



2011 JET-MIP ESSAY

MARCH, 2012: BREEZE ISSUE #53

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

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Japan, how I long for the words to describe thee. The places I went, the people I met, and the things I have done. My experience with you is one I will never forget. Every day I've spent back in America I have compared to one in Japan. The more I think about it the more it seems that this was what the trip was for. It will never be that time I went to Japan; it will be the time I lived in Japan.

The moment I left my parents at the terminal in Little Rock to depart for San Francisco was life changing. At first I was nervous about being alone and flying over half of the country, but once I got on the plane it felt natural. It was as though this is what I was meant to do.

After we all arrived in San Francisco and moved on to Japan town, I started to get to know the other participants. Everyone got along well, and quickly fell into their own groups, though not the ones assigned. I could tell, even if they hadn't, that they settled themselves together. Not wanting to be sucked into a clique, I distanced myself. Well darn. Now I'm "That Guy." You know the one, the guy who drifts around and acts awkwardly. I decided that wasn't me so I integrated myself into a group who shared my interests. Naturally, I still floated around, but I could always come back to my new friends.

Descending into Japan was one of the most intense moments of my life. Typhoons do not make good weather for airplanes. Settled down, we depart for the Kansai institute. If I could sum up my first view of Japan into two words: gray, wet. Indeed it was gray. In fact I didn't see a blue sky until we left. But I digress, the institute was quite impressive. The courtyard was beautiful, the library was extensive, and the cafeteria food was top notch.

Going to Senboku High School, I was pretty nervous. Not that I was going to meet Japanese students, but that I was going to meet a specific Japanese Student; my host sister. The language barrier was a wall too high to climb, and yet we still had fun touring Osaka castle and roaming the streets. Now I am looking forward to seeing the rest of the family on the weekend.

I didn't know what to expect of Kiyomizu-dera, and I was impressed. The shopping area under the temple was unexpected but I appreciated the souvenir shops. In fact I had bought all the gifts for my family there. The temple area was widespread and well kept. To be honest, Kinkaku-ji was striking and at the same time disappointing. It was just that I thought there would be more buildings around the temple like at Kiyomizu-dera. Now I'm glad that it was, this way it keeps its tranquil nature.

The next day is the big day, when I stay with my host family. I need to keep this part short because it can be an entire essay by itself. First, the Ohkuma family (as they told me how it's spelled) was very inviting to someone that they had just met. They took me anywhere I asked, including the river and the Pokémon Center. One day I will have to repay their kindness by sending them a gift.

When we were going to Kobe I was starting to wind down, the thrill was ending. Going into the art museum I found out we were going to see a life size version of the "set" of the newest Studio Ghibli movie. Then we would be going to the Disaster Reduction Center; Oh my gosh. But the best part of Kobe was when we had okonomiyaki for lunch. It was the best meal I had in Japan, no contest.

My favorite thing to do in Japan was to go to Rinku Town. Most of my money was made there and most of my fondest memories were there. At the top of the Ferris wheel was one of the most amazing views of the bay, especially at sunset. My group and I rode the bikes from the institute to Rinku Town every day.

Going to Japan, meeting new friends, seeing historic buildings were all once a dream, but now they're all something I experienced through the JET program. I would definitely want to go to Japan again, and would like to do more with JET. This trip is something I will never forget.

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Annual Report

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