<sup>th</sup> Dan Shihan**

**Vice President and National Area Representative**

**Tony Smibert 6<sup>th</sup> Dan**  
179 Mole Creek Rd., Deloraine, TAS, 7304  
Tel: (W) 03 6362 3326 (H) 03 6362 2474

**Technical Teaching Committee**

**Tony Smibert, 6<sup>th</sup> Dan, Hanan Janiv, 6<sup>th</sup> Dan, Robert Botterill, 6<sup>th</sup> Dan, John Watson, 6<sup>th</sup> Dan, Andrew Dziedzic, 6<sup>th</sup> Dan.**

TTC Contact address: c/o 5 Bertram St. Eastwood, NSW, 2122.  
Tel: 02 9858 5241 e-mail: dziedzic@bigpond.net.au

**Area Representatives**

**ACT**

**Hanan Janiv, 6<sup>th</sup> Dan** 23 Crest Rd., Queenbeyan, ACT 2620.  
Tel/Fax: 02 6297 8258

**NSW**

**Andrew Dziedzic, 6<sup>th</sup> Dan** 5 Bertram St. Eastwood, NSW, 2122.  
Tel: 02 9858 5241

**NT**

**Richard Barnes, 6<sup>th</sup> Dan.** PO Box 254. Darwin, NT, 0801  
Tel: 089 816 964

**QLD**

(Area Committee contact) **Chris Seto-Payne 4<sup>th</sup> Dan.** 11 Ortive St.  
Yeronga, Qld 4104. Tel: H. 07 3892 7551. W. 07 3379 1831.

**SA**

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

**TAS**

**John Karas 5<sup>th</sup> Dan.** 43 David St. East Launceston, TAS, 7250.  
Tel: 03 6334 6144 Mob: 0418 585 702

**VIC**

**Geoff Savage 6<sup>th</sup> Dan.** 72 Mansfield St. Thornbury, Vic. 3071.  
Tel: 03 9484 5483

**WA**

**Hugh Derham 6<sup>th</sup> Dan.** PO Box 1274. East Victoria Park, WA, 6981. Tel:  
08 9367 6407. Fax 08 9368 6408 Mobile. 0421 342 857

**Chairman of Administration:**

**Austin James.** 75 Highgate St. Bexley, NSW, 2207  
Tel. 02 9580 2627 (H) email: ausjam1@gmail.com

**General Editor and Publisher**

**John Litchen.** PO Box 3503. Robina Town Ctre, QLD, 4230  
Tel: 07 5578 8748

E-mail: jlitchen@bigpond.net.au

**Contributing Editor**

**Bodhi McSweeney** c/o PO Box 69, Meander, 7304  
E-mail: tenchi\_farm@bigpond.com

**Registrar**

**Kathy McCarthy.**

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

**Webmaster:**

**John Rockstrom.** phone: H 03 9757 2926, W 03 9788 7776  
mobile 0411 115 235.

**Aikido in Australia** — official journal of Aiki Kai Australia Inc.

**Website:** <http://www.aikido.org.au/>

Print Post Publication number: PP424022/00903.

Address for official documents: GPO Box 2783EE. Melbourne, Victoria, 3001.

Copyright of material remains with each individual author. Opinions expressed are those of the authors and not that of Aiki Kai Australia Incorporated.

Aiki Kai Australia is the sole qualifying organisation for Aikido with the Federal Government National Coaching Accreditation Scheme.

All members are advised that Aiki Kai Australia is a signatory to the anti-doping policy developed by the Australian Coaching Council and consequently all students are bound by the rules of the policy. A copy of this policy is available on Coaching Council website.

**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.*

**From the Editor:**

Over 30 Australians attended the IAF Congress and Seminar in Tanabe this year. Both Sugano Sensei and Smibert Sensei taught at the Seminar and both were appointed by Doshu to the Senior Council of the IAF. The appointment of Sugano Shihan is very significant, because it places him at the highest level among the Japanese Shihans.

Many significant events were also held, including a commemoration at the family grave of O'Sensei and Kisshomaru Doshu and a Shinto ceremony at historic Kumano Shrine. This was followed by the International Aikido Embukai at which our own Robert Botterill Sensei and Marie Petery Sensei demonstrated at the Shrine. We've covered this with a couple of reports and some splendid photos from Linton Tuleja.

The Senior Council of the IAF is comprised of a number of very senior Shihan who have been appointed to this council by Doshu. One of their many responsibilities is to protect the ethics of Aikido. Members of this council include Tada Sensei, Isoyama Sensei, Tamura Sensei, Yamada Sensei, Asai Sensei, and most recently Sugano Sensei and the only westerner to be appointed Smibert Sensei. Incidentally, Smibert Sensei is one of the very few non Japanese to teach at the IAF Congress. (In my view this is quite an honour and we should all be proud of this.)

Australia has participated on the IAF from the very beginning with Smibert Sensei being a Vice Chairman for just on 20 years. His new role as a member of the Senior Council is a continuation of our belief in the IAF and the role it plays worldwide.

Sugano Sensei was recently appointed to the Senior Council by Doshu and this clearly identifies and affirms him as one of the most senior Japanese Shihans in the world. As President and founder of Aiki Kai Australia he takes our training very seriously, visiting twice a year for national schools. Very soon we hope he will organise one of his 'Inner Aikido Schools' in Australia. Another special event planned to take place in October 2009 will be the **Cherry Blossom training**, (*Hanabi Keiko*) in Tasmania. This is to be an annual event with Senseis Smibert, Botterill, and Janiv teaching. There will be a feature about this in the next newsletter.



## A recent interview with Tony Smibert Shihan.

*Tony Smibert Sensei is Vice President of Aiki-Kai Australia and has been the National Area Representative since 1979. He recently retired from the position of International Aikido Federation Vice Chairman and has been appointed by Doshu to the Senior Council of the IAF.*

*Q. Could you give the readers of this publication a brief idea of the recent developments within Aiki Kai Australia?*

Over the last few years we've been gradually maturing our organisation by putting into place changes that would position us to pass responsibility to a new generation. These changes included the restructuring of Aiki-Kai (Australia) along guidelines requested by the Federal Government and the positioning of Sugano Shihan's Aikido Foundation to perform here in Australia as something like the Aikikai Foundation in Japan. From January we'll have a new-look Board so that, where we used to have a Council largely made up of Area Representatives – all appointed by Sugano Sensei – now the majority of the Board will be elected. We need to have young people on this Board and people identified for their proven skills in getting the sorts of things done that we now need to have happen. I think this is a great stage to be at...

*Q. It appears that student numbers have dropped over the last few years as older people leave, retire, or are no longer able to train as they once did. Is there any way we can attract a younger generation to take up Aikido?*

We also have to recognise that the sorts of ideas that attracted earlier generations to take up Aikido may not apply to the current younger generation. Consequently we're now going to survey our younger members and enlist their help to take Aikido out to their generation. John Rockstrom Sensei, one of Sensei's original students and professionally very experienced in this sort of surveying, has created the survey which will then go to a group of younger instructors that he will chair. (John's personal history includes the fact that he left home as a teenager back in the 60's to study Judo and classical martial arts in Korea and Japan.)

*Q. Do you think there could be any other reasons why numbers are down slightly, other than the retirement of older students? Has Aikido lost relevance to the younger generation making their way out into the world today?*

Martial arts organisations grow and subside as a result of lots of factors, including whether or not it is currently 'fashionable' to train in a martial art. We can't manipulate our training to make it more attractive and I don't think anyone would want us to. We are also not an independent, eclectic, home-grown 'style' of aikido. We are original Aikido within the Aikikai and still the only officially recognized Aikikai organisation in Australia training under one of the world's leading masters. We have history, evolution and a high level of experience nationwide. Sugano Shihan takes us (and our training) very seriously and we return the respect. Also, because we are part of the Founder's original organisation, we respect and follow Hombu's international regulations, remain active members of the IAF and structure all our activities to protect the integrity of Aikido within our organisation.

*Q. Lately there have been a number of other organisations*

*outside of Aiki Kai Australia teaching Aikido that have grown quite rapidly. No doubt some people who would potentially have come to Aiki Kai Australia have joined these other organisations instead. They are obviously more commercially orientated and do seem to be gaining students. Is there anything we can do to counter this trend, and to make Aiki Kai Australia more attractive to them?*

Aikido dojos outside the Aikikai and without the connections I mentioned a moment ago have little to constrain them from doing as they will and according to their own understanding. We've always focussed on our own development within our own school. Sensei used to say 'quality not quantity' so we have been relatively non-commercial. Just recently we've had to seriously consider Sugano Sensei's future and his capacity to continue to teach and support us – physically and financially – and so our focus has had to shift towards establishing structures and a level of funding that could ensure the longer term future of Aiki-Kai (Australia).

While I realise that there may be some people who don't understand why they are now paying a larger lump sum in the middle of the year rather than in parts through the year, fortunately the matter has been strongly supported by the membership and so we can move on with the building of Sensei's Foundation. The model for all this is the Aikikai Foundation in Japan, of course, so we're reasonably confident we are on the right track.

*Q. There is talk that Sensei will hold very soon an 'Inner Aikido School' in Australia. Can you tell us something about this?*

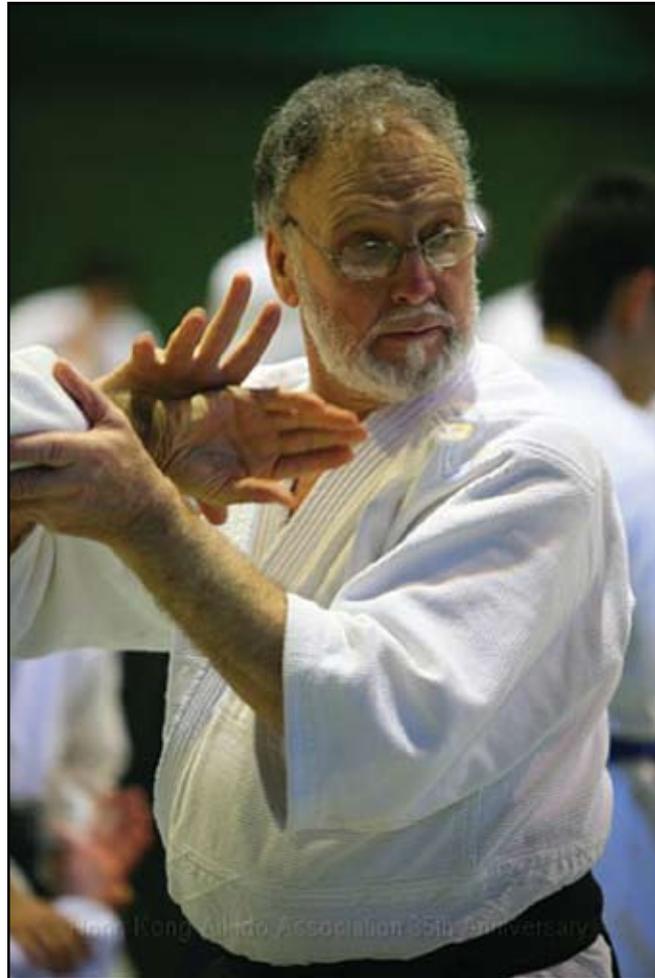
Over recent years a number of Australians have attended Sensei's Inner School of Aikido in Belgium. This is a special seminar he runs for a smaller number of mostly younger trainees. Sensei sees this as a critical way to build the younger generation. Here, we've asked one or two promising, younger yudansha to take up the initiative of organising such a course to take place in Australia. In so far as possible they will do this independently, authorised by the Aiki-Kai and working directly with Sugano Sensei – but with the costs underwritten by his Foundation. This will be one of the first clear results of the restructuring of his Foundation, enabling us to keep the cost of participating in the Inner School much, much lower.

*Q. with Summer School about to occur, is there any news regarding that which will be of interest to attendees?*

These are just some of the things that I think are exciting at present. Oh, and of course, this Summer School we will be welcoming Irie Shihan as Sugano Sensei's guest instructor. Irie Sensei is one of the younger Shihan teaching at Hombu. Next Winter School we will have Osawa Shihan as guest instructor and hope to co-ordinate Winter School with the opportunity for students to go to Malaysia for Sugano Sensei's MAA anniversary Seminar and, if it can be done to follow Winter School with the Inner School. Then, later in the year, there will be a special-focus training based at Sugano Dojo in Northern Tasmania and taught by the Senior TTC instructors (The Foundation Shihankai). We have interest from overseas trainees for that as well. We intend to provide as many opportunities and events as our new circumstances will allow us, so there is quite a lot happening.

*Thank you Sensei for taking time out to answer these questions.*

*JL. Editor.*



Ken Cottier Shihaan teaching during the 35th Hong Kong Anniversary



Cottier Shihaan at Aiki Kai Australia's 40th anniversary in Melbourne, 2006.

Far right: teaching in Melbourne.

# Remembering Ken Cottier Shihan

Graham Morris Sensei

During 1971 I was a teenager studying Aikido in my home town of Liverpool, England. My teacher at that time was Jean Hill and I still recall very clearly the day when she said to me and my fellow students that we will be having a visit from a great instructor who will be taking classes the following week.

Jean Hill spoke of him very highly and how he had trained with the founder of Aikido – Morihei Ueshiba O’Sensei.

I was so looking forward to this week and to meeting this man of such importance. Through my own ignorance, I assumed, as did all of my fellow students, that he was Japanese, and hoped that I would understand him; being a young and naïve youth, it never occurred to me that this great teacher was anything else but Japanese!

The night arrived when we would finally come face to face with this new great master arriving from Japan. We were kneeling on the mats in seiza and being all proper when our instructor Jean walked in with a gentleman in tow. We were absolutely astonished to discover this gentleman was an Englishman; in fact he was one of the lads from the Wirral just over from the River Mersey, Liverpool.

We were not disappointed he wasn’t Japanese, just taken aback if I recall now, as we had all assumed he was from Japan.

How proud all of us young bucks felt to think that we had our very own “English” Sensei to train with and to think that he was born and bred here!

Following the formal introductions Ken Cottier Sensei told us how he trained with O’Sensei and traveled to other countries promoting Aikido while also adding that he was the founder of Hong Kong Aiki-Kai.

That first class he took was one of the many I was to have with Ken Cottier Sensei and the stories he told of his move from Liverpool to Japan and of the experiences he had were inspiring to say the least and are still very vivid in my mind.

Over the years Ken kept in touch with Christmas cards, Birthday Cards and postcards from various spots around the world during his travels always keeping us up-to-date with his whereabouts and my family and I were privileged on a few occasions to have him stay with us on the Gold Coast.

In the November of 2006 I took Rachel my daughter with me to Hong Kong for the 35<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebrations of the Hong Kong Aiki-Kai. This was a trip I will never forget, because not only did I have the company of my lovely daughter, but it was (unknown to me at the time) to be the last time I was to spend with my dear friend. The three of us spent many hours together laughing and reminiscing of times gone by with the promise to keep in touch once again. My very last contact with Ken was a Christmas card from him in early December 2007.

Ken Cottier Sensei was a man of distinction, an inspiration to me and my mentor, and what I have learnt from him I will keep very dear in my heart and will endeavour to continue on my path of learning with the knowledge that this great man has given me. Ken was a true friend to me, my family and my students and will be dearly missed.

Ken Cottier Shihan with Graham Morris Sensei at the old Burleigh West Dojo, Gold Coast Queensland (circa 1998)





### Opening of Sugano Dojo- Deloraine

January 2008 saw the naming of Sugano Dojo in Deloraine. The dojo itself has been open since 1985 but this marked the beginning of a new phase and focus agreed to by Sugano Shihan.

Sugano Shihan taught a class on the Friday evening and then conducted a dedication ceremony on Saturday, also followed by a class. The dojo was packed with people from all over the State. The feeling was very intense – especially being on such a small mat area with Sensei. There was a sense of everyone doing the best that they could to honour the moment so the energy was alive and quietly respectful.

The dedication ceremony began when Sugano Sensei hand-painted a traditional dojo sign in calligraphy onto timber to remain in the dojo. He then picked up a bokken and, with some movement and incantation, declared the Dojo open as Sugano Dojo.

Like all Aikikai dojos, Sugano Dojo is intended a place for people Australia wide to visit and train. But as well as regular classes there are plans for intensive training courses including a special annual training when Deloraine's plantings of Japanese cherry trees flower along the river bank in front of the dojo. (For many years now, the Deloraine dojo has organised a flower viewing party ('*hanami*') which has become something of an event. This 'Cherry Blossom' training, to be taught by Botterill Sensei, Janiv Sensei and our 'local' shihan Smibert Sensei, is already attracting interest from around Australia and overseas.

Over the years various first kyu students have come to Deloraine for a time as part of their intensive preparation for Shodan. Special trainings were then held for them as well as trainings in Launceston and Devonport. The new Hanami Training at the renamed dojo will be a focus of the opportunity for those doing intensive study as well as anyone else who wishes to participate.

The Spirit of Aikido was very much alive in the dojo and remained so later during the celebration dinner at the local pub.



Waka Sensei Mitsuteru Ueshiba in Auckland March 2005

### Marriage of Mitsuteru Ueshiba also known as Waka Sensei

Doshu sent a letter to all Aiki Kai Australia as well as other Aikikai organizations around the world in April and the text of this letter is reproduced here.

April 20, 2008.

I hope this letter finds you in best of health.

I am very happy to inform you that my son, Mitsuteru Ueshiba, was married to Miss Keiko Kusano on March 2<sup>nd</sup> of this year.

Your continued and good favour would be much appreciated.

Sincerely yours,  
Moriteru Ueshiba.

*We were asked by Sugano Sensei to organise a gift, and we sent a beautiful silver tray with a plaque as a gift from Sugano Sensei and Aiki Kai Australia to Waka Sensei and his wife. He was kind enough to reply with a note of thanks and appreciation.*

## The Value of Special Training Classes for Beginners... by Kit Elliott.

When I was first interested in trying Aikido in 1994 I was lucky enough to be able to participate in a special introductory six week course for beginners only. This took place in Launceston in what was then the Dojo in a beautiful little old, deconsecrated church. There were six of us, all women, so the teacher who was a 4th Dan invited a woman Shodan to help with the demonstration. From the very first I was enthralled and captivated. I was 42 years old, had never done much sport though not from lack of trying. — I just was never good enough to be picked for the team in anything I tried so I gave up.

Aikido is non-competitive. It's similar to trying to beat one's personal best so there is an element of competition but against oneself. This was the activity for me!!

At the first session the instructor explained quite a lot. The female assistant who was a friend of mine explained after that this was not the normal training. Usually there was minimal talk and one learnt by "doing". Repetition is the key.

We also learned a few basic terms and very importantly

we learnt "Dojo Etiquette" which has stood me in good stead. (I have seen many a beginner in regular training struggling to remember all the "House Rules" and some oblivious to them).

The third session of the 6 week course was taken by another instructor. He did little talking. He had us on the move. We loved it and when he demonstrated a roll with his arms folded in front of him I heard and felt the swish of his hakama. It was poetry in motion. My love affair with Aikido had begun.

That was late 1994. Early in 1995 I took up all my courage and fronted at the Deloraine dojo. My friend wasn't there but there were a few familiar faces from around town.

As far as I know I am the only person who continued out of those six beginners. I know Aikido isn't for everyone but it is certainly for me and I very much appreciate having been able to do a dedicated beginners course. I also liked the way I didn't feel that I was holding up a regular class, which is a worry a lot of beginners relate. The explanations were important as was the demonstration of where Aikido could lead.

At Summer school in January 2008 a number of senior students were interviewed. Each person was asked the same three questions, and their answers were both recorded and video taped.

I believe that at some time in the future these video interviews will be available on the website, but for the moment I thought it would be nice if readers of this publication could see the interviews, so I present the first three of them here.

The questions with some slight variation to each person were:

*How has aikido changed your life?*

*Looking back over 40 years of training do you have a particular memory of Sugano Sensei, or an impression that profoundly affected you, or gave some insight into the kind of person Sensei is?*

*Looking forward, what do you hope for the future in Aikido and for*

## Hanan Janiv Sensei

Well it altered my whole activity. I had a different life before. Now I have a new one. Aikido has done that. It just took over my life. It's taken over. I don't quite understand. You get addicted and suddenly it's just total engulfment. I think about Aikido all the time.

I would say the very first time I met Sugano Sensei was in the dojo when I tried to watch a class, to attend his dojo.

I knew of him having classes in Sydney, so I looked out and found them. When I did find the class I was standing an hour and a half at the door before he even attended to me. So I basically stood there in a total daze and realized, indeed, this is what I wanted to do. So I had to trade. In my case I had to trade something else. I was heavily involved in Judo and I'd done some Karate, and I thought, well no... This is what I really want to do. And it was quite hard. I was a dan grade in another Art. I had to don a white belt and to join in the class, so I remember very distinctly the first night I came.

Sensei was conducting the class and he was so inspirational to me. I thought, *the thing that strikes me most is his smile...* you know he was constantly smiling. It seemed such a happy event being on the mat compared to my other experiences where people are there all the time to get you, so his whole demeanour, and attitude grabbed me.



I'm hoping Aikido will remain a little bit more of what it was rather than evolving and changing into something totally different, which I see is something happening to other arts. My concern is not to wash down Aikido too much and make it something esoteric and totally something different to what it actually is.

## Robert Botterill Sensei



There are many special memories of Sensei, but I think very early on the single characteristic I remember is the way he could move in Suwari Waza, almost as though he didn't touch the mat. He seemed to float over it and his power was so effortless and so natural that I thought to myself: it was very different to the Karate spirit which was all power and aggression as I had experienced it. I thought he taught me the meaning of cooperation.



When I started training I was about 18 and I was learning several martial arts, and they all had different characters. Karate was powerful and dangerous. Judo was a lot of strength and nasty. Fencing was very subtle but extremely intent to kill people, and Aikido which didn't have any of those characters.

After a while, like about 10 years, I suddenly gave them all up, except Aikido, because it's me. So that changed all of my life because that meant I changed how I talked to people, how I did business...(I became) less competitive with other people, more cooperative with other needs and people...

I guess I'm far enough in the organization to think in a global sense, to be a little concerned with possibly the way it's going.

I see Aikido as a very pure martial art. People talk about: is it a martial art at all?

To me it's a very ultimate martial art, because you have to accept both authority from above, and responsibility for juniors.

As in any art, you have to train with total intensity and alertness – These are things to me that make a martial art – because of the outcome which is to control people. If it was another art... it would still be the similar except for the way the outcome works and the control of people. But still that's what I want for the world rather than national organizations and small groups fighting each other.

I think that's a sign of my own view.





## Tony Smibert Sensei

Aikido and Sugano Sensei really changed my life.

It's hard to imagine who I would have been or what I would have done without it, but it took me to Japan. It gave me insight into art and I'm now a professional painter.

It gave me a means to find myself as a teenager. Having a man to teach me who could be my mentor, who was admirable and who was someone worth following was a very important thing to me at that stage of my life, and I would probably describe myself as being a fairly confused boy as a teenager.

I could see that not only the art but the teacher I had access to was profoundly impressive.

It's a bit like falling in love and your relationship evolves with that person, but the moment you see them you know. So for Aikido it's meant everything...Aikido meant everything to me in terms of really my whole life, and my life without it...it's hard to imagine who I would be.

Probably my most formative memory of Sugano Sensei was one of the first trainings I attended with him where at the end of the class he asked me if I would like to attack him. And as a boy I thought this was fantastic, so I remember rushing in at him...and suddenly I felt like I was caught in a big wave and I literally didn't know if he'd touched my hand or my head or my foot, and then I was whooshing down onto the sand as if caught in a breaker...but it was gentle and I landed so softly...and I remember jumping up and thinking WOW! Terrific!

I rushed at him again and I jumped onto him. He must have let me come behind his back and I looked over his shoulder and he seemed to be fumbling with my hands...and I thought: he's not so good...and I suddenly realised he was being gentle and had no need to prove himself or prove something at my expense... and from that point on I knew I would always be safe with him.

In order to be able to trust the teacher and be able to throw yourself and know that as your ukemi evolved you would always be safe was a vitally important part of my relationship with Sensei from that point on...which he's never disappointed.

I guess my dream for the future is that we will continue to develop our organization here in Australia as we have at the beginning, respecting Sensei's idea which is quality not quantity necessarily, and to remember what he has created here is enshrined in everyone of us and collectively we make up that resolve. Probably that would be my dream...that we manage to keep that feeling together.





You can't take a plant from one eco system and plant it in another and expect it to thrive without understanding what it needs and what underpins it. It will wither and die.

In my view, DVDs of aikido should be regarded in the same way as books.

If you follow a system developed within an organization and the head or other senior instructors have produced video material of the basics and advanced aspects of that system, then it is valuable as reference material from which you can increase your understanding of what you are studying in the training classes you attend.

Unfortunately it seems that there are literally thousands of videos of people demonstrating aikido or so called aikido techniques and some of them really do look terrific. I must admit I enjoy looking at them as much as anyone else. I also might mention here that I have seen very little of what is available to download from YouTube. I believe that the segments on YouTube are isolated techniques that someone has thought are fantastic enough to post on the site for others to look at and that there are so many things posted that any value they have other than simply being there for entertainment simply doesn't exist.

Another thought that occurs is that the more videos there are of a person it either reflects that they have a very interested following (as I'm sure some of them do) or it may suggest that they want to have an interested following and that the videos are out there to attract new students.

Sugano Sensei has said on some occasions that if a visitor asks to teach then the visitor is more often than not searching for new pupils (even though he or she may not consciously be aware of it). And perhaps the very proliferation of video material is a reflection of that concept. Sensei's view is that he believes the student seeks out the teacher and requests to become a student, rather than the other way around.

The truth is that it's a new world out there with so much material available on video it is hard to know where there could be amongst it anything of real value. What probably started with some students of particular teachers asking to have visually recorded material to use as a reference, has now evolved into massive amounts of material that is on video, DVDs, and websites that both promote aikido or alternatively promote with the intent of gathering new students. There is simply so much—some of which is very good, most of which is mediocre, as well as some that is plain silly—that a student searching for information in visual form is completely overwhelmed.

On the subject of taking videos I asked Tony Smibert Sensei for the reasons taking videos of gradings are not permitted within our association. He was kind enough to respond and the following is the gist of what he said:

*The first reason is that Sugano Sensei says we can't do it...and that's that.*

*But the underling reasons as I see them are Gradings are about a whole range of things that can never be captured by a video camera.*

*The assumption when someone does a test is that they know how to do the techniques already, and our whole system is based on them being able to do the techniques.*

*But as they do the techniques other things happen as they address personal issues and the grading is much more about how they address the inner issues that a camera will never capture.*

*If you film it and then look back on it, those looking at the test then see the test only in terms of the technical presentation. The real danger is that while the person who did*

*the test comes away with a unique experience wherein he or she may have risen above themselves to a new level of effort and integrity in their aikido, but a video of that test immediately reduces it to how they tripped over when they were doing ikkyo or how spectacular their Koshinage looked. The film can not show what that person felt during those moments and for that reason videos of gradings are just not on.*

Responding further to the material discussed in this article Smibert Sensei went on to say:

*When it comes to videos in general, I feel there are two issues.*

*The first is that Sugano Sensei has always been concerned about people fixing aikido into a specific way of doing things, particularly his own aikido because that is always evolving and is never fixed. Although this is not such a concern anymore because with the amount of material available all around the world relating to aikido it is clear that nothing anywhere is fixed.*

*As for the second, and this in an increasingly important issue; it's a matter of Intellectual property or IP, and people commercializing the personal IP of other people whom they have filmed, particularly the IP of the world's leading instructors. Some of us have actually heard Sugano Sensei become very angry over the use his IP in a way that he thought was inappropriate. This is one reason why we are so conservative.*

*Within the IAF for example we are taking this very seriously, and this includes asking Shihans in advance to agree in writing that they are going to be filmed.*

*We also have to consider the fact that participants in a course may not wish to have their image recorded or commercialised, and there are indigenous issues that are also related to this.*

*Considering these points:*

*Personal IP (intellectual property)*

*Shihans being filmed*

*Participants agreeing to be filmed and indigenous issues,*

*We are saying it is simply not your right to make a video.*

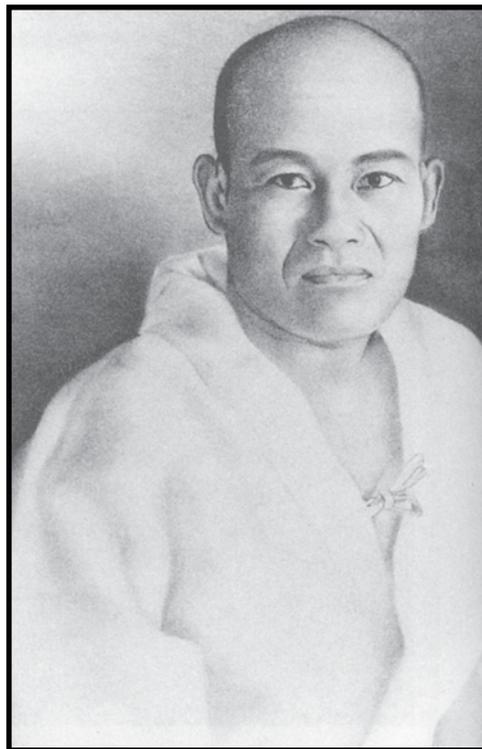
*I should say we have lightened up recently on allowing people to take photographs, but the problem we now have is that most still cameras also take videos, and so do phones. A lot of video appearing now is what people have taken on their phones.*

In Aiki Kai Australia and in the newsletter we are looking at this seriously, and in future we will occasionally list websites, DVDs, and blogs where we consider the information to be of value.



## O'Sensei in Tanabe

compiled by John Litchen



This year's IAF International Aikido Congress was held in Tanabe. Everyone who studies Aikido knows Tanabe was Ueshiba Morihei's birthplace. He was born on December 14, 1883 —or November 16, according to the old Japanese calendar— 125 years ago.

Tanabe City in the 1880s was a small neighbourhood of farms and fishing villages and O'Sensei was born in one of those farm houses. It seems that the Ueshiba family name is quite rare in this area because for generations most of the children born were female. He was the only son of Yoroku (born 1843) and Yuki. The Founder's father was himself an only boy, so he was delighted when at the age of 40 after fathering three daughters Yuki gave birth to a son. There was another sister after Morihei.

Yoroku was a strong man and was a popular council member from 1892 until 1910. He was capable of lifting large bags of rice on and off scales with little apparent effort. He doted on his only son and through demonstrations of his strength in daily activities Yoroku hoped to set a fine example for his son to follow. The Founder at first had a weak disposition and was prone to sudden illness. His mother Yuki on the other hand was a renowned calligrapher and had a great love for literature. She also influenced her son, and his love of poetry, and classical literature can probably be attributed to her influence.

Though not physically strong as a young boy, the Founder had a phenomenal memory. Once he heard something he never forgot it. He loved to sit in his room and read his many books. He loved stories of heroes and the Chinese classics. He was fascinated by physics and mathematics. He was so interested in the miracle stories of the Kobo Daishi that his mother suggested he could become a priest, but his father disliked that idea, and so nothing came of it. Instead, to build up his son's strength, his father took him down to the beach and made him compete in sumo wrestling with the children of the fishing families. It was here that the Founder received his first instruction in the art of spearing fish from a famous harpooner. This required manual dexterity, good eyesight, and an ability to instantly calculate the position of a moving fish while allowing for the refraction of the water. It is thought that from this early training O'Sensei gained his love of spear techniques. (Sojutsu).

Tanabe is now part of the Wakayama Prefecture which was formally known as the province of Kii. The Kumano Mountains with more than 3000 peaks, and one of the least spoiled areas in Japan, is believed to have special and powerful spiritual qualities. Shingon esoteric Buddhism spread throughout the province and there are many temples scattered through the mountainous province where for centuries pilgrims have made journeys to visit all of them. The trails they follow from site to site (the Kumano Kodo) and the three grand shrines of Kumano (Kumano Sanzen) are all registered with UNESCO as World Heritage Sites. O'Sensei has been quoted as saying: *"My spirit was nurtured by Kumano, and part of me is always there, immersed in its wondrous mountains, forests, and seas. In Kumano I feel as if I am walking on air."*

The Founder's family were landowners and though considered to be wealthy by some people, they were probably well off rather than wealthy. The Founder's mother believed their good fortune was because they were pious and paid proper respect to the Gods. Every morning before sunrise, always accompanied by her son, she would visit the temples and shrines in the village to offer prayers before becoming involved in other activities.

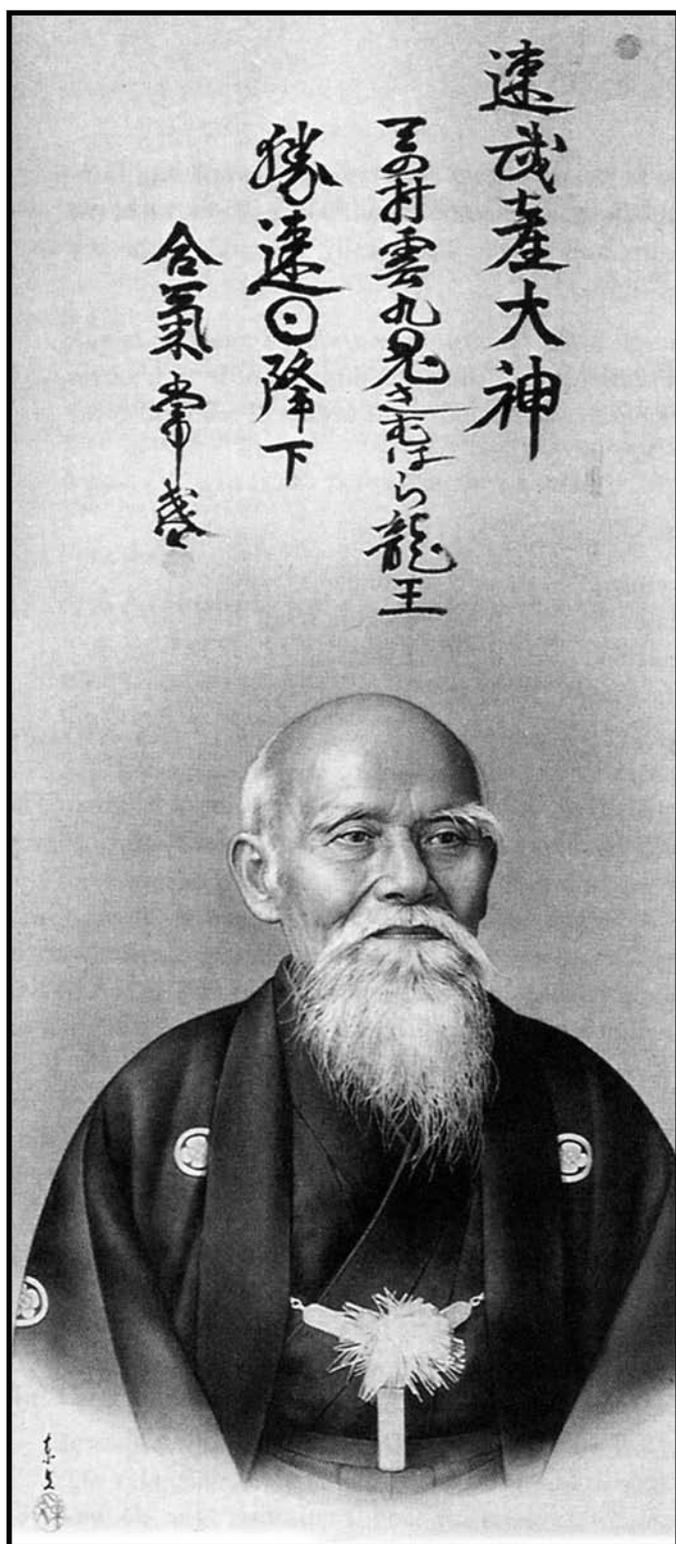
The Founder's earliest teachers were priests, and he was fascinated by the Shingon Buddhist teachings, in particular one of their rituals, a visualisation technique where one conjured a mental image of a deity and attempted to merge with it. Morihei became adept at this, which could help to explain his many profound visions later in life.

Yet for all his love of books and reading he disliked school and being confined in classrooms. He dropped out early to undertake his own studies. His father, concerned about his son's love of books often took him hiking in the forests, and since they lived only a short walk from the ocean, taught him how to swim and encouraged him to wrestle with the fishermen's children.

Being good at calculations with an abacus the local Tax Bureau offered him a job where he worked a short time until becoming involved in a tax dispute between the poorer fishermen and the tax bureau. He was 17 at the time and he sided with the protesting fishermen. This upset his father who as a town councillor was responsible for collecting taxes.

Perhaps to save his father from some embarrassment over the failure of the affair with the fishermen and the Tax bureau the Founder decided he would go to Tokyo. His father gave him some money and at 18 he started a business selling stationary items and school supplies from a pushcart.

In Tokyo the Founder also began studying Tenshin Yo Ryu Jujutsu as well as the sword style of Shinkage Ryu. Though a successful merchant he knew it was not for him. Overwork



could not be a merchant he was at a loss to know what to do and would often wake in the middle of the night. He would rush outside and pour cold water over his head. He prayed incessantly and took long walks in the forested mountains. He fasted and people began to think he was crazy. His father finally decided to employ a famous judoka to teach his son. He bought the man a house and built a dojo. This turned out to be a successful ploy and the Founder trained vigorously in Judo under the instruction of Tagaki San, a 9<sup>th</sup> Dan Kodokan instructor. Although he had studied classical judo in Tokyo this was the Founder's first experience of Kodokan style modern judo. By this time, as a result of his hard army training and his vigorous martial arts practice the Founder had become phenomenally strong for a man of his short stature. He was only just over five feet tall.

On one occasion the Founder participated in the rice cake contest that involved pounding hot rice in a pestle using a huge mallet to make a glutinous mass that was moulded into small cakes. He wore out 10 other contestants and also broke the stone pestle. After that he went to other festivals at the end of the rice growing season and the people would offer him tea and cakes before politely convincing him to leave the contest to others.

He trained hard in both judo, jujutsu, Sojutsu and kendo, but still felt that he had not had the chance to help his country the way he perhaps wanted to because his father had him released from the army.

In 1909 the government instituted a consolidation process to close down thousands of the smaller shrines and temples to merge them with larger ones to gain land for redevelopment. Suddenly the Founder had a purpose. He joined with biologist Kumagusu Minakata to fight against the government's development which included plans to develop the forested areas belonging to the shrines as farmland. There were many protests some of which no doubt were violent. The Founder loved those shrines that were going to be wrecked and felt horrified that people were going to make money out of their dissolution. His presence and his activities were so forceful, as he organized petitions, and confronted government officials that although in the general Wakayama area the number of shrines were reduced to less than one fifth of the original number; in Tanabe only six shrines were destroyed.

O'Sensei has been quoted as saying "During that period I felt, for the first time, the presence of devoting myself to the interests of my country."

It was not long after this that O'Sensei was inspired by tales of adventure in a land that was new and ready for development, to undertake a journey to Hokkaido where with a group of settlers and families from around Tanabe he was instrumental in founding the village of Shirataki.

*The Founder's story is well documented and anyone wishing to read more is recommended to search the archives of Aikido Journal (Formerly Aiki News), and the many books which have biographies of O'Sensei or sections devoted to his life. The information in this article was gathered from the translation summaries of the biography of the Founder written by his son, the late Doshu Kisshomaru Ueshiba, which are available in the early issues of Aiki News, published by Stanley Pranin whose research into the life of O'Sensei is invaluable.*

*Additional material was also found in the book 'Invincible Warrior' a pictorial biography of the Founder of Aikido, by John Stevens. This book published by Shambala I would recommend for all students wanting to know more about O'Sensei. ..JL..*

and poor diet contributed to a serious illness, so he gave his merchant business to his employees and returned to Tanabe to regain his strength. Not long after in October 1902 he married Hatsu Itogawa.

Since this article is more concerned with the time the Founder spent in Tanabe we will skip over his experiences during the war between Russia and Japan.

The Founder's father was instrumental in having his son released from the army and he returned to Tanabe. Since his father opposed his career in the military and he knew he

# Notes from Tanabe and the trip to Japan

Text and Photos by Linton Tuleja

Tanabe was a really nice little town or as we may call it in Tasmania, a city. It reminded me of where I live if it was Japanese. The days we spent in Tanabe were quite simple. Eat, train, eat, drink, sleep. Repeat by 6... I took one class off so that I could visit O-Sensei's grave alone. It was just too crowded during the public ceremony. I was lucky on my second trip though because there were very few people there and I was free to roam as I pleased.

The training at the seminar was somewhat crowded but enjoyable all the same. The classes themselves were very different. I cannot describe it properly and would fail if I tried. The training experience is something different for each person and my opinions on training and what it is for me will not coincide with many other people's views. Ultimately training is training. It does not really change all that much.

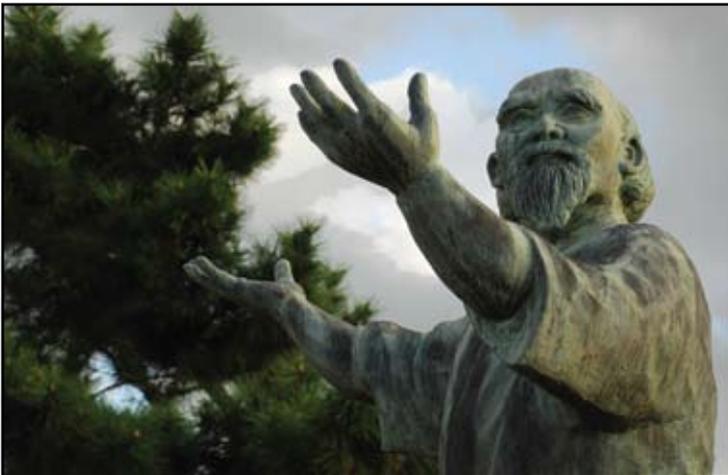
It was in Tanabe that I discovered *Umeshu* and I do not believe there was a single night passed that I did not have a nice cold glass of *Umeshu* with water and ice. One more reason to return, I say. The highlights of Tanabe for me were, the training, lunch with Sensei and the discovery of *Umeshu*. Three com-

pletely incomparable events. All thoroughly enjoyable. I could have spent more time in Tanabe except for the fact that I could not speak to anyone.

In the larger cities it was easy to get by but in Tanabe I felt very isolated from the population.

The demonstration was fantastic. It was one more highlight of my trip because I got to wander off on my own for most of the afternoon and just sit by the river and watch the hawks playing. When it came time to watch the demonstration it was helped by the fact that the sun set and the moon had risen and the blend between night and day had occurred without me noticing because of my focus on the event. I wonder if anyone else noticed that?

The day after we all attended Doshu's class and that marked the end of the seminar. The end of why we had all come to Japan. It was good to have done it but sad to be leaving it.





Training at Hombu was a highlight for me. I had spent all afternoon trying to find it and was about to walk in the wrong direction when a lady stopped us and asked if we were going to Aikido. She must have been used to people like us. She changed her course and went about 10 minutes out of her way just to show us to the front door. I think there was a little bit of doubt still in our minds as to where we were until Doshu walked in the door.

The training at Hombu was mixed. Classes varied from energetic training to technical focus to ki development and exploration. I did not understand a lot of what was being said but in the end we were taken care of and treated kindly.

Tokyo was an amazing city but I felt that I was missing out somehow most likely due to the language barrier. A few more days in each location would have been welcome. Three days in any place is simply not enough time to fully enjoy it. No sooner are you off the plane and in the hotel than you are on the next train headed for the next place, so the one impression I have of the whole experience was the overall feeling of being rushed. But in the end it was OK because all of my experiences minus the squid balls was fantastic. I enjoyed very much what I saw and experienced of Tokyo and it has given me a taste of something I believe I have become addicted to because I am already making plans to return.



The first real change I encountered that told me I was elsewhere was the cleanliness of the cities. I found it admirable that such a large population could maintain such a level of tidiness in such large crowded spaces. Then there was the friendliness and courtesy of the people. And then there was the food! I am a great fan of food. Mostly everything I ate in Japan was fantastic with the exception of perhaps some day old bento boxes and the Western styled foods and some strange dumplings full of uncooked squid... It would have helped a lot that day to know what I was ordering. The steamed pork buns were great, the ramen was great, the sashimi was great, and last but not least the *Umeshu* was great. *Umeshu*, as I found out, is a plum liqueur and became a very good friend when in Tanabe.



I made it my mission in each city we visited to get horribly lost and then try and find my way back. I must have done OK because at least my body has returned to Australia, but I think my heart remains in Japan.

# A Visit to New York

## by Tristan Derham

Having flown in from New Delhi, I stepped out of the airport, looked up at the blue sky over Manhattan and felt a flood of relief at the cleanest air I'd breathed in months! My brother was to arrive in a couple of days, it was my birthday and we were about to begin something we had been planning for years. I don't remember much of my first day at New York Aikikai. In fact, I don't remember much of the first few weeks. A blur of early morning starts, all-day training, bruises, strains, aching muscles and cracking feet amidst the bitter cold of a New York winter. None of which dampened our excitement at being in the thick of one of the most important dojos in the world. And all the while we were being built up. It was about eight weeks before our bodies stopped complaining and entered a comfortable state of exhaustion. We settled into the dojo life.

The dojo is in lower Manhattan – the centre of the known universe. Millions of people live on the island and millions more descend upon it every morning for work. Self-motivated and goal-oriented, New Yorkers know what they want and how to get it yet somehow they go about their business without interfering with one another. In fact, I often had the strange sense that while each person was striving toward their own ends, this raised the standard and forged a sense of community. The energy of the city and the vibrancy of its people make for an intense experience, even before you step onto the mat. One step outside the dojo and you are amongst avenues of towering skyscrapers, steaming drains, crushing subways, yellow taxis, busy parks, constant city noise and throngs of wildly colorful New Yorkers.

On a regular weekday we would drag ourselves out of bed at 6am and stumble downstairs to tidy the dojo before morning training. We'd grab some breakfast and then either chill out at a local cafe or watch the front desk. At 10am were morning chores such as cleaning bathrooms, the mat, the deshi's quarters or Yamada Sensei's office and then some more time to rest until midday training – one or two hours. There would be another break until the evening trainings – three hours, starting from 4pm. Weekends were lighter, with children's classes in the mornings and only two or three hours of training in the afternoon.

With a history of over forty years, hundreds of wonderful students, over thirty hours of available training each week, and regular classes by Yamada Sensei, Sugano Sensei plus homegrown Shihan such as Harvey Konigsberg, Hal Lehrman and Donovan Waite, it should not be a surprise that NYA is such a special place. Luke and I were constantly inspired and challenged, especially as we found our niche and became accustomed to the differences in style, in attitude, in ukemi and even a slightly different set of 'basic' techniques. One of the most interesting experiences was to work with raw beginners one-on-one for their first few classes. We would spend hours every week with these new students, refining our teaching and our knowledge and building a relationship as they explored Aikido movements for the first time.

An important benefit of being an uchideshi is the opportunity to spend time with Sugano Sensei and Yamada Sensei, both on and off the mat. Yamada Sensei regularly invites the uchideshi (anywhere between five and eight during my stay) into his office for meals. We spent many long evenings around a generous spread, listening to stories about O'Sensei, Hombu

dojo and New York Aikikai in the early days.

Sugano Sensei and Yamada Sensei both spend weeks or months at a time away from the dojo, often teaching in Europe, South America and the US. When they're in town they teach classes almost every day. They draw dozens of students to each class and the mood takes on an urgent, expectant edge as soon as they enter the dojo, let alone step onto the mat. NYA has a long, narrow mat space and fifty people can make for a very crowded session, especially in the hot, humid summertime.

We had the opportunity to follow Sugano Sensei to seminars in the area around the city – in New York State and New Jersey. One of the highlights was a weekend at Redbank, NJ to celebrate the opening of a new dojo building there. Sensei taught weapons for four hours on the first day and three on the second, with a packed mat in a beautiful dojo. There was a single grading on the first day – a severely disabled young man who had to be carried onto the mat. The struggle for this man to perform even the simplest of movements that any one of us would take for granted, and yet do it grinning, brought a tear to the eye of more than one student. It was a testament to his dedication and that of his teacher. It drove from me all complaints about my own technique.

Having originally planned to stay for three months, I was able to remain in New York until late August. With more than a little regret it was time for me to move on. I was somewhat compensated, though, as I had arranged to come home via Europe and attend Sugano Sensei's Global Inner Aikido Seminar in Belgium, and Yamada Sensei's seminar in





Bernau in Germany., both of which were amazing.

As in previous years, the GIAS was held in the peaceful surrounds of the Maredsous Abbey. Maredsous is a working abbey and the monks produce cheese, bread and of course that finest of all brews – Belgian beer. Pre-breakfast meditation either in the open air dojo or one of the Abbey halls focused everyone for the morning classes and the level of attentiveness was very high. Sensei would teach for two hours in the morning and spend the afternoon relaxing. The GIAS is designed for those students who are familiar with Sensei's weapons teaching system and there was no shortage of teachers and students to stretch my abilities.

For those of us daunted by the prospect of spending a week shut up in a monastery, our hosts had organized a swathe

of functions and activities, including a bonfire, a masked ball, fencing and a discussion evening with Sensei. It is a little strange to meet students dedicated to Sensei and his teaching who are not Australians – a little like cousins you didn't know you had! The GIAS is an amazing opportunity to study intensively with other students and I highly recommend making the effort, especially as the tenth GIAS is scheduled for 2009.

It was a privilege to have lived at the New York Aikikai, to have become a real part of that strong, unique community and to have studied so intensively under Sugano Sensei and Yamada Sensei, both in the US and in Europe. Even now I am constantly reminded of the people I met and their support and friendship on and off the mat.

above: training at New York Aikikai and a walk in Central Park.

## A report on the IAF Congress at Tanabe by Tony Smibert Sensei

Over recent years the IAF congress and Seminar has evolved to become THE major international Aikido event. Its seminar now draws participants from around 100 countries – representing the wide and continuing growth of O'Sensei's idea of a world united.

Although the primary function of the IAF Congress has always been to bring IAF member nations and organisations together to discuss and develop ideas of mutual interest, the Seminar has now become a major part of the event. Open to any and all trainees in organisations officially recognised by the Aikido World Headquarters, the IAF's seminar is not limited to those who also have the special distinction of membership in the IAF. It's grown over recent years - and this time there were around 1200 trainees in Doshu's class on the final weekend.

There were over 30 Australians in attendance – including those in our tour group – so you never knew when you might encounter them on the street, in restaurants and of course, at training.

This time, Robert, Hanan and I all went – because of the recommendation to Shihan title announced by Sensei at the last Summer School. It was terrific to travel together and have opportunity to spend at least some informal time with other Aussies. Unfortunately, because we had to attend the meetings we weren't able to spend a great deal of time with the gang in Tanabe, but Tokyo and Kyoto were fun.

This was the first time I've been asked to teach a class at the Seminar so I have to admit to being about as nervous as it gets – even to suffering a complete blank out during the warm-up. Fortunately one of the guys from Tasmania was standing in front of me and I was able to lock onto what he was doing and pull myself together. Classes of 600 or so people are NOT what I'm used to teaching...

The official programme included some terrific extras: the Buddhist memorial service for O'Sensei and the late 2<sup>nd</sup> Doshu at a temple outside Tanabe, followed by a procession to the family grave was particularly moving. As a senior IAF official I was seated inside the temple and participated in the Ueshiba family ceremony along with senior Shihan including Tada Sensei, Sugano Sensei, Tamura Sensei, Yamada Sensei, Isoyama Sensei, Asai Sensei and many others. I never saw O'Sensei myself. I was training in Australia but had not yet gone to Japan, and so felt relatively detached from his part of the ceremony, but I was deeply moved when it came to the commemoration of Kisshomaru Doshu, who I knew well and had enormous personal regard for. Suddenly I felt like part of a large family – celebrating the lives and achievements of people who had given so much to me through their efforts. I guess there were hundreds who experienced the same emotions and so it was a wonderful reminder of our familial relationships within Aikido.

One of the most moving aspects was when the various older Shihan who were of course the former, youthful uchideshi of O'Sensei and the last Doshu, each made their way forward to bow and to pray.

The other great part of the Tanabe celebration was the Embukai at Kumano Shrine, one of the most important Shinto Shrines in Japan. O'Sensei regarded it as very important and there were many stories being recounted of his pilgrimages to



Waka Sensei, Mitsuteru Ueshiba Sensei during the embukai.



Marie Petery Sensei.





Robert Botterill Sensei



Marie Petery Sensei



Kumano on the day we went there.

The shrine is located deep in the mountains, on the wide flood bed of a river where it was originally set within a beautiful grove of trees. As I understand it the wooden buildings were swept away in a flood years ago and so they were reconstructed on a hill above the valley. The grove still remains, but without the buildings. Most people visited both areas, a relatively short walk under beautifully sunny skies and through the little village which seemed incongruously modern and thoroughly geared for tourists. As the afternoon lengthened the many hundreds of visitors then gathered within the sacred grove, where a raised and tented platform was set up for the IAF Embukai (demonstration). Once again there were religious observances and all were invited to share in the Shinto rituals of commemoration and purification before the action began. There were around forty demonstrations including impressive demonstrations by Doshu and Waka Sensei, Mitsuteru Ueshiba, destined to one day become the fourth Doshu of Aikido. His demonstration was strong and pure, and I believe he shows the determination and qualities that will make him a very worthy successor to the line.

Of course all Australians were waiting for their turn and Australia's Embu was impressively handled by Botterill Sensei and Marie Petery Sensei. We all know the quality of Robert's aikido but I was also really impressed by the energy, good humour, constant movement and strength of Marie's. I don't suppose that one should really comment on someone's aikido but, in this case, the demonstrations were clean and flowing – with no sign of pre-rehearsed pattern, just immediate response to the moment - which is what Embu is all about.

As the light faded the glade of trees did become a very special place for the Embu. Aikido has at its heart mankind's inter-relationship with Nature and so I couldn't help sensing a very special kind of magic may well have been present there.

After the Embu, we made our way by torchlight to the wide river-bed where we were served a simple, shared meal of rice balls and miso. Again I was struck with the feeling of goodwill and friendship all around, as it should be at an aikido event. We were able to catch up with lots of friends, make new ones, take crazy photos and enjoy the night sky - and all with the dimly-lit but massive, distant *torii* of the shrine looming over us.

What about the Congress meetings? Well, they were significant of course and, among the most important decisions taken was the decision to accept the WADA (World Anti Doping Authority) Code. This is unavoidable in today's world and will oblige member nations to work with the IAF to institute a code of practise applicable to Aikido.

Overall the Congress, Seminar, associated events and our tour went very successfully. The most remarkable efforts were made by the Hombu Staff and a great number of other volunteers, things mostly ran like clockwork and our tour group was happy, if tired!

I can't finish without noting the enormous amount of work in tour and seminar preparation by Andrew Dziejdzic Sensei in the months leading up to the tour. He and Lynden were supposed to meet up with us in Japan after a month of private travelling in the UK but Andrew, in his enthusiasm managed to throw himself down an embankment (why, Andrew why?) and break his ankle. He and Lynden were unable to travel on to Japan and she, poor girl, had to fly him home early and look after him... Seriously though: thank you Andrew AND Lynden. We missed you both.



Doshu and Waka Sensei





Meeting with Doshu in his office at Hombu Dojo in Tokyo are Sugano Shihan, Botterill Sensei, Janiv Sensei and Smibert Sensei.

Below: an informal portrait of the group who accompanied Sugano Shihan to Japan.



## Aiki Kai Australia 2008 Winter School

### Dan Gradings

#### Shodan:

Dominic Lane, NSW  
Tony Neil, Tas  
Timothy Richards, Vic

#### Nidan:

Marion Artis, Tas  
Georgina Sexton, Qld  
Beverley Webster, Vic

#### Sandan:

Lionel Wong, WA/NSW

Please note: *All the photos on pages 2, 14, 15, 18, 19, 20, 21, and the back cover were taken by Linton Tuleja.*

*Linton has been training since he was a child. After taking a few years off he has returned to Aikido and is a student at Deloriane currently graded to 1st kyu.*

*Photos on pages 16, 17 are by Tristan Derham. And hopefully in future issues we will be able to present more writing and photos from Tristan.*

*The other photos were taken by John Litchen except for the top group of photos of Ken Cottier Shihan on page 4 which were obtained with permission from the Hong Kong Aiki Kai website where there are many more images of Cottier Shihan and other participants in the Hong Kong 35th Anniversary celebration.*

*As editor I would like to thank all the contributors who have made this and past issues so interesting.*

*The appearance of the publication continues to change and evolve and I feel we are producing a world class magazine, and that with the help of the contributors it will only get better.*

*If you have any suggestions and ideas to help this become a better and more collectable publication please talk to me at summer school.*

*I would also like to thank Sugano Sensei who allows me to take photographs at his national schools, the TTC, and Dziedzic Sensei and Smibert Sensei for their continuous and always helpful input, and Bodhi Mc Sweeney for her editorial assistance.*

*JL. Editor.*



Group training, Summer School 2007.



## Aikido, Shiatsu, & Ukemi: *the art of falling.*



by Annica Wade

While precariously balanced on the edge of my veranda, half in gumboots and with a watering can, I suddenly realised I had taken perhaps too close a look at the flowerbed below. With enough time to evaluate that the objects closest to me were not going to assist me in staying on the veranda but only join me on the descent, I decided to go alone. It was a particularly Alice in Wonderland moment as I forward somersaulted into the garden bed below. Sitting amongst the agapanthus, I suddenly had the thought as to whether I really fell at all.

What is it to fall? When a bird enters free fall on a dive to the sea does the bird actually fall?

Falling implies a loss of control. What is of value in the experience of losing control? Can we be consciously present in the experience? If falling is commonly defined as losing balance, what does it mean to fall while taking your centre with you? How do we relinquish control and yet keep our centre? It cannot be done with force. It is a lesson in receptivity, for holding on with one hand while reaching out with the other can never yield what it is possible to receive when one deeply lets go. There is a trust that is needed to execute good ukemi – trust in the universal. Trust that if you let go with both hands and take your centre with you, nothing will be lost.

In Shiatsu, good ukemi is also possible and requires this same trust. Trust to let go and really observe the body anew in the moment as the practitioner applies touch and movement. When the receiver receives like this, the border between practitioner and client blurs and resolves into a dynamic flow of energy connecting and moving between the two. In a shiatsu treatment, the art of falling is in allowing ourselves to be passively moved and observing – seeing our boundaries arise and beginning to find the trust within to let what no longer cultivates us fall away. This is the art of falling – trusting the universe and relaxing into the unknown. It is also then the art of letting go. As we begin to break down the walls within us, ki is unlocked from these stagnant areas and is free to flow and revitalise the body. If the practitioner simulates the fall of a limb in a treatment, it is an opportunity to observe yourself. Can you trust? When do you catch yourself?

A world of difference exists between falling with your centre and just falling into someone else and trusting they will catch you. To fully embody our own power we must alone assume this responsibility. We must be in the moment when we fall and sensitive to the correct moment to catch ourselves. Without leaning or pushing our posture will begin to naturally straighten as we align ourselves with the universal strength that flows between heaven and earth.

It has been said that one must first learn to drink cha from an empty cup. The yin receptivity ideally comes first, for how can we learn when our cup is already full? In aikido, some teachers have beginner students ukemi for a significant period of time before ever executing one technique and in so doing they assist the student in cultivating the quality of receptivity that is ukemi. Ukemi is the yin of aikido. It is the balanced half to the yang of giving. Are you equally proficient at doing the technique as you are at receiving it? As the Tao teaches, opposites are the complimentary poles that unify to form the whole. Are you equally capable of training hard and fast as

you are soft and slow? Does the doing, nage, role take any precedence in training over the receiving, uke, role? Can it be possible that an imbalance of these principles on the mat has no translation to the person who steps off the mat and continues their day in the world outside?

Are you falling in the same direction you always do, following the same well trodden path, or are you able to really sensitise yourself to where nage is leading you? Aikido must filter down into the subtlest movement just as it filters down to the subtlest moment. Are you really there

in the moment with nage each time anew or has anticipation already dictated your next movement? Have you missed the moment? Because when you miss the moment you miss everything.

The yin of these arts is ever present. It is the still centre of the turning sphere. In aikido, it is the moment that fixes your partner to that line before you move. In shiatsu, it is the mother hand that holds in stillness while the son hand works by her side. It is the eternity between breaths, and though it does not actively seek our attention, it is the stage upon which all movement dances.

Image above: taken at Burleigh West 1998. JL.

Receiving Koshinage, Uke is supporting himself with one leg on the floor as he allows the rest of his body to flow over. Reaching down with one hand he will distribute the impact along the length of his body. in a perfectly controlled ukemi. Nage: Sensei G Morris, Uke: Paul Kersley

# *Aikido in Australia*

*Aiki Kai Australia National Newsletter*  
Volume 2 number 4 Spring 2008

