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



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It was almost one in the morning, about seven hours before my departure to Los Angeles, and I was still trying to finish packing for my two and a half week adventure with the 2015 JET Memorial Invitation Program. Even after knowing about my acceptance into the program for over month, I still couldn't believe that I was going to go to Japan with 31 other students from all over the country! It didn't seem real enough for me to believe that it was actually happening. I was pretty keen on thinking that the trip would be canceled somehow or that something would happen to prevent me from going. But before I knew it, I was at the JFK Airport waiting (and crying over the fact that I was traveling alone for the first time without my mother) for my flight to LAX to board.

We had a nice little buffet-style dinner the night we arrived in Los Angeles and I got to know the 31 other participants a bit more than from their Facebook introductions. We were also greeted by the director of the Japan Foundation, Mr. Hideki Hara, who congratulated us and talked a bit about the Japan Foundation and its mission. After a good night's sleep, we checked out of the hotel early in the morning and headed over to the Japan Foundation office to attend a pre-departure orientation and watched a film about Ms. Taylor Anderson, one of the JETs who passed away on 3.11 and to whom this program was dedicated to. We were also able to meet some of the friends and family members of Ms. Anderson and Mr. Monty Dickson. Andy Anderson, Shelley Frederickson, and Ian Dickson took part in the orientation and told stories about the fellow JETs. They talked about what

were like at home, how much they loved Japanese language and culture, their life, and their hopes and dreams for the future. After hearing what they had to say, I was heartbroken and couldn't help but wonder how they were able to move on. Even though I had never met Ms. Taylor Anderson or Mr. Monty Dickson, I felt like I knew them pretty well just by hearing the stories their friends and family members told, and it was then that I realized how important it was for us JET-MIPpers to continue their legacy.

That same day, we headed over to the Official Residence of the Consul-General of Japan in Los Angeles for the send-off reception. At the reception, the Honorable Consulate General, Harry Horinouchi, addressed the impact that Ms. Taylor Anderson and Mr. Monty Dickson had on both the U.S. and Japan. Later that night, we had the opportunity to see a Rakugo performance by Mr. Katsura Sunshine. After a wonderful performance, we finally left for LAX to depart for Japan.

In the fourteen days we got to spend in Japan, we traveled to Osaka, Rikuzentakata, Sendai, Kesenuma, Ishinomaki, and Kyoto. We visited many different schools while on our Tohoku tour and I made quite a lot of friends along the way. However, while I was on this tour, I learned a whole lot about the communities Ms. Taylor Anderson and Mr. Monty Dickson taught. I learned about many of towns' condition after 3.11 and how the students were affected. Some lost their homes, some lost their parents, and others lost their lives. The Great East Earthquake and Tsunami affected everyone emotionally and physically and it was hard to believe that these were the same students I was just talking and laughing with. With the little time I had with these students from various schools, I made some really great friends that I still continue to talk to today.

In addition to meeting students, we met other people affected by the earthquake and tsunami. We met the owner of Hotel Boyo in Kesenuma and he talked about his experience during the disaster. I learned about the importance of that hotel and how invaluable it was during the time of the disaster. I was also given the opportunity to stay in a "Japanese-style" room; I bathed in an *onsen* for the first time, ate a *bento* every morning, and slept on a good ol' *futon*. During the little free time we had at Hotel Boyo, I explored the city of Kesenuma and found a nice little shrine just a minute from the hotel and also found a lovely bakery. The lady from the bakery was extremely kind (almost like everyone in Japan) and even gave us a free treat with the fruit cake we bought (which was very *oishi*). In Ishinomaki, we met Mr. Endo, a wood craftsman, who lost all three of his children to the tsunami. He told us how he was in a very dark place after the disaster, and after a while, he managed to find the strength to move on. He built a bookcase in honor of Taylor Anderson (who taught his kids) as well as Rainbow Bridge, a monument dedicated to his three children on the same spot where his house used to be before the disaster. I really respect Mr. Endo for finding the courage and strength to move forward with his life. I think the Rainbow Bridge has become a great symbol to represent the bridge between the U.S. and Japan and Mr. Endo has done a beautiful job to help strengthen this bridge.

Along with learning more about the Tohoku region and the disaster's effect, I had the chance to experience Japanese culture. At Sendai Higashi High School, I tried *sadou* and *kendo* with students there. The JET-MIPpers were all paired up with a buddy who we spent our morn

and lunch with. My buddy and I both shared an interest in rock bands so we spent our lunch listening to each other's music. He introduced me to J-Rock, something I never thought existed because I thought only J-Pop existed in Japan, but I thought it was pretty cool. Since my buddy was also obsessed with American T.V. shows like *Breaking Bad*, we had a conversation about a rumored sixth season to be broadcasted. After lunch, we said our good byes and exchanged LINE's to keep in touch, and that ended our exchange at Sendai Higashi High School. The next day we toured Aoba Castle and that was the end of our Tohoku tour. All in all, my experience with the Tohoku tour was unforgettable and spectacular.

When we finally returned back to the Kansai Institute after the beautiful tour, we spent our Japanese classes getting ready for our homestays, learning Kansai dialect, and preparing for our final presentations for the closing ceremony. After class, we would spend our free time going out (by bike, of course) to the *conbini* to buy some *oishii* "whipped donuts", taiyaki with custard, *karaage*, and my favorite, some *Meiji* milk (Japanese milk is *so* much better than American milk. It's a lot richer and tastier than the ones here, I wish we had them here.). We also biked to *Rinku Town* and of course, when in *Rinku Town*, one must ride the iconic ferris wheel for a small price 500 *yen*. We went to *Namco* too at *Rinku* and played the *Taiko* drum game like a billion times (to the point where two of our fellow MIPpers got blisters on their hands).

As for my homestay, I met my host sister and host mother at Semboku High School. I met the rest of the family at home and we did some fireworks together. My host family made my stay extremely pleasant and it actually felt like "home" (at least for the two days I spent with them). On the second day with my host family, I made them American pancakes for breakfast and they enjoyed it a lot, which was a relief. The two days I spent with my host family was filled with going to various places like a *sadou* museum, *Big I*, a huge department store, a restaurant which served six different courses of tofu, a historical castle, a local *matsuri*. We also did some fireworks and dressed up in *yukatas*. We ended my homestay with a nice dinner at *yakiniku* restaurant where my host brother and older host sister worked. It was a nice last gathering before I had to go back to the Institute, I definitely found a place that I can call "home" in Japan and I can't wait until I get to go back.

My experience with JET-MIP in a brief two and a half weeks was nothing less than incredible and there are still days where I wish I was back in my room at the Kansai Institute, staring at the bridge right outside my window on the seventeenth floor. I got to make some really close friends from all over the U.S. in just a mere nineteen days, but I guess it's probably because we spent each waking moment together that we became so close. I could not have asked for a better group to spend my time in Japan with. Our inside jokes, hilarious conversations, hysterical attempts at trying to converse with Japanese people, and adventures on the bus have all made the program extraordinary. JET-MIP is something I will always look back to and something I will never ever forget. I loved every single moment I spent in Japan. Whether I was scavenging for coins in my coin purse, trying my best to use one of the toilets that required squatting, rushing back to the institute from *Rinku* five minutes before curfew (which we had to make back in time), or just attempting to communicate with my terrible Japanese skills, I

it all. Although I can't turn back time to relive my JET-MIPper days, I can say that this experience will mostly be why I'll continue to study Japanese language and culture in college. My stay in Japan has definitely helped me improve my Japanese skills and it has also helped me realize that it will not be my last time in Japan, I will definitely be back.

After telling my friends and family about my adventures in Japan (and bringing back the *omiyages*), they all shared the same reaction and told me how they wished they could go to Japan. They were surprised at how "daring" I was to try the onsen and they were all enthralled by my stories in the Tohoku region. My friends all thought that the JET-MIP was just a free vacation to Japan, but they were shocked to hear that I actually went to the towns and cities where the Great East Earthquake and Tsunami hit. While I have encouraged all of my friends to travel to Japan, they have all reminded me how special this trip was.

To Ms. Taylor Anderson and Mr. Monty Dickson:

Although I've never met the two of you, I feel as if I already know you. Because of my trip to Japan with JET-MIP, I began to understand a bit of your reasons for becoming JETs and for continuing to serve your communities. You both shared a remarkable passion for Japanese language and culture and proved to me that passion is contagious. You both enjoyed working with students everyday and never even stopped to think that it was "work". I truly hope that one day I can find something I love doing and I cannot thank you guys enough for the work you've done and for the connections you've helped me make on my trip to Japan. Your legacy has not been forgotten and has already inspired so many (like the 160 JET-MIPpers) and will be definitely be continued.

NIPPON THROUGH MY EYES PHOTO SUBMISSION



"The Rainbow Bridge"

This is the bridge Mr. Endo built in honor of his three children (the three poles represent his children). I think it signifies the hopes and dreams Mr. Endo has for the future, in addition to the bridge between the U.S. and Japan.

Breeze #110



Breeze #109



Breeze #108



Breeze #107



Breeze #106



Breeze #105



Breeze #104



Breeze #103



Breeze #102



Breeze #101



Breeze #100



Japan Found Me Campaign Report

Japanese Language Education Update 27

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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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