When I left Honolulu for the JET Memorial Invitation Program, I knew it would be an adventure. In preparation for this trip, I asked friends about Japan, researched Japanese customs and etiquette, and explored the Kansai area through the Internet. With this knowledge and from Japan heritage, I perceived Japan as a nation whose culture and traditions are important. I also perceived that Japan is an important and rich place to visit, especially given the rapid modern pop culture came to be in the late 1980s. There, I found many of my expectations to be true, but, of course, I learned that Japan offered so much more.

When we first arrived in Japan, many of us students were tired from the long flight across the Pacific Ocean. Upon arriving in Japan after many years of studying the Japanese language and culture, and after the first couple of days, we enjoyed delectable meals at the institute cafeteria, made quick trips to a nearby convenience store, and learned about the abundant resources at the institute. Following this knowledge, we were ready to adventure through the land of the rising sun.

Our first major experience in Japan was culture trip to Senboku High School. There, we took classes like Japanese calligraphy, I was fortunate enough to take a calligraphic class, and I learned how to make ink, brush out the character yume, meaning “dream,” and interact with other students. The students in the class were helpful and accommodating as they brought out the calligraphy supplies and gave helpful tips to me that were a part of this class. This calligraphy class helped me to gain a better understanding of Japan's amazing mix of hospitality, honor, and cooperative spirit.

Experiences and lessons like these built upon my prior image of Japan. It is true that Japan is a nation of great hospitality and cooperation. After the institute opened, we headed out to my family’s Humme and drive to an elementary school where my host sisters had kept class. There, instructions were given that all keepers must make sure that the children’s hands are washed and clean. By the end of the lesson, all of the American students in the class could drum out a beat together and held “speed date” sessions in English. We talked about various cultural topics, including technology, and held “speed date” sessions in English. We talked about various cultural topics, including technology.

The following morning, we bussed back to Senboku High School to meet our new host families. I was relieved to see my host mother carrying baby Isara and Chisato by her side. They looked exactly like any motherly family that I would see in Hawaii. We sat down, and I gave my host mother the Koino no kake, macadamia nuts that I brought from Hawaii. After a bit of introduction, we headed out to my family’s Humme and drive to an elementary school where my host sisters had kept class. There, instructions were given that all keepers must make sure that the children’s hands are washed and clean. By the end of the lesson, all of the American students in the class could drum out a beat together and held “speed date” sessions in English. We talked about various cultural topics, including technology.

After a restful night back at the institute, we shared our home stay experiences, learned about Japanese language in manga and anime, discovered online resources, and took cultural classes. I signed up for a koto class, drumming class, and one on sushi-making. The koto class was fun and quite educational, but I quickly learned that I was not going to be able to make it the wonderful place it is. I am thankful to have had the opportunity to go to Japan as an ambassador of hospitality, honor, and cooperative spirit.

The next day, we were taken to Kyo to eat at a buffet and see Kyo and Kyoto. The buffet had a number of different dishes unique to Japanese culture and finished with delicious desserts like maitake and chestnut. After lunch, we were shown a rare glimpse of Japan’s old traditions and entertainment. The following day, we headed to Osaka where we were taken to a huge electronics store, and then we ate our final meal together at a yakiniku. The meat was tender unlike that in the United States. Again, my host father made sure that I had enough to eat. After a long flight across the Pacific Ocean. However, we all were excited to be in Japan after many years of studying Japanese language and culture. In the first couple of days, we enjoyed delectable meals at the institute cafeteria, made quick trips to a nearby convenience store, and learned about the abundant resources at the institute.