



## FEBRUARY, 2016: BREEZE ISSUE #100

A FREE MONTHLY E-NEWSLETTER FOR FRIENDS OF JAPAN & TEACHERS OF JAPANESE



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“JAY-R! Sensei is looking for you! Go to the library NOW!”

I rushed down the hallway into the school library, where I found my Japanese *sensei* holding her phone in her hands with a look of utter disbelief. I quickly grabbed my phone out of my pocket to check my email, only to find myself screaming in the library with people staring at me as if I was crazy.

It was 2:55 P.M. on May 13, 2015, and I had just received my acceptance email into the 2015 JET Memorial Invitation Program; and before I knew it, 2 months later, I was at the Los Angeles International Airport at 1:00 A.M., in line to board the overnight flight that would take me on an amazing adventure in Japan, a country I have always wanted to visit ever since I was a child.

Throughout my 2 week visit, I had the opportunity to do nearly everything I have always wanted to do in Japan. In fact, some of my fondest memories of the trip include singing karaoke at the Institute’s karaoke room until 1:30 A.M., taking a taxi to the local AEON mall as the city was battered by wind and rain from Typhoon Nangka, stuffing my face with amazing Japanese cuisine every single day, relaxing in the *onsen* with many of the guys I met on this trip, and riding bikes (while getting lost) through the narrow streets of Rinku Town on our first day in Japan. It was these activities that made this whole trip seem like the nice long dream vacation that I had always wanted to take.

The Tohoku tour, however, was definitely the most “real” part of the entire trip. Although I have been exposed to seeing images and videos of the disaster through a screen, coming to the actual towns and cities in which the disaster unfolded really solidified the fact that this disaster occurred. Instead of seeing pictures of the foundations of houses that were washed away by the tsunami, I stood at the very locations where these houses once stood. In fact, one moment of the Tohoku tour that definitely affected me occurred while I was at Yuriage Junior High School near Sendai, or should I say, what still remains of Yuriage Junior High School. The building itself was indefinitely condemned after the disaster occurred, yet, our group was allowed access to see the interior, which was mostly cleaned up. I remember entering the building and just being in utter shock from seeing an empty, deserted building that nature began to take over. Yet, remnants of the school before the disaster were still present. For instance, our group went into the music room where all of us saw faded posters of classical musicians hanging on the walls, a chalkboard with the word “Graduation” written on it (we learned that this school had their graduation ceremony the morning of the disaster), and a large analog clock that was stuck at 2:46. the time when the earthquake struck the region.

Although I saw the damage the disaster had done, what really moved me were the people of the Tohoku region. Nearly everybody I encountered was very *genki* and cheerful; yet when they wanted or had to talk about the disaster, they seemed very open and willing to do so, even though it may still be very painful to talk about something so heavy. Furthermore, throughout the main highway that passed through many of the towns and cities affected by the tsunami, I kept seeing LED signs with the words *Ganbarou Tohoku*, which can be translated along the lines of “Keep Going Tohoku” or “Keep Persevering Tohoku.” Even 4 years after the disaster, many places still have not fully recovered. Yet, seeing things, like these signs, definitely showed me just how tenacious and optimistic the people of these affected regions can be.

My time in Japan was definitely the fastest 2 weeks that have ever gone by, and eventually the hardest part of the entire trip came on the last day, the day that I had to finally say goodbye to my many friends. I remember giving tight hugs to some of my best friends at the airport, and then breaking down and crying myself to sleep on the flight back home. Although I remained depressed and extremely jet-lagged for about a week after I returned, eventually I was able to talk about this life-changing experience to other people, all of whom were extremely excited to hear my lineup of stories about my adventures in Japan.

Now, 3 weeks after returning home, I still think that I will wake up in Room 908 of the Institute, open up my curtains to the gorgeous view of Rinku Town, put on my slippers, and walk down to the cafeteria, where I would see the group of best friends I made on this trip. Prior to this trip, I knew that I would meet some incredible people; yet, I never realized how intelligent, friendly, and “real” these people would be. Even though the best friends I made on this trip may come from faraway places like Oregon, Texas, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, and even Guam, I know that while we may all go on with our own lives, we will still maintain the *Kakehashi* we have formed between each other. Such action would continue to honor the

memories of both Taylor and Monty since we would not only be maintaining the bridge between the U.S. and Japan, but because we would also be maintaining the bridges within our own nation.

In addition, along with personally changing my life, the trip has also strengthened my commitment to study Japanese. This fall, I will be attending the University of California at Berkeley and although I am not able to fit any formal Japanese class into my schedule for my first semester, I definitely plan to continue practicing and studying Japanese. In order to accomplish this, I intend to maintain communications with all the people I met on the trip and utilize online resources in order to continue learning the language. Even though external circumstances seem to work against me in my quest to become proficient in the Japanese language, I know that I will continue to adjust to those circumstances and do whatever it takes to continue learning about this beautiful and intriguing language.

On a final note I would like to personally address the two teachers to whom this trip is dedicated for:

*To Ms. Taylor Anderson and Mr. Montgomery Dickson,*

*You both did not act as just mere the English teachers you were assigned to be. Rather, you helped be a part of that connection between the U.S. and Japan. Even though you are physically not able to continue working to maintain that bridge, I am glad that people, like us 160 JET-MIPpers (so far), have been able to continue your legacy by continuing to be a part of that Kakehashi (symbolic bridge) between these two nations. Thank you for your service in maintaining that Kakehashi between our two nations.*

## **NIPPON THROUGH MY EYES PHOTO SUBMISSION**

“Stairway to Safety”

This picture was taken on top of Mount Hiyori in Ishinomaki, which many people climbed in order to escape the tsunami directly below them on March 11, 2011. The sea in the background as well as these stairs in the front of the photo emphasize how seemingly close danger and safety were at the time when the tsunami occurred.



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Japanese Language Education Update 27

2015 J-LEAP Report: Mihoko Tsujino

2015 J-LEAP Report: Yukihiro Sakamoto

2015 JET-MIP Essay: Gardelio Mantuhac

2015 JET-MIP Essay: Nina Mei

2015 JET-MIP Essay: Megan Ngai

2015 JET-MIP Essay: Jacquelyn O'Connell

Breeze #99



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