Reflections of Summer School

By Anja Marzuki (2017)

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

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

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

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

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

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

I set myself a goal on the first day of the school. I wanted to test myself and I wanted to learn. I didn't want to miss a single thing. I was going to go to every single class. I wanted to prove, not only to myself that I could it, but also show that I was worthy of the faith put in me by my instructors and those who recommended me for the Beverly Webster Award.

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

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

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

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

PICTURE: Malang Aiki-Kai at Museum Brawijaya