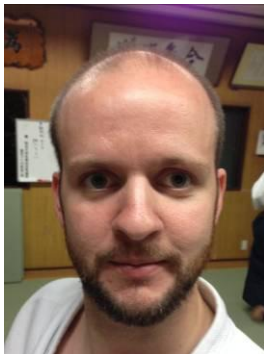


The Uchideshi Experience Jeremy Neff



Upon arriving in Japan and making it safely to Aikido Kobayashi Dojo my first class was taught by Soshihan Yasuo Kobayashi at Kodaira dojo at 11:30 on Sunday. The first thing I noticed about his class was the massive positive energy that he brings into the class and how it spreads to everyone in the class. The energy cheers everyone up and everyone smiles as they practices Aikido. I want to grow and be like him as an Aikido instructor with positive energy that can fill a class of any size.

After our first class I became immersed in the Zen of cleaning and training. Day after day I woke up and cleaned, trained and ate. At the beginning my mind was still darting around trying to figure out what needed to be done. My time as an uchideshi progressed and I fell into a Zen awareness that guided me from task to task. As I completed one task the next would be staring me in the face; I would just continue the flow of motion with the world around me and complete the next task. This Zen state helped me realize how important it can be to just live life as it comes.

When I started the rigorous schedule of an uchideshi my mind turned this way and that. The question of “Why did I want to come be an uchideshi?” came to mind a few times. Then one morning after practice in Kodaira dojo I sat talking with Sensei Barbara. I talked openly with her and she gave me the little push I needed to realize why I came. The first push was the realization that I could leave whenever I wanted. It sounds simple but it sank in. The reason I came was to get out of the rut of normal life and Aikido training. I had reached a point where I was questioning myself and needed to find my purpose in Aikido again. The first time I became an uchideshi at Aikido Kobayashi Dojo in 2007 for 3 months I came looking to learn the physical side of aikido. I did some of that this time as well. However my biggest gain was in understanding what a quality instructor is and how they take care of their students. Another big thing I gained as an uchideshi was what different teaching methodologies do and how they can affect the way we learn. This information was what I came for to help my development as an Aikido student and instructor.

As the old saying goes “When in Rome, do as the Romans”. This fully applies to being an uchideshi as well. As daily life took hold I found I was doing things as a Japanese would do them not as I was culturally raised to do them. A good example is sweeping the mats. We do this before and after every practice with traditional brooms. When we are done, rather



than vacuuming up the debris we sweep it out the window to be collected when we sweep the street later. Another one is the window screens. We don't use them to keep bugs out during practice as I was raised to do. Instead we have them open so the fresh air can flow in without interruption.

As an uchideshi I was busy, but that doesn't mean I didn't have fun! We had the opportunity to help with the dojo newspaper. As I inserted fliers and folded them for everybody I had a wonderful time chatting and talking to the other uchideshi and wonderful college students who helped us out with the task. Even though we were busy doing work for the dojo it was still fun. Just because it is "cleaning" or "work" doesn't mean you can't be smiling and laughing at things. I really enjoyed sweeping after class with everyone. We worked together and found ways to make people laugh and enjoy the process.

As an uchideshi you will inevitably make mistakes. I learned and accepted that it wasn't the fact that I made a mistake that was the issue; it was how I reacted to the mistake that mattered. If I took the information in stride and tried my best to do it right the next time, that is what really mattered. I wanted to make the dojo clean and beautiful for the students and I also wanted them to have a good experience. This made life as an uchideshi very rewarding.

Creating a good environment is important for Aikido. I want to make people feel at home and happy to be at the dojo. This will help me when I return to America. I will try and make the classes I attend better for everyone by being there and making people feel welcome and happy to practice Aikido.

I also learned that if people enjoy class and have a good learning environment they will come back for more. People everywhere want to be included and part of the dojo. When I teach I will do my best to make everyone who comes feel that way.

I have made many friends and many people have made my life better during my time as an uchideshi. I am grateful to all of them. Recep was a fantastic uchideshi sempai helping me learn my duties as an uchideshi and being calm, friendly and understanding. I was grateful to have such a good sempai to look up to and help with all the many tasks we undertook. Hiroaki Shihan was always kind and happy. I enjoyed his classes and every time I worked out with



him on the mat he had a smile and was always trying to help me understand the technique better in some way or another. Kobayashi Shihan was always an inspiration. He always made me feel welcome and helpful. He never approached things in a negative way and has the ability to lead in a way that everyone wants to follow him and help out however they can. I have really enjoyed my time as an uchideshi at Aikido Kobayashi Dojo. It is a life molding event that has helped me to become a better Aikido student and teacher.