Sangetsu North America

Special Edition Newsletter #26



December 2021

This edition of our newsletter is dedicated to North America Sangetsu Founder, the Reverend Harutami "Henry" Ajiki. He passed on Christmas Eve, 2020.

We miss his gentle yet determined guidance for ikebana, Japanese flower arranging, as well as the many aspects of his life. He was a Johrei minister and healer, a spiritual visionary, a painter, calligrapher, a husband and father and a loving and humble human being to all.



Life of Reverend Henry Ajiki

Reverend Harutami "Henry" Ajiki was born in Tokyo, Japan, on November 18, 1926. He and his wife, Michiko, were married on January 24, 1955, just before his leaving for the United States as assistant to Reverend Kiyoko Higuchi. They came to Los Angeles, California, for the purpose of bringing to this country the spiritual and philosophical teachings and practices of Mokichi Okada (1882-1955), known as "Meishu-sama" ("Enlightened Spiritual Master"). Together they established here the spiritual organization that is known today as the Johrei Fellowship.

Based upon Okada's philosophy of beauty and nature, and photographs of his many flower arrangements, the Sangetsu School of Ikebana (Japanese Flower Arranging) was founded on June 15, 1972, in Japan—the first such school based on a spiritual teaching other than Buddhism.

In 1974, Rev. Ajiki was asked to organize and head up the Sangetsu School in North America. He carefully chose ten volunteers to accompany him to Japan for intensive study and eventual certification as the first American instructors. The school developed steadily under his direction, and he began traveling and teaching around the country. He found a great demand for Sangetsu, and growing interest in work of the Johrei Fellowship, in his visits to Colorado and Arizona.

In 1988 he and Michi left their longtime home in Los Angeles to start a new life in Tucson, Arizona. Here they gradually came to love the beauty of the desert, as they both taught Sangetsu's emphasis on working with the natural beauty and flora of one's environment. He established a small Johrei Center in 1991, and in 1994 dedicated the Tucson Johrei Fellowship Center. In 2005 this also became—and remains—the North American Headquarters of the Sangetsu School of Ikebana.

Although long retired, "Henry"—as he came to be called-continued as a mentor to the Sangetsu School, to teach and advise, and always to arrange flowers--up until his last days. He made his transition to the spiritual realm on December 24th, 2020; his beloved Michi having predeceased him the previous year. Together they embodied Okada's philosophy of "makoto" — sincerity, love and compassion—and the love and respect for the beauty and teachings of the natural world. Henry will always be remembered and honored for his long life of joyously sharing the power of beauty to uplift and bless us all.

Lorna McMurray, Senior Instructor

Henry would always say that when flower arranging, your first idea is always the best.

Terry Quinn, Tucson

A small vase of flowers,

Placed on a schoolboy's desk,

A mother's encouragement

My teacher, the Reverend Henry Ajiki, described this event as a defining reason for his love of flowers and arranging them. Studying for secondary school exams was a worrying task for a young boy. But finding a vase of flowers and learning that it was his mother who had slipped them into his room, gave him gracious hope. It was a kindness he would repeat for others over and over in both humble and profound ways throughout his life.

I have so many memories of Henry that follow me around. The angle of his arm as he held a stem between his fingers in the most tender way. The careful flight of that stem into the vase, placed as if its mission in life was to land...just...there. The focus. His arrangements didn't just randomly come into being, they were born. And he gave his flowers something to say, "See this gorgeous part of me?" "Can you see my deep spirit?" "Feel this great mystery." I once asked him, "In a room full of flowers, how do you decide what kind of an arrangement to make?" He said, "I ask the flowers...and they tell me."



I was able to study flower arranging with Henry for almost twenty years. I never stopped reminding myself how lucky I was and what a privilege it was to be in his presence. As time passed his modeling revealed him as beloved

Sensei, my teacher in the most treasured way.

We ate a lot of sushi together. We ordered sushi "boats" which were mounds of sushi layered in a replica wooden

boat. It was a tremendous portion of fish and I loved watching him eat. With most things, Henry was Japanese; delicate and refined, but with sushi, he attacked it with pleasure and gusto. It was as if he had been beamed up to the front door of his favorite Tokyo restaurant. For a moment, he was truly home. Henry, of course, was a Johrei minister and he gave Johrei freely to everyone no matter how tired or late it might be. He was present...always. Always and always.

Sometimes he would ask me to make a flower arrangement for this person or that organization, telling me how important it was to have a "good relationship with the community." He knew the powerful healing qualities of a simple arrangement, and sometimes he used that to his advantage. He had moved into a community that had objected to a TV antenna that would connect his home with a Japanese television channel. After flower arrangement deliveries to some key decision makers, he got his Japanese TV.

Henry took us to Japan many times. Whether a Johrei pilgrimage or a Sangetsu study he would lead the tour and explain the intricacies of Japanese and Johrei culture despite the demanding toll it began to take in his later years. It was important to him that we were immersed. He wanted us to know the spiritual and true heart of Japan. When we studied ikebana from local teachers, Henry arranged with us and deeply appreciated being critiqued in the most rigorous way.



At the MOA Museum, Atami, 2013

Planning a Sangetsu class is a lot of work and involves many steps. But when a class is on the calendar, flowers and materials ready, a lesson plan written and I stand before my students, Henry is in the back row. Then as I struggle for

perfection to place my own arrangement on the sacred altar, Henry is there too with something to say.

A short memory of Henry: Until Henry was very elderly, several of us would arrange flowers every Saturday at 9 am at the Tucson Johrei Center. It was always a gift to watch him arrange, the focus, the way he selected his flowers and vase. I could never guess what he was going to do and it was always a spectacular arrangement.

Terry Quinn, Master Instructor

Tribute for Henry Ajiki

I have always known this day would come, and honestly, I am at peace.

I choose my teachers very carefully, or so I've always thought. On deeper consideration, I could not have known the depth and breadth of what I would learn on my path with Henry these past 29 years. He encouraged me in countless ways. I have often thought he was not only my teacher, but a life gift from Spirit.

Henry's lack of ego was so very refreshing. Being in his humble presence was inspiring, calming, and healing all at once. By remembering him, I can feel it again.

His cure for difficulty was three-fold: receive Johrei, trust in God, and DO THE WORK. I must admit that I wasn't always confident in my ability to do whatever tasks he requested or entrusted to me, but it never occurred to me to refuse. There were many, and I grew with each one. Receiving Johrei helped my confidence, I worried until I dared to trust God, and I survived the work and the transformations it brought.

Each task required that I grow, that I give more than I thought I had. As I grew, I became able to see further, willing to surrender more, and open to understand more deeply.

There was something about him that took me years to understand: he brought all of himself to every moment. He taught me about the impact of being fully present. We enjoyed a friendship of mutual trust that allowed us to be frank with one another. Not one to beat around the bush or suffer excuses, I could always count on Henry to tell me the unvarnished truth, and I loved him for it. Truth from a kind

heart saves a lot of wasted time and life. We got to the heart so much sooner.

As the years passed, Henry enriched us all and offered as much wisdom as we could open to receive. He lovingly shared the exquisite jewels of his culture as opportunities arose in our years together.

Putting it mildly, we were not an easy bunch. There were times when he would pause, smile, and shake his head while teaching us flower arranging or tea ceremony. We would joke that teaching us was like trying to herd hummingbirds. We had enthusiasm, not always discipline. We had tangential questions, not always patience for his answers. We were quick with the creative, but not always willing to put in enough time with the basics. Still, he proceeded to look for ways that we could understand the concepts he hoped to share.

I am so grateful for the gifts in this life of his time and attention. What an honor it has been to be his student and his friend all these years. He set a remarkable example and leaves an unforgettable legacy of depth of heart and commitment to God.

Sometime after he passed, I saw him in a dream. We were saying goodbye at the water's edge of a huge river. He stepped onto a huge barge that was completely filled with the most glorious floral blooms and many of his beloved ones who had preceded him in passing from his life. They welcomed him warmly and there was lighthearted dance music playing. He was beaming and ecstatic to be with them again. He turned and smiled goodbye for now and moved among the mounds of flowers and people and music, gently to his next destination.

Karey Karam, Instructor



Memory of Reverend Ajiki

Rev. Ajiki arranged flowers with joy and simplicity, whether it was an elegant Shoka or a huge installation. One time many years ago in Los Angeles a group of flower arrangers gathered to create a Sangetsu exhibition. There was a large floor space reserved for him in the exhibition room and yet he had not arrived. As we were all finishing our individual arrangements and cleaning up, we were getting very concerned for his ability to do a large installation arrangement at this late hour. Then there was suddenly a flurry of activity and Rev. Ajiki started offloading materials: huge cacti and dried cactus, desert flowers and big logs and bags of rocks and sand. This endless parade of elements seemed like an impossible task to assemble. He suddenly paused and scanned the space very carefully and then set to work. We all stopped and watched as he created in what seemed like a matter of moments a whole panorama of cacti, sand, rocks, logs and a few floral elements that brought the living desert into this homely hall. This creation of texture and colors and dynamic depth was a little miracle in itself. In essence this was his personal story of his love for the desert and how later in life he would permanently gravitate to live there. Rev. Ajiki was an inspiration for how his buoyant enthusiasm and joy pervaded his flower arranging and his life.

Patricia Dickson, Senior Instructor

Henry and the Liberated Pine

When Sangetsu was in the offing, Rev. Henry Ajiki gave it his whole delighted attention. I have a favorite memory from back in the early 1980's, when he had been invited to the East Coast Center to give a public Sangetsu demonstration in New Jersey. I was part of the airport pick-up committee, and as we headed out of Newark, already mind Henry—his on the morrow's demonstration—naturally started asking about the kinds of line material that might be available for him to use. "Would there be any pine?" he asked. We said that we didn't think so, at which he looked quite disappointed. We started listing other choices, when suddenly he shouted, "Wait! Stop! Pull over just here!"

Startled, the driver immediately hit the brakes and pulled off onto the shoulder. We were in the loop of the onramp to the main toll way, which the taxpayers had caused to be beautifully landscaped with lush grass and several small pine trees. "There!" he pointed, springing

from the car and hot-footing it towards the nearest one. We all ran after him, saying, "Sensei! You can't cut those!" But already he had whipped his *hasami* out of his pocket and clipped off several nice branches. "It will be okay," he assured us, "It's just for the demonstration."

We had just turned to shepherd him back to the car when we noticed that a police vehicle had pulled in behind it with a large uniformed officer climbing purposefully out and coming towards us. "Everything okay?" he asked. We said we were just taking a look at the pine trees, when I saw Henry out of the corner of my eye, open his hands and let fall his branches to the grass at his feet, a look of supreme innocence on his face.

Clearly, the needs of the demonstration were supreme, for the officer did not notice the little heap of evergreen, and simply warned us that it was dangerous to pull off of an on-ramp, and that we should be on our way. We all assured him we were just going, and as we all started walking back to the cars, I noticed that Henry had managed to retrieve his prizes. We quickly surrounded him, escorted him back, tucked him safely into the passenger seat--pine and all--and sped on our way.

We were all silent for a few miles. Then, "That was close!" Henry said, shaking his head. I think it was only in that moment that he realized quite how close it had been, and he started laughing long and hard, wiping the tears from his eyes.

Lorna McMurray, Senior Instructor



2011 Tucson

Message from Mamiko

I hold Sangetsu classes once or twice a month at my home in Bellevue, Washington. Two to three students attend every class. We enjoyed making arrangements for Thanksgiving in cornucopia shaped baskets.



A remembrance of Reverend Ajiki: I studied Sangetsu since it was established in Japan. I didn't have a chance to become an instructor, but some time later, when Rev. Ajiki visited the Seattle area, he selected me to take the Sangetsu teacher's



exam. I flew to the Tucson Center for an intensive training session and succeeded in the test. I appreciated Rev. Ajiki's guidance and help to give service through Sangetsu.

Mamiko Matsushita, Instructor

Sangetsu in Vancouver

At the beginning of August, I resumed in person classes for my continuing students, and for beginners. Everyone seemed happy to be back. By September I had two sets of beginners as well as two (smaller) sets of continuing people.

On the first weekend in August, the Powell Street Festival took place in Vancouver, in a scaled down version. The Vancouver Ikebana Association (VIA) provided 13 arrangements; Kimberly Cooke, So-Jung Choi, Lily AuYeung and I represented Sangetsu.

The National Nikkei Museum and Heritage Centre in Burnaby had a summer festival at the beginning of September, and asked the VIA to provide four ikebana (one for each school). I made a two part arrangement using local rose hip branches and Arum berries from my garden. This display helped advertise our upcoming Fall Show.



On the Canadian Thanksgiving Sunday, the VIA held a Fall Show at the Nikkei Centre, for the first time. The venue was beautiful, and we had about 300 people come through to enjoy our displays and demonstrations. Over fifty arrangements from four schools were on display. The Consul General of Japan, Mr. Hatori and his wife came to open our show. There were ten arrangements created by members of Sangetsu, and I did a demonstration, showcasing one basic arrangement, and one of lively motion. Photos and videos may be viewed on Facebook under Vancouver Ikebana Association.

A remembrance of Reverend Ajiki: At one of the first Sangetsu conferences that I attended in Los Angeles, I had a bad headache. Reverend Ajiki noticed that I wasn't feeling well and asked what was wrong. I told him of the headache and he immediately commenced Johrei. This was the first and only time that I really felt some positive energy directed at me. I felt shivers go down my spine, and the headache was soon gone!

Joan Fairs, Master Instructor

Vase Room

As many of you know, our Sangetsu North America Headquarters is located in Tucson Arizona. We have a small cottage to store flower arranging items as well as a vase room located off the Tucson Johrei Center. Weather has been unpredictable all over the world, and rain was abundant this past summer. Consequently, roofers had a busy season. It turns out the vase room in the Center not only leaked, dangerous mold grew throughout the room and remediation was needed. While the Center covered the cost of the roof repair, the Sangetsu Directive Council voted to cover the mold remediation costs. What follows is a communication from the Tucson Center Head, Reverend Gerry Nangle.

Dear Instructors,

At the height of Sangetsu activity in Tucson, there were eight instructors on staff at the center, teaching beginning classes and taking advanced classes with Rev. and Mrs. Ajiki. As the program grew, there were astonishing Sangetsu displays at the local botanical gardens, the Tucson Museum of Art, the local junior college and of course at the center itself, including one display featuring a six-foot cactus skeleton towering next to the altar. Saturday mornings have traditionally been our busiest time for exchanging Johrei, and there was always happy laughter coming from the classroom. When the public class was over, people would walk through the center carrying their creations and smiling proudly.

We beginners watched in astonishment as the instructors carted bucket after bucket of flowers and greens in from their cars, loaded up arrangements to be delivered, and then cleaned up the tables and floors in a state of convivial exhaustion. Members who offered to help were instructed to empty the water from the cutting bowls onto our thirsty outdoor desert plants so not a drop was wasted. We nicknamed Sangetsu a "full body contact sport." We also watched the instructors bloom as they found the voices, hidden in their hands, that only flowers can elicit.

I'll never forget the day we filmed the Ajikis as they did an outdoor demonstration. The weather was windy, and it looked as if we might have to cancel the project. Mrs. Ajiki quietly walked into the center and prayed, then we all watched in astonishment as the wind died down. As soon as the filming was over, the wind started right up again. On camera, the Ajikis also got into a very entertaining but gentle disagreement over how to arrange. They always modeled such gentle respect, but they were not afraid to speak up. Rev. Ajiki would approach your arrangement, jokingly ask if you had insurance, then start clipping. We learned that, as in life, what isn't there is just as important as what is there.

And now our teachers and many of their students are not here. We miss them terribly, especially as the world is on fire, but the clippers have been carefully passed on to all of you as part of Mokichi Okada's vision. There are more flowers to come. The seeds are already planted; the vases wait quietly.

About ten years ago, the Tucson Center added a vase storage room that was recently discovered to have mold.

The remediation is now complete thanks to your generosity, and all the vases will be carefully cleaned and restored. We have seen them in their glory, and we know their time will come again. Thank you for entrusting them to us.

Rev. Gerry Nangle, Tucson Johrei Center



Some of the temporarily displaced vases.

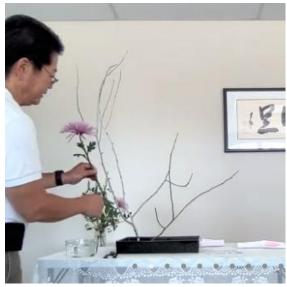
Sangetsu on Zoom

The times have been challenging for Sangetsu classes, and yet these many months of isolation and uncertainty have made the importance of having flowers in our lives even more apparent. After one trial demonstration of Sangetsu over Zoom in November of 2020, the Sangetsu Council hit upon the notion of giving monthly demonstrations via Zoom to inspire and encourage our instructors and students to continue with their practice. So we began our first attempts at online ikebana...

There were plenty of new challenges: A three-dimensional art form becomes foreshortened and distorted in a twodimensional medium, and therefore depth and rhythm were somewhat difficult to show. Getting the background uncluttered, the lighting sufficient and balanced, setting up cameras effectively, proper volume for teaching—even choice of clothing became a matter of discussion. We learned to remind one another to always place our hasami down on a folded towel rather than onto the hard surface of the table, as the resulting "clunk" becomes really irritating over a microphone. Always, we set a rehearsal the day before each demo to iron things out beforehand. One council member would serve as MC, while another "ran the tech"—spotlighting the appropriate speaker or teacher in turn. Once she entirely forgot to record the presentation, so was unable to send it out for people to access for their own practice. We learned our way through trial and error. We invited others to participate, so students had a chance to experience demonstrations from different parts of the US and western Canada. Some advanced students, preparing for their instructor's exams, found giving a demo a good opportunity to practice teaching basic arrangements. We were delighted to have some male instructors demonstrate, which hopefully will have encouraged more men to explore this art form.

More and more people were attending, invited by their friends. We realized that our audience now held many who had never studied before. Therefore we changed our format from three to two demonstrations, allowing for more actual instruction to be given. With the exception of August--when we gave everyone a summer break—our wonderful instructors and advanced students stepped up every month to help us with a new demonstration. Sometimes we had special themes, such as basic nageire or moribana styles, or rhythmical lines. There was one whole presentation devoted to shoka. In November, we had a special presentation about creating harmony between materials and environment. Finally, four of us on the council put together a pre-recorded "Holiday Postcard" of four festive arrangements for the December holidays, which is being sent out very soon, in lieu of a live presentation.

In exploring this new medium, we hope to help all of our instructors become more adept at bringing Sangetsu to a wider audience in the years to come. At the very least we will have given more people a taste of ikebana and encouragement to bring flowers more fully into their lives—especially in these interesting times.



Howard Doi demonstrating on Zoom



Lorna McMurray, Senior Instructor

Greetings From Florida

We continued with our ikebana classes at Johrei by the Sea with ten in-person students, plus three students via Zoom in The Village Florida and New York, NY.

For our last class of the year, we used vases made by our teacher Helena Arouca.



From Helena in Virginia

On October 7th Grace Morris, Sangetsu student, represented our school of at Ikebana of Richmond's monthly meeting. Ikebana of Richmond always encourages locals to do programs and this particular one had four schools





Grace is also a garden club state judge and has tremendous knowledge in arranging flowers in the

Western style. Now she is learning and enjoying Ikebana.

Each school had to interpret a card and she chose the one which is projected on the screen. She used maple branches.

Also in October, I arranged flowers to go with two large screens at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts in Richmond, Virginia. Here are the interpretive remarks about the screens:

Mori Kansai's screens depict the mountainous habitats, food and water required by animals in the winter and summer. The weathered Ghost Wood within the arrangement shows the decay of the winter season. Snowflakes are represented by the gypsophila. The evergreens in the winter and summer screens are shown by magnolia leaves. These foundational greens are the essential salad bar in the woods for the wildlife. Summer heat and humidity depicted in the second panel is represented by the use of the coral roses. Finally, the ceramic vase which is made of clay, exemplifies the earth holding the water for all. These elements together combine to give the viewer a glimpse of the tranquility and sanctity of this idealized world.





Helena Arouca, Master Instructor

COLORADO & JAMAICA SANGETSU

Challenges and new experiences have occurred and have been met. Finally, I was able to commit to a Zoom workshop in October. It didn't work out for last February, although an attempt to do a "show & tell" was nonetheless provided. For the October workshop, I practiced arranging from the back which I had never attempted. My advanced student Ginni Ishimatsu assisted and encouraged me. Being able to view the laptop screen is a huge help to actually see what you are doing. There still is a challenge because it isn't like



it is being viewed by a live audience but rather a flat two-dimensional version. It does require some perception shifting. For the main arrangement, I utilized liatris, front yard shrub leaves and a single white lily. In addition, I had created another example of parallel lines utilizing cattails. safflower hypericum to show already on display. The parallel lines lesson went very well after

all. In fact, two Ikebana members asked to view the Zoom presentation, and were invited.

My next challenge that also required preparation, was when I was asked to demonstrate at the annual Ikebana exhibit held in November. The theme was "Ikebana on the Move". I found these Lively Motion branches; dried withered looking branches and curly willow which I utilized in my exhibit arrangement as well as in the demonstration. There were four main arrangements completed for that, two of which consisted of two containers. I did most from the back but had several lazy-susans so I could eyeball them before finalizing. This was



another first for me. Special kudos to Helena Arouca, who by the way has mastered arranging from the back, as she was available to encourage and support me through both of these challenges. Arranging from the back is something actually taught and practiced in other Ikebana schools. I strongly encourage Sangetsu Instructors at all levels to take the plunge and try this! Begin with your laptop camera and give it a go.

There was another summer garden club workshop. I really liked working with them because they brought flowers from their garden as well as the host garden. I would arrive earlier than the class time scheduled and look for the branches to be used with the Moribana basic arrangements from the host garden. The two garden club hosts actually came to the November exhibition demonstration and a few other of my specially invited guests.

As far as Jamaica, their strict protocols still did not allow any group gatherings while I was there this past summer. I do plan to make contact with the Ikebana chapter in Kingston. Hopefully I can get something going while I am there this upcoming winter stay.

Natalie Montecalvo, Senior Instructor

In Memory of Henry

I can't think of Sangetsu without Henry. What I learned from him was not limited to the knowledge and techniques of Sangetsu. He taught me the most import aspect of Sangetsu, which is the spirituality. He was a spiritual and multi-talented artist. He was a walking Ikebana; the personification of Sangetsu. I miss him. At the same time, I feel we must keep carrying the torch of Sangetsu for the world. Henry will be with us through Sangetsu.

Mayumi Ichino, Senior Instructor Vancouver BC



Helena's favorite memory

I was attending the monthly service at NHQ and like always I went to the altar to see the Ikebana. Well this one was interesting! It had red roses and red anthurium. I inwardly screeched, thinking/wondering who put these two together??? I asked around and Reverend Ajiki came and said "It was me. Do you like it?"

Hmmmm... I asked, "Why did you use roses and anthurium? Those are main flowers!!!"

Then he said "WHY NOT???"

Then I understood his way of thinking out of the box. Presenting something unique and unusual. The arrangement was glorious, glowing.

So it must be right, right?

I still don't put roses and anthurium together.

I miss him!

Helena Arouca, Waynesboro, Virginia

Editor's Message:

The holidays are fast approaching! How can that be? It is said that time seems to go by faster the older you get...I believe that this is true!

The Sangetsu Directive Council is still working on the logistics of the planned conference in Vancouver in June. We may have to postpone it again, due to restrictions crossing the border, and may change it to the fall in Tucson. Please stay tuned!

Since the end of the year is coming up, it is time to remind you of the annual Sangetsu dues. It is still \$50.00 USD, which may be sent to our treasurer Karey Karam at: 7201 East Paseo San Andres, Tucson Arizona 85710.

A grateful "Thank you" goes out to all who contributed to this newsletter, especially to the members of the Sangetsu Council who put in a lot of time and effort to make this edition special.

Things are returning to normal, and several classes have resumed, and exhibits have taken place. The council is continuing to present monthly Zoom demonstrations to help keep us all in the ikebana stream. We hope that you are taking advantage of the live presentations as well as the recordings. Here is the link to the November demonstration on "Harmony":

https://us02web.zoom.us/rec/share/d6q5pEBU0J7awa KsmlkzEJY-

<u>DAH9zQrOu2gsL9yCEZm6Cmx7iiARh3cHTP711g.BjkZ71</u> <u>H6JWMU0dUQ</u> Press ctrl and click on https

Passcode: Beaut1ful!

Joan Fairs, Master Instructor



Japan 2013



Tea ceremony, Tucson 2011



Henry and Michi 2011