



A Life-Changing Experience

The goal of the JET Memorial Program was to raise the interest in Japan's language and culture in the minds of young American students who have been studying Japanese with the hope that one day these students will choose a career that will link the United States of America and Japan. I am happy to report that their goal has been successful with the very first group of participants.

This trip has meant a lot to me. Not only was I able to fulfill a dream, but I was also able to meet many people. Everyone I had the fortune of meeting has inspired me in one way or another. The members of the Japan Foundation were kind and I was grateful for their support during this program. They were extremely enthusiastic about it, as was I.

The members of the JET Memorial Invitation Program were amazingly influential. Their speeches and presentations not only interested me, but helped me decide on a path to take in the future. On this trip, I learned that many people who work in relation to Japan started their careers through the JET Program. I've known about the program for a few years, but only through this trip was I positive that it was something I wanted to pursue. I realized this would be a great opportunity for my future.

The students of Japan from both Semboku and Kozukata high schools were fun to be around. They were as excited about meeting us as we were about meeting them. Talking to them and being able to share the things we experienced was amazing. It made me realize that teenagers around the world are fundamentally the same. We talked about many things. They shared the same worries of college and the future as we did. Everyone was able to relate to pop culture, such as music, movies, and television shows. We were able to cross the language barrier and form terrific friendships.

Of course, we must not forget the people this program is dedicated to. Taylor Anderson and Montgomery Dickson were fantastic people. They worked for JET and lost their lives in the unfortunate Great Northeast Earthquake. Although no longer with us, they had a huge impact on me. They were two people who loved Japan, its people, and its culture. From the stories I heard, they were both loved in return by their neighbors and friends in Japan. They did much to contribute and will not easily be forgotten. They were passionate about what they did, and I only hope I could be as exemplary as them.

Of all the people I encountered, I have to admit that my fellow participants were the most important to me. We were all from different parts of the nation, from New York to Hawaii, and furthest from all was myself in Guam. It was obvious that we all had an interest in Japanese language. We shared the same dreams of visiting Japan. We experienced many new things together and made unforgettable memories. Waking up every day, sharing meals, attending classes, and seeing Japan with these people was more than exciting. We arrived in San Francisco as strangers and departed this fantastic trip as a family. Being so far away from everyone is sad. I miss those times we'd bike through the town and explore more of the country we love. I hope one day that we are able to reunite and have one more adventure together.

Not only did I meet people, but I was able to visit amazing places. Osaka, Kyoto, and Iwate were amazing in different respects. Osaka was definitely an energetic place to be. From the expressive attitudes of the locals to the bold and historic Osaka Castle, it was definitely an exciting city. Kyoto was more beautiful than I imagined it. The shrines and temples of Kiyomizu-dera and Kinkaku-ji were astounding. The architecture was like none I've seen before. It was definitely a city of culture. Iwate seemed like a small place, but was none-the-less interesting. I was able to see a more diverse part of Japan. The farmlands and open fields were quaint. I realized that there was so much more of Japan to see than Osaka and Kyoto.

I want to be able to go back. I want to see and experience more of Japan. I want to pet the deer in Nara. I want to swim in the beaches of Okinawa. I want to look out from the top of Tokyo Tower. I want to lose myself in the technological city of Akihabara. The relaxing onsens are calling my name. I need to feel Mount Fuji under my feet as I climb to the top! There is so much about Japan that I want to experience, and I will. One day, I know, I will go back and do everything I've always dreamed of.

This whole experience has been undoubtedly life-changing. There wasn't a time in Japan where I thought "I don't want to be here" or "I want to go home." Japan is simply marvelous. If I wasn't able to express my love for this country in my report, then I don't know what else to do to prove it. My love and interest for Japan has grown so much more through this program. It's exhilarating. Not only did I meet many people and see many places, I was able to decide on my future. I will study hard during high school and college in order to apply for the JET Program. I will definitely do my best to be chosen and live out more of my dream. After my adventures with the JET Program, I want to be able to work in a position that brings Japan and the United States of America closer to one another. I want to be able to share my experiences with future students in hopes that they too will want to learn about Japan, its language, and its culture. A saying was used throughout this whole program: "Become a bridge between two great nations." I will do my very best to fulfill that goal and inspire others to do the same.