



JAPAN FOUNDATION

## Living Out My Dream

When I applied for the JET Memorial Invitation Program, and was awarded a chance to travel to Japan, I could not believe it. My entire Japanese class was so excited for me, and my teacher was very proud. Soon enough, the day had finally come for me to go to the Philadelphia International Airport to head for San Francisco. My mother was nervous and worried, but she knew that this was something that I wanted to do for a long time but never could afford as a high school student. I looked into traveling to Japan before, but it was too expensive. However, I was determined to go even if it meant that I had to wait.

During my stay in Japan, I met so many interesting, fun, and amazing people that I have bonded with. The thirty-one other participants in this program made the trip an amazing experience. I had never met people from very far states before, and I was able to learn a lot about the differences between people living in other states by just talking to and getting to know the participants.

After having lessons on common behaviors to display while staying in Japan and living with a host family, I got a little worried. There were many difference between Japanese culture and American culture, I thought I was bound to forget something: handkerchiefs, the toilets, Genkan, Onsen, and even baths within Japanese homes.

However, my whole outlook on Japan changed after the short amount of time that we had. Osaka, Kyoto, and Kobe were all beautiful places. Kyoto was full of Japan's traditional culture. In addition, the people were all so interested in talking to us. For instance, sales associates in clothing stores would begin to talk to me and ask me questions about where I came from and how long I have been studying Japanese. I enjoyed this because this behavior is not very common in America. Another thing that I loved about Japanese people was how kind they were. Every store clerk would greet us. There was a store in Rinku Town that I went to every time I went shopping and I always conversed with one of the workers. On my last day in Japan, she made me a origami animals as a present to take home with me.

The most interesting thing for me during my stay in Japan was my homestay. I was more nervous about my homestay than anything else I had done. However, if I had known how nice they were I would not have been nervous at all. They showed me so many new things and were so nice to me. I wanted to try Takoyaki and we cooked it at home. We played with fireworks in Yukata and we went shopping. My host family could not speak very much English and my Japanese was not very extensive. However, they worked to communicate and we taught each other many things about our cultures. Shiori, my host sister's best friend was trying to learn English and I was able to help her learn English while she taught me Japanese. She was able to translate for my host family and me. My family left a huge impression on me and made me love the people and the culture even more than I already did.

I am truly appreciative of the opportunity I had to visit Japan and truly experience the Japanese culture outside of the classroom, the internet, and the television. I learned that in order to understand other people, you have to be open to their way of living and immerse yourself in new things. This program has even made the path I want to take in the future very clear. I plan to study International Relations and Japanese because I do want to be a link between countries. I also plan to visit Japan again in the future. I want to thank the Japan Foundation for such a great opportunity and for fulfilling one of my wishes. Now, I can share my stories with others to let them know that traveling overseas or trying to fulfill a dream is not impossible.