

My Uchideshi Experience at Kobayashi Dojo

By Anita Bromley

Why?

Being that there are very few Aikido dojos that follow the Kobayashi style of training in the UK and even fewer female Aikido-ka, our dojo was encouraged to diversify its membership by starting classes for children and by getting more women to participate.



I asked to come to Japan to be an uchideshi, because I saw it as a great challenge and knowing that it would take a lot of courage and determination to complete. I set out needing to prove something to myself, at least at that time.

Preparation

Five months in advance of my arrival, my preparation consisted of fitness training at a gym everyday and, in my mind, I tried to piece together what it would really like to be an uchideshi by talking with few people I knew who had accomplished it already (the two people I know and spoke to are from Sweden and the UK).

What I gathered from them was that, for one, I wasn't going to get much sleep, and two, there would be a lot of cleaning involved and that I would be expected to help out whenever and wherever I was needed and to be flexible about the Dojo's arrangements.

After my duties were completed for the day, I imagined that sleeping and eating would be my only priorities. Sometimes I felt like I was at the bottom of a mental `Black Hole`, but on the positive side, I would meet what would turn out to be some very kind people and that this would be an experience of a lifetime.

In my Mind

I set out to enjoy my life as an uchideshi as much as possible, mainly because I considered it a great honor to be accepted into the program through Aikido Kobayashi Dojos Scholarship Program even though I was just a White Belt at the time.

Since there were several individuals in the program, uchideshi life at Kobayashi Dojo meant working as a team and, believe me, when you don't all speak the same language or come from the same background, and you have to cope with sleep deprivation, you learn to be very efficient and very quick to respond to whatever the dojo needed at that moment.



Of course, maintaining a good sense of humor throughout along with a high level of tolerance and sensitivity to every need above and beyond your own personal needs came in handy. I did this with an open heart and did not retain a grudge

whenever something came up that caused a momentary situation.

In my opinion making judgments about others is a big no-no, because then they can always surprise you when you least expect it. I did discover that the only major difference in the treatment of men to women is that women had to stay at Kodaira Dojo on their own, but then again I did have a private room that I could organize the way I wanted to, and at that time I was the only female so I was able to enjoy some privacy though I was comforted in knowing that Kobayashi Sensei and his wife were just upstairs from me.

People would trade places with me, if they could

I am sure that right now around the world, there are many yudansha that would love to trade places with me, and even though there were many times where I was exhausted and overwhelmed, I would not trade them...EVER!

My strategy was simple: think positive, always show willingness and carry on day after day after day.... *GAMBATTE!*

In the times when my energy was low someone would smile at me or make me laugh and it would just give me the energy to carry on and that nothing was too serious as to cause me to stay down.



Practice was many things

A challenge for me, a source of inspiration and of great relief, the atmosphere on the tatami was similar to that of Iyasaka Dojo in Stockholm, Sweden, and once I got over the fact that I was in Japan, it was easier to relax and concentrate.

As an example, my problem with the techniques of Nikyo and Sankyo laid with me the student, not the teacher, and Kodaira Dojos' mat spaces were always filled with people who were more than patient with my continuous wrestling of these two techniques in my mind. Needless to say, I am very grateful to them.

Kids class, outings with Barbara-San and the Swedes

Assisting the kids' classes was great fun and really rewarding. Just how much fun can you have inventing games for them? To see them do the 31 Jo Kata and to make Irimi/Tenkan/Kaiten movements without hesitation was great to see. Oh, and to see them jump and take ukemi over three others was really inspiring.

I think my outings with Barbara-San and with the Swedes came at a critical time for me because sometimes you need to step away from the deshi routine and remember that the world outside operates by different rules.

Dojo life for me

Going to Japanese class, experiencing Golden Week, going to Tokyo and visiting Yamawaki Sensei's Dojo were all fully enjoyable and appreciated. I came away feeling like a part of a large close knit family, rather than just a guest student,

which made a big impression on me.

In return, I hope that a little bit of Wales and the United Kingdom rubbed off on them. Of course, if anyone would like to come over in order to understand the differences better, they are more than welcome.

What did I get from it?

Well, hopefully my Aikido is better than it was two months ago. My test is tomorrow night in Bristol.... I think that for me the quality of my Aikido is a reflection of how confident I am inside, and this aspect improved a great deal by having trained in what I perceive as the Mecca of Aikido Dojo.

I gave it my best

Aikido Kobayashi Dojo seems to be more about taking care of people, and now I have some understanding of how much effort goes into keeping all the dojos organized and running smooth. A friendly and interesting place, it was a great challenge to undertake, because I know how hard it can be at times and to keep going was the only answer. I gave it my best and came home in one piece having made some good friends in Japan who I hope will be genuinely pleased to see me as I would them if I am able to return one day.

The plan however is to continue to study Aikido and see what I can do to further establish our Dojo in Bristol....

Thank you very much to Kobayashi Shihan and to Hiroaki Sensei and all the other instructors and members of Aikido Kobayashi Dojo for allowing me to have such a great experience.

