

# Sangetsu North America

## Summer Newsletter #25



June 2021

### Editor's Message:

There is light at the end of the tunnel! With more and more people being vaccinated against the Coronavirus, things are finally starting to open up! As I said in the last newsletter, the healing power of flowers and nature make us the fortunate ones, since Ikebana is so readily accessible to us.

Sadly, our revered Head Master Henry Ajiki passed away peacefully on December 24<sup>th</sup>, after gradually slowing down over the previous week. He was 94. The family is grateful for the outpouring of love and support during his time in Tucson and after his move to California. We will be putting together a special edition of our newsletter later this year to commemorate this special man. **Please send a short fond memory of him**, so that it can be included, to patriciadickson27@gmail.com.

We now have dates for our Sangetsu Conference in the Vancouver area, for June 2022. Please see the time table further on in this newsletter so you can begin planning...

The Sangetsu council has been spearheading monthly Zoom Ikebana demonstrations, which have been very well received. Each demonstration has been recorded, so it can be accessed by going to: [Video Conferencing, Web Conferencing, Webinars, Screen Sharing](#) the access code is: Beaut1ful! If anyone is interested in participating in future demos, please let one of the council members know. Also, if we have missed sending out the link to you for the live demonstrations or recordings via Zoom, please let us know so that you can be included in the future.

Joan Fairs, Master Instructor

## SANGETSU DIRECTIVE COUNCIL REPORT April 2021 NAC

With the passing of Henry Ajiki last December, and of Michi Ajiki the year before, Sangetsu NA has lost not only two Master Instructors, but also two central figures in our School. We on the Council have been doing our best to keep Sangetsu alive and active in the face of these great losses, as well as the Covid-19 crisis that has affected our work since spring of last year.

We have updated our roster, and now count twenty-three active instructors, of which three are Master Instructors, and three are Senior Instructors. Because of the Covid crisis, we were unable to hold our Conference last year, where we would have had been able to add three new instructors to our list, and upgrade three of our current instructors to higher levels, through the examinations that had been scheduled.

We have rescheduled our Vancouver Sangetsu Conference for late June of 2022—the 50<sup>th</sup> year of the School's founding in Japan. We have secured our venue and have funds in place to cover expenses in Canada. We hope that we will have at least those same six candidates ready to take their exams by then, and a full conference of participants to help us all celebrate not only the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary, but also a return to in-person classes, and the expanding of our body of students and instructors.

We have kept in touch with our members through two issues of our Newsletter last year, as well as through our website and on social media. While the weather permitted, some instructors were able to teach classes out of doors, but these came to an end with the approach of winter. We as a Council experimented with one on-line Zoom class, which exposed some of the difficulties of teaching via Zoom with beginning students. Several instructors, however, have been successfully teaching monthly classes on Zoom with their more experienced students.

Determined to keep students and instructors inspired and active, at the suggestion of one of our instructor candidates we started presenting online demonstrations on Zoom, which have proven very successful. Starting with a trial demo last November for instructors and students only, beginning in January we have presented monthly demonstrations open not only to students but to all members of the Johrei Fellowship and some friends. Each demo lasts about one hour, and has three instructors or candidates demonstrating an arrangement apiece. The recordings of the demos have then been shared to allow more people to watch them, or as teaching aids for those wishing to try the arrangements on their own. These will

be continued on a monthly basis, giving different instructors the opportunity to present a demonstration. We have had around 60 viewers in attendance each time, and we are encouraging all who join us to arrange some flowers in their homes and for their friends' homes in this time of isolation and insecurity. We hope that this exposure of Sangetsu to so many members and friends will encourage more students to join us when we are able to return to regular classes.

Otherwise, some of our instructors have participated in Ikebana exhibitions around the continent—including in Vancouver, BC (a Virtual Spring Show) and several in Washington DC. Individual demonstrations have been done on Zoom as Study Classes for Centers or groups, and one demonstration was given in Montana to a Toastmasters' meeting using invisible materials--to great acclaim.

One of our Council was sponsored to go to Los Angeles to arrange flowers for Rev. Ajiki's Memorial, and to represent Sangetsu in the ceremony. As we continue to explore new ways of bringing the healing power of flowers to the world in these difficult times, we are trusting in Henry and Michi's ongoing inspiration and guidance from the spiritual realm.

Lorna McMurray

### **A Broken Vase**

Not long ago, I planned a short overnight trip and needed a maintenance check for a drive into Mexico. I drove to my garage and was told to return in a few hours. When I called to confirm that the car was ready, the receptionist told me the car was ready but that there had been an accident. The mechanic, while checking the spare, dropped a bag that was in the backseat and the contents had shattered on the garage floor. Investigating, he discovered that it had been a flower vase. He saw my name and the year of purchase written on the underside and realized it was probably a special possession.

I told the receptionist on the phone not to worry, that things happen. However on the way to the garage I became more and more angry. The vase, I remembered, was one that I had purchased in Japan and had hand carried back on the plane.

By the time I arrived at the garage, my anger had mounted. I told the receptionist that I wanted a personal apology from the mechanic. He came from the garage into the waiting room annoyed and angry himself. He said that a true apology was something freely given, not demanded from a stranger. He turned and abruptly left.

I was taken aback. On my way to the car, (that was now repaired for safe travel), I heard a small voice in my head telling me to go to a flower shop. I purchased some gorgeous flowers, rushed home and made two small arrangements. When I took the arrangements into the shop about an hour later, the receptionist was quite surprised and I could tell very pleased. She had just spent time searching the internet for information



about Kintsugi, a Japanese technique used to repair broken ceramic parts with a final dusting of gold, platinum or silver in the cracks. The technique is also a philosophy that treats the breakage

and repair as part of the past-history of an object rather than something to disguise.

As I was leaving, the mechanic stopped me in the parking lot. He thanked me for the beautiful arrangement and asked that I forgive him for the broken vase. Of course he was forgiven and I expressed regrets for my behavior too. We shared a few moments that were civil and respectful.

That day, flowers were my allies. Though the vase was not repairable, broken feelings were. And maybe some of the cracks in my character were patched a bit as well.

Terry Quinn, Master Instructor

### **Message from Mamiko**

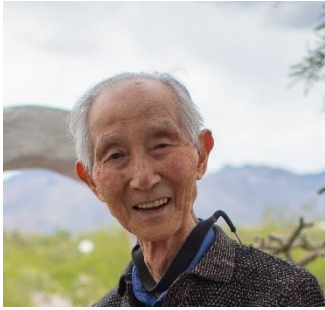
Earlier this year, I spent some time in Japan. I returned home in Bellevue, Washington, at the end of March. Since then, I have held classes by Zoom, once a month. Attendance is low, but we enjoy it. I was happy to be able to join the Zoom demonstrations by Sangetsu North America while staying in Japan. I'm lucky to be given the opportunity!

I learned the Shoka style in May from the Zoom demonstration given by Patricia Dickson. I really appreciated that she taught this style to us. I e-mailed her pictures of my arrangements and she helped me perfect my attempts. I used iris growing in my garden.



Mamiko Matsushita, Instructor

## Henry Ajiki's Memorial April 2, 2021



Rev. Harutami (Henry) Ajiki was the first Director of Sangetsu North America, and served our School of Ikebana in that capacity--and later as Advisor--for over forty years. He was an exceptional artist, teacher and mentor, and oversaw the progress of our school with great heart and dedication. His formal Memorial was held at the Los Angeles Johrei Center on April 2, 2021—the 100<sup>th</sup> Day of his transition. I was greatly honored to represent Sangetsu North America on that occasion, on behalf of the Sangetsu Directive Council.

I arrived the evening of March 31<sup>st</sup>, and the next day went to the huge flower market downtown to find flowers for the main altar and a special commemorative arrangement on behalf of the School. The choice of materials was overwhelming! I found blossoming cherry branches and deep rose hellebores for the altar—a combination of winter and spring appropriate for the timing of the occasion--but came to an absolute standstill in choosing for the special arrangement. I felt the responsibility keenly, and wanted to find something spectacular, but at the same time wanted it to be something Henry would choose amongst the hundreds of materials. Finally, I just asked him for help. Immediately my eyes were drawn to some beautiful, glowing peonies and fasciated willow, and I did not need to look further.



The memorial service the next day was broadcast on Zoom, and many friends and students attended from their homes all over the country, as well as in person. The day was blessed by a sprinkling of rain in the early morning. The ceremony was beautiful and dignified, yet filled with laughter as the Ajiki family shared wonderful stories of their father's life. I was honored and grateful to be there.

Lorna McMurray, Senior Instructor

## A Brief Report

This spring, besides Reverend Ajiki's memorial, I represented Sangetsu North America at the annual North American Council meeting at the end of April. It was once again held via Zoom, as restrictions on in-person gatherings were still in place. I submitted a report which you can read elsewhere in this newsletter.

I have been acting mostly as the tech person for the monthly Zoom Demonstrations we have been presenting. The response to these hour-long presentations of flower arrangements has been enthusiastic, and there are more people attending each time who have never had a chance to study Sangetsu. When locations open up more fully over the course of the year, there will still likely be a call for continuing these on-line presentations, as they are reaching and encouraging many people to try their hand at arranging flowers, even where there may not be a formal Sangetsu class available.

I have been arranging flowers for my home altar and my office, and informally teaching a flower enthusiast here in Helena, Montana. I will again be presenting a small exhibition for friends and neighbors in my office space in celebration of Paradise on Earth Day, June 15<sup>th</sup>, and am hoping to get a workshop organized for the fall.



I recently was asked to arrange flowers in a tiny rural church in Basin, Montana, for a special performance of a Partita and Sonata by Bach for solo violin—the first in a series of such performances in historic churches in Montana by baroque musician Carrie Krause, playing a 1740's violin. The church was built in the 1890, and had surprisingly beautiful acoustics. I made two simple arrangements with sunflowers, white mums and purple statice, to bring nature into the sanctuary, and a small arrangement for the vestibule. It is always a special treat to combine flowers with other art forms!

Lorna McMurray, Senior Instructor

### Sangetsu Report by Mayumi in Vancouver

The worldwide purification started at the beginning of 2020. We all are affected by this pandemic. No Ikebana shows. No Sangetsu classes. I had a few online classes for those who wanted to have remote classes, but many said that online classes were not the same as in person ones. Responding to their request, I have started in person Sangetsu classes since March of this year, every other Thursday at the Vancouver Johrei Centre in Richmond, for those who wanted to come out there. In order to comply with Covid-19 restrictions, I am keeping the class size one or two students at a time. I am asking students to come at flexible times between 11:00 and 14:00. Usually I have three to four classes in one day having one or two students for each class.

We miss social gatherings with other students but we are happy to have in person classes, and feel so fortunate that we can interact with flowers and nature for our spiritual well being during this difficult time.

Sangetsu students sometimes join us working in the garden of the Vancouver Johrei Centre. It gives us happiness being with nature, as well as giving us the feeling of accomplishment. We understand that learning Sangetsu is more than acquiring the techniques and knowledge. Enriching the life experience, including working in the garden is also the important part of learning. The beauty of nature surely purifies and uplifts our soul. We believe that plants have consciousness and respond to us. The more we take care of them with love, the more beautifully they bloom.

A large peony was blooming in the garden of Vancouver Centre. I cut it, arranged it, and put it on the altar. It was amazing that the simple single flower arrangement could express so much joy in life. I recalled Meishu sama's poem of a Camellia when I made this arrangement.

Meishu sama's poem:

A large camellia  
Was blooming in my garden.  
I cut it, arranged it,  
And put it in my alcove,  
What joy I felt in living!



Mayumi Ichino, Senior Instructor

### Report from Joan in Vancouver

From mid February of this year, I have only had weekly classes for a small group of advanced students, via Zoom. They come to pick up the branches and flowers which I leave at my front door, and return home to participate virtually. I ask them to send me pictures of their arrangement, and suggest small improvements to enhance their final arrangement. I find that this method of holding classes works quite well with my advanced students, but is too difficult to teach beginners in this way.

Now that many people have had their first vaccination against the Coronavirus, and things are opening up, I am planning on having a beginner's class starting in September for those who have never taken classes before, and will have another set for beginner's who have taken a set or more of my classes before the shutdown. Hopefully the latter group can start classes in mid-July, which I plan on holding outside on the covered verandah of our heritage house. We should be able to hold classes in the amenities room of the heritage house from September.

This heritage house, which is over 100 years old, and was completely refurbished ten years ago, will be the site of our Vancouver Conference. It is actually in Burnaby, a city of over 250,000, right next door to Vancouver. Here are the conference dates:



#### 2022 Conference dates:

Wed	June 22 <sup>nd</sup> Council arrives. Preparation.
Thurs	June 23 <sup>rd</sup> Preparation and Participants arrive.
Fri & Sat	June 24 <sup>th</sup> and 25 <sup>th</sup> Conference
Sun	June 26 <sup>th</sup> Morning Conference , afternoon Exhibition
Mon	June 27 <sup>th</sup> Exams

Joan Fairs, Master Instructor



### Sangetsu in Colorado and in Jamaica

Pandemic purification for all.... But I still realize the sun rises and sets, as well as the moon cycles, flowers bloom and grow... Life still exists. For me, Sangetsu flower arranging is a part of my life no matter. Sangetsu activities, although limited, still are maintained. At the beginning of 2020 the Jamaican demonstrations for the Orchid Societies in Ocho Rios and Montego Bay still occurred. But not this year, as strict protocols there are in place.

On the bright side, Zoom presentations have kept us all in touch and inspired. Both the Ikebana International chapter to which I belong, and Sangetsu have kept me plugged in for sure. I attempted to do a Zoom for Sangetsu this past February, but internet limitations did not allow that from where I live in the hills outside of Ocho Rios, in Jamaica. However, I took a road trip to the southern coast where I previously lived and did an arrangement for show and tell at the end of the February Zoom. Internet was available at the hotel where I stayed.

Virtual teaching is a new challenge for me that requires additional preparation. I plan to work on that and am happy to see that Helena has been tackling that since last year.

Needless to say, Sangetsu arrangements are regularly done for friends and home, both in Colorado and in Jamaica. I'm happy to report I'm back to teaching as of May, working with a neighborhood Garden Club across town from where I live. We have scheduled another class as a matter of fact, in June. I do hope there will be on-going interest as indicated by questions regarding supplies and the Sangetsu text.



Also, the annual Ikebana exhibit held at the Denver Botanic Gardens is scheduled for November. Last year's was cancelled due to the pandemic. I hope everyone can do what is possible as we all aim towards Flowers for a Better World!

Natalie Montecalvo, Senior Instructor

### Love of Nature: The Pathway to Birthing Korinka

Blessed with the gift of time and opportunity for reflection this pandemic has bequeathed; besides enjoying the "matchless beauty of Nature" so evident in my garden; making Ikebana arrangements with the branches and joyous flowers- they, seemingly oblivious of the global panic; I have been reading literature that inspires and soothes the spirit. Nature is a common theme. As I reviewed excerpts from the various writings I recorded, what is striking, is the extent to which the underlying principles and practices of Ikebana – reverence and love of Nature and focus on expressing its natural beauty - recurs across centuries and cultures.

The quotations I share, not only express reverence, appreciation and love of Nature; but also highlight the fact that love of Nature is not passive. It seeks expression. In the words of Ralph Waldo Emerson (1936), "*Nature is a discipline of the understanding in intellectual truths.*" Mokichi Okada emphasized that Nature is "*the voiceless, priceless teaching of the Supreme God.*" He spoke of the importance of cultivating and inculcating aesthetic values and practices which would foster the ability to express natural beauty and derive its benefits and further stated, "*But far more important than the physical beauty is that which is within. When we can sense the spirituality of a lovely art form, we can receive far more inspiration from it. This contributes to our spiritual elevation and expanding consciousness in every way.*"

In a similar vein, Ohiyesa (Charles Alexander Eastman) describing the place on Nature in the lives of Native Americans, states: "*We hold nature to be the measure of consummate beauty ---; there are no temples or shrines among us save those of nature.*" Appreciation of beauty is "*akin to religious feeling. ---That which is beautiful must not be trafficked with but must be revered and adored.--- Beauty in our eyes is always fresh and living, even as God, the Great Mystery; dresses the world anew at each season of the year.*" Kahgegagahbowh (George Copway) born into the Ojibwe nation expresses deep gratitude for his close connection to Nature, "*I was born in Nature's wide domain! The trees were all that sheltered my infant limbs, the blue heavens all that covered me. I am one of Nature's children. --- It is thought great to be born in palaces, surrounded with wealth- but to be born in Nature's wide domain is greater still!*" (Nerburn, 1999).

Celia Loughton Thaxter, a nineteenth century American writer shares Kahgegagahbowh's sentiment of good fortune: "*He who is born with a silver spoon in his mouth is generally considered a fortunate person, but his good fortune is small compared to that of the happy mortal who enters this world*

with a passion for flowers in his soul." She suggests that the love of Nature is a gift at birth. *"--- the true lover of flowers is born, not made. And he is born to happiness in this vale of tears, to a certain amount of the purest joy that earth can give her children, joy that is tranquil, innocent, uplifting, unfailing."* In extolling Nature's healing qualities, she states: *"Ever since I could remember anything, flowers have been like dear friends to me, comforters, inspirers, powers to uplift and to cheer. --- When in these fresh mornings I go into my garden before anyone is awake, I go for the time being into perfect happiness. . . All the cares, perplexities, and griefs of existence, all the burdens of life slip from my shoulders and leave me with the heart of a little child that asks nothing beyond the present moment of innocent bliss."* (Thaxter, 1895)

Thoreau, an American naturalist in explaining his love of Nature also highlights the benefits: *"I love nature, I love the landscape, because it is so sincere. It never cheats me. It never jests. It is cheerfully, musically earnest."* (Journal, 16 November 1850). *"I make it my business to extract from Nature whatever nutriment she can furnish me though at the risk of endless iteration. I milk the sky and the earth."* (Journal, 3 November 1853)

Ralph Waldo Emerson (1836), in his essays on Nature, described the enchantments of Nature as being medicinal, *"they sober and heal us;"* however, he observed that not everyone derives these benefits - and this to our loss. *"Only as far as the masters of the world have called in nature to their aid, can they reach the height of magnificence."* He noted our inability *"to see."* *"To speak truly, few adult persons can see nature. Most persons do not see the sun. At least they have a very superficial seeing. The sun illuminates only the eye of the man but shines into the eye and the heart of the child."*

Thoreau also lamented that humans are not sufficiently appreciative of Nature. *"How much of beauty—of color, as well as form—on which our eyes daily rest goes unperceived by us,"* (Journal, 8/1/60). In his view, *"the perception of beauty is a moral test"* (Journal, 6/21/52). Like Emerson, he speculated that children seem more sensitive to beauty, *"the child plucks its first flower with an insight into its beauty and significance which the subsequent botanist never retains"* (Journal, 7/16/51 & 2/5/52). For Thoreau, ultimately, beauty is felt. *"A man has not seen a thing who has not felt it"* (Journal, 2/23/60).

It is precisely this deep desire to show reverence for Nature and express beauty with life-filled flowers which gave birth to Ikebana in the sixth century. The goal was to prolong the life of the flowers as part of worship rather than design floral

arrangements. Today, as an artform, the expression of the beauty of Nature is at the core of Ikebana. According to Mokichi Okada, *"It is not necessary that we re-arrange nature, just add a few touches. It is beautiful as it is."* Korinka, the essence of the Sangetsu School, transcends forms, awakens the arranger as well as the viewer to *"the spirit,"* the inherent beauty of the natural materials used in the arrangement, renewing, revitalizing, uplifting and transforming the consciousness of both arranger and viewer. Sangetsu states Korinka is an ideal, a process which requires keen observation and respect for the insights which come from communing with Nature and being fully present. It involves seeing wholeness, harmony, beauty, perfection in a dried branch, tiny bud, radiant bloom, individually and collectively.

In the words of Eckhart Tolle (2010), **to see** in this way *"presence is needed to become aware of the beauty, the majesty, the sacredness of nature."* Thich Nhat Hanh, (1995) poetically states:

*When we look into the heart of a flower, we see clouds, sunshine, minerals, time, the earth, and everything else in the cosmos in it. Without clouds, there could be no rain, and there would be no flower. Without time, the flower could not bloom. In fact, the flower is made entirely of non-flower elements; it has no independent, individual existence. It "inter-is" with everything else in the universe. ----- When we see the nature of inter-being, barriers between ourselves and others are dissolved, and peace, love and understanding are possible.*

Such is the promise of Korinka: *"the beauty inherent in the heart of each being, when awakened into clear expression, would transform the world into a place of truth, virtue and beauty."*

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