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



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When I read the email that said that I had been accepted to JET MIP, I was overjoyed! I would finally be able to go to Japan and be immersed in a culture and a language that I love.

I was somewhat unsure of what to expect during the trip. Would my beginner's knowledge of the Japanese language be enough? Before I left for Japan, I was nervous about using my Japanese for fear of making a mistake. This program forced me (in a good way) to use my Japanese whenever possible. I certainly made mistakes, but thankfully, the people I met in Japan were very understanding and encouraging. I learned during the trip to not be so nervous about the things I couldn't do yet, and just focus on what I could do, learning as I went.

While in Japan, I often felt like I was dreaming. Every experience that we had in Japan, such as visiting Kiyomizu Temple in Kyoto, going to convenience stores, and biking around Osaka, allowed us to soak in the Japanese culture. I loved being in the center of it all!

Before visiting the Tohoku region, I was largely unaware of the challenges that the people of Tohoku are currently facing. When I first saw the landscape of Rikuzentakata and the marker that showed how high the water rose, I was able begin to understand the scope of the disaster. Throughout the trip, many people spoke to us about the disaster and its effects, and gave us a better idea of the situation in the Tohoku region. I learned that many people are living in

temporary housing, and that the number of volunteers is unfortunately declining. Besides that, there are growing numbers of people suffering from PTSD. But it's possible to overcome these problems if we remind the world of the need that still exists in the Tohoku region.

I think that the greatest impact we had was through the friendships we made. It was sometimes difficult to communicate with the people I met, not just because of the language barrier, but mainly because of nervousness and the uncertainty of what we would have in common. There were plenty of awkward silences when my group first met the Japanese students we would be working with in the Rikuzentakata summit. However, we were able to get over that awkwardness through the discussion we had and the activity we did together. When the time came to create our presentation, we were able to work together as a team; all of the kids from the U.S. and Rikuzentakata became so much closer throughout the course of the projects we did together. Afterwards at dinner, it was so nice to see Japanese and American kids hanging out together as new friends.

We came to Japan hoping to make a positive impact, but I feel that the Japanese people, and the people of Tohoku in particular, made an even greater impact upon us.

We met so many incredible people during the Tohoku trip who showed the will to overcome their difficulties and stay positive. I was inspired by Mayor Toba of Rikuzentakata's vision to create a town that has no need for the word "normalization," where all can live their lives with ease, regardless of their disabilities. I was also inspired by the woodworker Endo-san's mission to bring happiness back to his community through building the playground called "Rainbow Bridge," and to continue Taylor Anderson's legacy through building bookcases called "Taylor Bunkos." We met so many people who were determined to help their community, despite their own losses they sustained from the disaster.

The people who made the biggest impression upon me were the students from the Rikuzentakata summit. The purpose of the summit was for students from the U.S. and Rikuzentakata to team up, go to different areas around Rikuzentakata and think of ways to make those areas live up to Mayor Toba's vision. Although their town became a place of sadness after the disaster, the students from Rikuzentakata showed a determination to improve it by participating in the summit. I was amazed that people our age took on so much responsibility for the sake of their town.

I was really touched by the kindness of my host family, who took care of me really well. They also brought me to interesting places around Osaka, such as a conveyor-belt sushi restaurant and a beautiful Japanese-style garden. I had a super-fun weekend with them and really felt like a member of their family.

I loved my time in Japan so much that I want to keep studying Japanese in college. After hearing from JETs in Miyagi prefecture about their experiences as Assistant Language Teachers, I'm hoping to become a JET after college.

This trip proved to be more than I ever could have asked for. The Japan Foundation, the staff of the Kansai Institute, and all those who took time to talk with us and share their experiences, made this trip unforgettable.

Dear Taylor and Monty,

You guys succeeded greatly in connecting with your communities in Japan, and acted as bridges between the two countries. I hope that this year's JET-MIP group was also successful in this goal, and that I can follow in your footsteps someday, as a JET. And lastly, I admire you guys for following your dreams and touching so many lives.

NIPPON THROUGH MY EYES PHOTO SUBMISSION



“The Miracle Pine”

When I saw the Miracle Pine Tree in Rikuzentakata, I was shocked that it was the only one left of a huge pine forest. Yet, it also seemed to represent hope, showing that it's possible to overcome the effects of the tsunami, just as this pine tree is still standing.

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Breeze #108



Breeze #107



Breeze #106



Breeze #105



Breeze #104



Breeze #103



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Breeze #101



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2015 JET-MIP Essay: Nina Mei

2015 JET-MIP Essay: Megan Ngai

2015 JET-MIP Essay: Jacquelyn O'Connell

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