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



CHRISTOPHER WYNN

*Ocean Lakes High School
Virginia Beach, VA*

The golden rays of the sun peeked in through my bedroom window. Classical Japanese music slowly filled the room as my alarm went off. My mind was fuzzy with the last remnants of a dream being chased away by the rude realization that I was awake. It was a wonderful dream—something about living in Japan. But then I remembered: I am living in Japan! I was carrying out a life-long dream and goal of mine to visit a land that I had heard and learned so much about, but had never had the opportunity to visit. That is, until the life-changing summer of 2015.

I clearly remember being in complete disbelief when the acceptance letter came in the mail. Eyes wide, mouth agape, body shaking—I couldn't believe that all of my hard work and dedication had finally paid off. I couldn't believe that in a few short weeks I would travel across the world with thirty-one strangers and visit Japan of all places. However, although excited beyond belief, I never truly felt like I was going to Japan until my first night there. Even when we conducted the facility tour and everyone spoke Japanese, it never quite hit me until free time that day. Having finished our business for the day, I excitedly began my first, real adventure in Japan. Like a majority of the mippers, I decided to go biking with a group of friends. That moment—watching everyone's faces light up with pure jubilation—truly made me feel special to be there and experience it with everyone else. I felt, for the first time, that I was a part of something special. And it would only get better from there.

Unsurprisingly, we all wanted to go everywhere. There was Rinku Town, home to several neat shops, delicious restaurants, and the colorful ferris wheel. A tad farther away was Aeon Mall, full of literally everything. And if that wasn't enough, the rest of the area was teeming with untold mysteries, ready to be explored. The prospect of having to choose only one made it nearly impossible. Our indecision led to the group splitting up to go our separate ways. めっちゃ悲しい (Very Sad). However, I still had a wonderful first night. I went to a small ramen shop where I had my first authentic Japanese conversation. Unfortunately, neither my friend nor I could understand anything the waiter was trying to say; we barely even knew what we had ordered. Nonetheless, it still tasted good! Following our meal we explored the unfamiliar rocky beach and took a stroll along the coast until it started to rain. Not ready to end our first adventure, we huddled under an umbrella and miraculously made our way to Rinku Town. From there, we looked at the shops, bought milkshakes at マックドナルド (McDonalds), and even played a couple games in the arcade. But as curfew approached, we had to bring our adventures to an end and we unwillingly walked back to the institute. Overall, however, my experiences at the restaurant and at Rinku Town relieved my disbelief. I finally felt like I was in Japan.

The rest of the trip was nothing short of amazing and truly inspiring. Traveling throughout the Tohoku region, listening to the stories of the affected, witnessing the rebirth of cities was one of my favorite parts of the trip. I learned so much not only about the tsunami and earthquake, but also human nature. The people of Japan have imparted on me some of the most valuable lessons I have ever received. These people who have experienced more destruction, depression, and trauma on one day than many of us will never even experience in a lifetime happily and willingly accepted thirty-one strangers with open arms. These people chose to be happy, instead of sad. The sheer resilience and strength of these people has inspired me to live life differently. Instead of seeing only the problems in life, instead of putting all of my energy into being sad, I should focus on the solution to those problems. For example, when we attended the Japanese-American High School Summit in Rikuzentakata, one of the most devastated areas, not one person asked for our sympathy. Not one. Instead, with open arms and a smile, they asked if we would help them develop a city that “has no use for the word normalization”. They wanted to build a city that was accessible to everyone, including foreigners. The people of Rikuzentakata were focused on the solution, not the problem. And Rikuzentakata was not alone. Regardless of where we went, the people expressed only the utmost happiness for our presence. I never once saw anything but the best from the people of Japan—that is what has left the largest impression on me.

As we returned to the institute, I continued to learn as much as possible. Whether it was our Japanese language classes or cultural lessons, I was eager to learn any and everything about the culture and the people. One of the most enlightening experiences of the entire trip was my homestay experience. Although I was very nervous the entire trip about whether I would be able to communicate or not, it turned out to be one of the most enjoyable weekends of my life. My host family was one of the nicest and most generous groups of people I have ever met. To my surprise, when we left Senboku High School, the first thing they did was buy a jinbei geta for me. Receiving gifts from my host family—people I had never met before—had ne

crossed my mind. And the generosity didn't end there. Whenever we went out to eat, they always insisted that they pay for me, regardless of the price. I was amazed not only by their genuine kindness, but also their 楽しい (fun) lifestyle. All my host brothers loved playing cards and many sports. Whenever we had free time between activities, they would whip out the cards and teach me a Japanese game or we would go outside to kick the soccer ball around. On top of that, we did so many, for a lack of better words, cool things. We went to the castle in Osaka, ate a huge dinner with two other host families, and did fireworks all in the same day. The next day was even better. We went to Harvest Hill in Osaka. There, we met up with three host families, made pottery, ate at a BBQ, slid down hills, saw lots of interesting animals, shot arrows, and rode go-karts. All the while, I was genuinely enjoying the company of my host family and friends. I was truly happy.

Unfortunately, the program was nearing its end. I exchanged my final goodbyes with my host family at the graduation ceremony and took so many group pictures. I certainly will always appreciate everything they did for me. And in the blink of an eye, I was back in L.A. waiting for my shuttle bus to the airport, wishing with every fiber of my being that I was back in Japan. Leaving behind all of my new friends who I may never see again was truly difficult. Merely saying I was sad pales in comparison to how I really feel. However, if I have learned anything from my trip to Japan, it is that I shouldn't let that sadness consume me.

Adjusting to life in America was not an easy feat. The stark differences between the two nations were always and still are evident. I still ache to be in Japan. And for that reason, and many more, I know that I want Japanese to be a part of my life for a very long time. I plan to continue my studies into college and further in hopes of one day becoming fluent and possibly even living there. Somewhere down the line I want to apply for JET and revisit the country that was so difficult to leave. However, regardless of what happens, I know that I want Japanese to be a part of my life in some way.

Finally, to Taylor Anderson and Montgomery Dickson, although I may not have known either of you, I know without a doubt that you were both incredible human beings. Your positive impact on the world grows each and every day. I have learned so much from this life-changing trip and I attribute all of that and my future successes in Japanese to both of your sacrifices in the face of extreme adversity. I honestly cannot thank you enough. Although you both may have passed away, you will always remain in the thousands of hearts and minds you have touched. In this way, you will never be gone.

NIPPON THROUGH MY EYES PHOTO SUBMISSION

“Sushi”



I chose this picture because this was my first time having sushi in Japan. Also, this picture reveals to extent to which American and Japanese meals are different.

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Breeze #109



Breeze #108



Breeze #107



Breeze #106



Breeze #105



Breeze #104



Breeze #103



Breeze #102



Japanese Language Education Update 29

2015 JET-MIP Essay: Fei Zhao

2015 JET-MIP Essay: Mackenzie Young

2015 JET-MIP Essay: Bailey Well

2015 JET-MIP Essay: Christopher Wynn

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5700 Wilshire blvd, Suite 100
Los Angeles, CA 90036
P. 323.761.7510

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