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

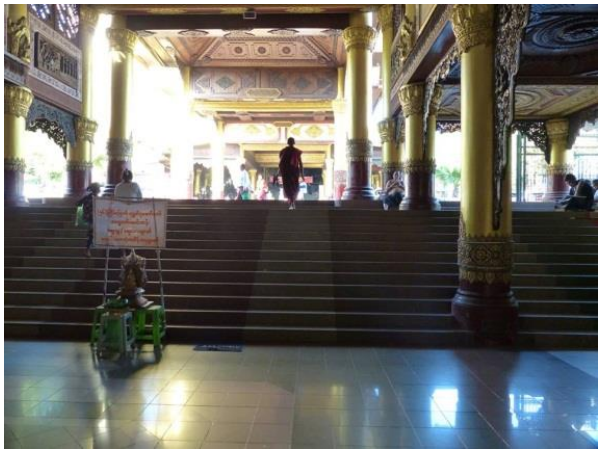
When I started training in Bendigo Aiki Kai Dojo at the age of fifty I did not envision myself flying over a stack of prostrate individuals and landing safely on the other side. Nor did I think that I would still be flying, though not so high or so far, at the age of sixty two.

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

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

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

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



Serendipity perhaps? (Zoom in, third column on right)

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

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

"It's fine, we are quite safe." I assured her. "It's Aikido!"

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

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

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

There are, however, many women and men on the mat who train in a zone that is neither 'Next Generation' (under forty five years, 2nd Kyu and above) or 'respected or revered generation' (forty five years and over with Dan degrees). So fitting somewhere can seem fraught with difficulty and unique challenges. We people too have aspirations and stories to tell that may surprise, inform and enlighten.

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

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

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

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

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

The Beverley Webster Award is a legacy.

It is natural. Women are warriors.

Thank you, Beverley.