

KODOKAN CONNECTIONS

Newsletter of Kodokan Aikido USA
Greensboro | Winston-Salem | Blacksburg | Harrisonburg

Spring 2019

From the Editors

Welcome to the second edition of **Kodokan Connections**. Thank you for reading. In this issue we share musings from several of our students as well as a remembrance of our beloved dojo member, Jon Harris sensei, who, we are sad to report, passed away in March. I will remember Jon for his gentle spirit, his fierce determination, his beautifully soft ukemi, his compassion for all living creatures, especially dogs and humans, and his love for his wife Jeanne. I wish I could tell you all the dogs he had a hand in rescuing, all the aikido students he helped along the way, all the times he made me laugh, and how much we are going to miss him. Rest in Peace, Jon. You were truly a peaceful warrior.

On a less somber note, we were very excited to host our guests from Japan: Tanaka shihan, Yangisawa sensei, Oota sensei, and Tanaka Nao san, in late April and early May. We hope you had a chance to train and interact with them through their visit.

A special issue covering their visit will be out soon.

Thank you to all our contributors to this issue. If you have news, articles, or pictures you would like to share for future issues, please send them to news@kodokanaikido.com. We look forward to seeing your pictures and reading your articles.

Sincerely,
The Editors

Seven Years of Aikido

Seven years of aikido practice isn't long, but when I started practicing aikido I was 15 years old. When you crunch the numbers, that's almost one third of my lifetime now. In that time, there have been many high and low points for me on and off the mat, but aikido is such an important part of my life and I'm grateful to have found it.

Right after I turned 15 my dad signed me up for aikido. He wanted me to learn how to defend myself. Aikido was a good fit for me because I don't like competition and the dojo practiced on

Sunday which is the only day my parents could drive me there since they were busy toting my siblings around to baseball games the rest of the week.

I remember when I first started it was just weird. How my sempai moved and the entire reasoning behind aikido didn't make sense to me yet. My dojo had a "learn as you go" mentality with multiple instructors so things didn't make sense right away as every instructor had a different approach to teaching aikido. I didn't really see how anything we were learning

In this Issue

Seven Years of Aikido	1
The Challenge of One Thousand Cuts	2
The Art of Practicing	3
From the Mat	4
Contact Us	4

Upcoming Events



was going to help me in my life, but I'm a little stubborn so I didn't give up right away.

I didn't even realize how far I had come from my first day of practice until two girls came in for their first class and were learning how to roll. I don't really know what kept me going to aikido throughout high school. I know it felt good to go. I felt comfortable on the mat and I know it helped me to be more confident. The first time I really used aikido outside of the dojo I was playing with a little girl about 2 years old. She was

pretending to fall down a steep hill and I would catch her. It was fine until I lost my balance too. Without much thought I put myself between her and the ground and took a back fall. We were both fine and she got back up, ready to play more.

When I went to college, my aikido family in Northern Virginia made sure I could contact a previous sempai who had moved back down to Blacksburg. During orientation at Virginia Tech my department advises freshmen not to join any clubs until second semester. I made aikido an exception to that rule and soon realized it was for the better. If I couldn't go to aikido, I noticed I was frustrated more often during the week. Aikido

gave me a space to relax and unwind. Sometimes, my day was too much to forget about when I stepped onto the mat, but my aikido family was there for me when that happened.

I know I wouldn't have gotten through some really rough patches in my life if it wasn't for my aikido family. Aikido really can help people connect. I don't know why but there always seems to be a dojo wherever you go. While every dojo family is different, you always know they will be there even if you have to stay off the mat for a while.

When I see people wearing their gi I know we understand each other at least to a small degree. Will we see eye to eye 100%? God no, but no matter your shape or size you are

welcome on the mat and there is a technique for you. Pretty much everyone I have met on the mat I would never meet otherwise.

Because I started on the mat as a teenager, my dojo family has had a large impact on my life and has helped me to grow and challenge myself. Without aikido and the people I practice with I would not be whole. No matter how old a person is they should be encouraged to get on the mat by those in the dojo, because you never know how long they might stay.

Kylie Hericks served actively as student president from 2015 - 2018. She graduated summa cum laude with a B.Sc. in Animal and Poultry Sciences. She starts vet school in Fall 2019.

The Challenge of One Thousand Cuts

A. Grochowski, GKAD

"There are no contests in the Art of Peace. A true warrior is invincible because he or she contests with nothing. Defeat means to defeat the mind of contention that we harbor within." -- Morihei Ueshiba



Photo Credit: Brown Biggers, GKAD

January 6th, 2019 marked the first 1000-cut challenge at Greensboro Kodokan Aikido Dojo. Per O'senseis summons to a "true victory over ourselves," several of Kodokan students gathered that Sunday morning to endure the test of a 1000 shomen cuts. Armed with their *bokken*, they stepped out of the Kodokan dojo into the sunny "outdoor dojo."

Nature showed her support of their effort with a comfortable 50 degrees Farenheit, while open sky afforded them space for unencumbered boken swings.

A 1000-cut exercise is a vehicle for every student to concentrate on their own challenges. With only a wooden sword in their hands, they focus on the "right here, right now". Stripped of any other concerns, the students are encouraged to concentrate on the purity of their cuts.

The physical purity is ascertained by maintaining the alignment of their bodies as they shift

the weight from one leg to the other, and by allowing the arms and the shoulders to relax, thus producing an unimpeded movement of the bokken.

The spiritual purity is ensured by a concentration on breath, thus limiting mental distractions constantly assailing their minds. The kiai

accompanying each cut provides a physical demonstration of this focus.

Based on the shared thoughts before the event, many students approached it with a bit of trepidation. A most common question arising in their heads was related to their ability to withstand the physical demands of the undertaking.

Based on the comments

Photo Credit: Brown Biggers, GKAD



after the event, quite a few of the students experienced a sense of relief and renewing of energy once the half point was reached (though exactness of that point was obscured by the author's miscounting).

Masakatsu Agatsu Katsuhayabi - rang strong as the synchronized kiai reverberated in the morning air. With every shout,

students inched toward "true victory." With every cut, they pursued the path towards "self-victory."

"The victory at the speed of light" is just around the corner and based on general positive reception of this initial challenge, issuance of a similar challenge in the future will be most welcome.

The Art of Practicing

Last fall, I was practicing a jo kata with Jay Sensei. I made a mistake, reflexively stopped, and emitted a guttural sound of frustration like "ugh." I then compared this typical reaction of mine with his typical non-emotional reaction to a mistake. I knew that kind of reaction just works against me. It impedes learning because it wastes time and concentration. I later remembered the adage, "In a real life situation, you will do what you practiced." I had been practicing reacting in a way that could cost the one I am defending my or their life.

I really wanted to change

and grow in this area. I needed a different, better perspective on recovering from a mistake. Moreover, I knew I actually needed to build a whole new perspective on practicing and then practice that to get better at practicing...that.

I thought of a two-part strategy: 1) to learn from a variety of people who have a lot of experience in practicing and think about it, and 2) help my fellow *aikidoka* benefit as well. That's why I asked to write a series of articles I hope would benefit us all. I'll share with you what I am learning.

A good place to begin our

Gary Burger, GKAD

journey in this first article is a working definition of practicing as it relates to aikido. I like this one, which is adapted from a book on practicing music by Tom Heaney, *First, Let's Practice*. "Practicing is searching for and mastering the ideal movements necessary to do Aikido." In the first issue of this newsletter our senseis wrote that aikido is more than just a collection of physical self-defense techniques (movements). It is a "do"—a way of life. What makes the movements used in physical aikido ideal is that they are the most efficient, effective, and strategic expressions of

[*]*aikidoka*: a practitioner of aikido.

Have questions about etiquette, history, or terminology? Email news@kodokanaikido.com.

attitudes, values, and principles we live by in general. It is a circular and self-reinforcing feedback loop of personal growth to search for the ideal attitudes, values, and principles to live by, then search for the best physical movements to express those, and while we are doing that

discover strengths and weaknesses in our attitudes, values, and principles, then work on refining and correcting them, then search for ideal movements to express those ideals, rinse and repeat.

Whew! That sounds like a lot of work and a threat to my ego. We'd better figure

out ways to make the process fun and fulfilling! We'll tackle those and other topics later.

Please send me your thoughts about practicing, gcburger@gmail.com or let's talk (336) 908-8838. I'll share what you share in future articles. We can learn and grow together.

Seminar Reports: From the Mat. . .

Diana Self, GKAD (Winston-Salem)

.... I refreshed my phone once again, hoping the weather report would be different this time. "Wintry mix beginning Saturday afternoon continuing through Sunday." Disappointing, but I hoped in the end it wouldn't matter because the aikido spirit would help us stay positive. It was the weekend of the annual Friendship Seminar featuring Women Aikido Instructors held at Triangle Aikido in Durham, NC. Over the next three days spanning January 11-13, I would be practicing with *aikidoka* from as far away as New Jersey and Florida. The list of instructors we would be sharing the mat with was impressive and I couldn't wait to get started.

[. . .]

Having attended this event in the past, I knew I was in for a treat. As the seminar progressed, I tried to follow along with the diversity of styles and techniques taught to us. Working on the challenges presented helped me reach my aikido happy place. What I quickly discovered was the common theme of effective communication that ran throughout the seminar. The skills and abilities of these women continue inspiring me to get on the mat. . . . (to be continued)

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Editors: Susan Dalton, Nadine Edwards; Columnist: Gary Burger

Thank you for making this issue possible: Brown, Biggers, A. Grochowski, Kylie Hericks, Diana Self

!!! Your name could be here!!!! Email news@kodokanaikido.com for more information.

Kodokan Aikido USA focuses on the harmonious application of energy to conflicts, challenges, and relationships. We are overseen by the Kodokan Aikido dojo in Okazaki, Japan under Tadimitsu Tanaka shihan and our dojo is affiliated with the Aikikai Foundation based in Tokyo. Our Greensboro dojo offers classes for children and teens. Visitors are always welcome to observe or participate. Please contact us in advance.

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