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THOMAS CUDE

VIRGINIA

ALBERMARLE HIGH SCHOOL

WAKING UP

I titled this essay “Waking up.” Not only the shock of being selected to have the opportunity to go to Japan, I was even more shocked at how much I learned and comprehended while i was there. In this essay I will describe to you briefly what I went through in Japan and how it affected me. Starting with the morning I woke up.

That morning, I woke up knowing that this day was going to be one of the most important days of my life and I swore into the air as I realized I overslept. I granted myself some leeway seeing as 2 weeks prior to this day I had been moving my family into a new house and seeing as my mom and dad are both disabled I had to lift practically everything. Seeing as my sister was a girl, she said she couldn't lift a thing. Staying up till 3am the night prior to this important day, I thought I did pretty good waking up at 5am; however, it was too late. Getting to the airport with only 30 minutes to spare they let me go through the gate as I checked in. Feeling relieved, I waited in security and when I finally got to my gate and saw that the plane hadn't left yet, I thought I was saved. Hwever, they stopped me at the gate told me I was 2 minutes late and sent me back to the front saying that the only way to reschedule was to fork over \$1000 which was impossible for me because if I had that much money, I would have just gone to Japan way before this. As I got home disappointed and devastated, I realized that my itinerary online had changed and that I had a flight that afternoon to San Francisco.....”YES!!!!” I yelled and didn't ask questions and booked it back to the airport, got on my plane and my journey started.

Seeing as a month and a half before I got home to move my family, I was in Peru so travel was familiar to me. Knowing all the security requirements and motions on how to flow and fly through security and ticket stations. Domestic flying felt like child's play to international travel. Arriving in San Francisco, I realized that I never contacted anyone about when I was getting in. No one was waiting for me.... I whipped my phone out and found a Starbucks with WiFi and looked at my old emails saw what hotel they were staying at and looked up the right shuttle and got on. Only to find while on the shuttle I got a call from one of my 31 counterparts saying they had come to pick me up. In any case I made it! I was in San Francisco o to go to the place I had always dreamed of going.

San Francisco was brief, I gave my speech at the consulate generals and the next day we were off to Japan, surrounded by new friends and stood in a clumps of travel cases and duffle bags, bubbling with excitement we got on the shuttle to the airport. The plane ride was...long, however as soon as we were able to catch sight of land we were enthralled at the sight of Japan. Some of us crawled on top of one another just to catch a glimpse through the parting clouds. Thus we touched down into Kansai airport. A quick bus ride across the bridge to Kansai and 32 gawking, excited youths were taking enough pictures to last 3 life times. Most all of us didn't really know of where we were staying or what it looked like so we didn't realize that It was the 18 story tower perched right on the coast next to a bridge were fishermen struggled with their catches of the day, was actually our new home for the next couple weeks.

Staying at the center was a whole new experience on its own. The staff actually greeted us. All the time and realized if we were leaving every time and promptly wished safe travels. Kindness and Consideration was a couple things that we all realized were dominant in the Japanese society. A society that actually follows the golden rule was almost unthinkable to us. Getting our room assignments, we were ecstatic to see our quaint one room apartments with small mini fridge and a bathroom with a DEEP bath tub. The cherry on top was the amazing view and I appreciated every day I was able to stay in such a nice place. The Japan foundation was definitely not without structure. The next morning we got our host families and an allowance, along with a packet with schedules that we followed to the dot. Although the orientations seemed to be a bit much in this trip we understood they were just trying to prepare us for our home stay. Now leading up to home stay, we experienced Japan in many ways. From trips to Kyoto to adventuring to the local convenience store by bike, which we were allowed to borrow from the center.

Kyoto was a shock. The overwhelming culture and the exquisite detail in the shrines, the very air of that place seemed to hum with age and mystery. Never setting foot in a shrine before, I noted it as one of the changing moments of my life. Realizing that societies of humans can get this old, I realized that America is still such a young nation. 400 years is nothing compared to this civilization which is over 3000 years old. Soon after Kyoto, Home Stay!!! Home stay was immensely helpful. I can think of no better way to understand the Japanese and how they live there life then actually living with them. I still miss my host family. The way they did things the way they treated each other the way they interacted with society while we were out. What kind of chores they had. What did they eat for breakfast or for dinner. Did they like to play outside or play video games? Questions where brought up and answered. Not only the society and cultural aspects but the language was all over. There was no escaping; they used it all the time in every situation. They taught me many conversation methods and ways of speaking that I have never thought of. I am truly grateful to have met such upstanding people. Getting toward the end of our trip half of the 32 was split up half to Kobe and half to Tohoku. I went to Tohoku

Tohoku was fun. It was another angle of Japan that I didn't know existed. Vast sceneries of green that stretched out to meet the dark base of mountains that jutted out of the landscape in various places. It was a small town with houses no bigger than two stories and most of them with rice fields attached to the hip. Meeting more highschoolers was defiantly a great thing. Don't get me wrong visiting shrines is defiantly a must, but the biggest thing to do in order to really build bridges is for the young to meet the young. Youth meeting youth is the best way to install a sense of unity, because we start off so similar anyway. So highschooler's were very fun to try to talk to in Japanese and they to us in English. Although some of us were disappointed we couldn't go to the disaster sight and see for our self what happened and if we had a chance to help clean up we would take it right away.

Tohoku was nearing the end of our stay in Japan, after Tohoku most of us started to get together with each other staying in the lounges exchanging experiences talking about Japan and wishing we could (We were taking a passport burning party into consideration) As the morning arrived for us to leave

took full advantage of the time before the flight. Anna, Tineal and I went biking around the suburbs of Japan about twenty minutes by bike away from the center we stayed at. An adventure on its own, passing locals waving hi and good afternoons while gawking at some of the grand houses and the quaint but pleasant side of Kansai that no one would ever take a tour in, stopping at vending machines with good deals to get some cold drinks. Soon after we got on a plane heading back to San Francisco. I won't go into much detail about the return because it was just sad. We touched down in San Francisco. Jet lagged and exhausted they asked us to make a power point asap. We tried. We had the opportunity to meet Montgomery Dickson's sister and brother in which we were grateful to have the opportunity. Then the next morning I watched as the group that we have all grown close together started to disappear one by one in front my eyes. It was sad but we all had face book and with promise of some day meeting again we all returned home.

In the end this was such a rare and amazing opportunity for me. I gained 32 new lifelong friends. I went to Japan. I gained 3 brothers and another set of parents. I spoke Japanese to Japanese people. I learned and experienced 2 weeks' worth of Japan. For free. If it wasn't for this program I don't think I would have been able to reach Japan for a long time. Now that I have been there and experienced it firsthand I intend to build my future around being a link between our two nations, and giving as much as I possibly can back to Japan whether it's through the JET program as an ALT or just going there and volunteering in local communities, I want to be a part of Japan.

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2011 JET-MIP Essay: Kaleialoha Nishimura

2011 JET-MIP Essay: Thomas Cude

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5700 Wilshire Blvd, Suite 100

Los Angeles, CA 90036

P. 323.761.7510

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