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



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HOW I CAME TO LOVE JAPAN...EVEN MORE

The JET Memorial Invitation Program in Japan is one that I will never forget. I will never forget the pleasantly clean, wet smell of the air as I roamed the narrow streets of Japan. I will never forget the friendly faces and polite greetings of store clerks wherever I went. Most of all, I will never forget the people I was blessed with, the connections I made, and the wonderful time spent together. The program is unforgettable because it taught me to live fully, appreciate what I have and strive for the amazing things I have seen in Japan.

Exiting the Kansai airport was not like leaving the airports in Los Angeles or San Francisco. It felt adventurous and surreal. Looking back, I remember always feeling this way even when the program's schedule was tight. While walking out of the airport, I smelled my first whiff of humid Japanese air. The heat-filled air

was surprisingly sweet, which made the experience even more real. Over time, the humidity became unbearable. I remember biking through the rain one day and later regretting that I had put on my thick windbreaker. It turned out that I was wet with sweat more than I was with rain drops. Regardless, biking through the narrow and backwards streets of Japan was always a challenge accepted. Biking past fishing harbors, people at the park, and little children playing was always worth getting lost in the clean, small alley-like streets. I loved waving to random Japanese residents as I passed and seeing a sudden change in their expressions as they realized I was a foreigner. From the first steps out of the airport to the last night celebration of fireworks, my adventures were always exciting and I'll never forget that feeling.

Not only was the Japanese environment very well taken care of, the people cared for each other. I enjoyed walking through the spotless, beautifully brick paved streets of Osaka and loved visiting untarnished tourist sites like Kyoto Tower because my experience would be just as great as others before me. However, that is just one thing the Japanese value. Just as much as the environment, they take in caring for one another. Although it sounds complicated, caring could be as simple as driving courteously or greeting literally all your customers. It's quite surprising how people could take time

considerate towards others, but it was evident in Japan. Everywhere I went, I saw friendly faces and this made my experience even better. When people bumped in to me, they would apologize. At intersections, drivers would allow each other to pass with ease. Random napkins or fans would be handed out on a hot day at large shopping centers. People generally thought of others and because of this, everyone seemed content with their day to day lives. It certainly made me feel at ease as I walked to the convenience store at night or when I got lost in the busy, winding parts of town. I could rely on the fact that Japan was safe and clean, which allowed me to have such an incredible experience.

One of the reasons why bridge building between Japan and the U.S. was so smooth was because the program and I were welcomed and valued wherever we went. In the Tohoku region, people expected our arrival and were ready to feed us at local stops. Elementary schools were eager to meet and have fun with us. People were interested not only in what I had to offer, but also just in me. To feel as if I've had an impact on little children and how they feel towards foreigners is a wonderful thing. Only few ever get this opportunity, which made the program a very humbling experience. Despite our noisy ways, we students were able to bathe at the local hot bath for three days in a row. From this, we learned how to be quiet and to be more considerate in such a setting. In the many cities that we visited, tour guides opened up about their memories of the earthquake, tsunami, and aftermath. They gladly showed us around and took time out of their lives to let us and the rest of the world know about the disaster. From gracious volunteers at Hotel Boyo to the amazing JETs and chaperones that were available to us, I feel honored to have met and shared such a great connection with them. They have shown me that even in disaster, we can depend on one another and the friendships that we have. The program also did an astounding job at choosing its participants this year. Not only were the students super intelligent and talented, they were able to find similar interests in each other. While many enjoyed playing instruments, others found tennis entertaining and some tried to teach and learn new languages. Most important of all was that I was able to bond and be comfortable with the other students. I shared baths at a hot spring, lounged until the wee hours of night at the Institute, and went on shopping trips with these incredible people. After a few awkward days together, a family was created through this program. Loving Japanese has never been a problem for me, but this family has taught me to love it even more and I couldn't ask for more.

Although I have not made any plans to take Japanese courses in college yet, I want to pursue my career while continuing my Japanese. My passion is to help others and I want to do just that hopefully in Japan one day. I have fallen in love with the overall environment of Japan. Even though I can't stand the humidity, I think I will learn to appreciate it. However, I know that I could live in a warm, welcoming community that sees the good in others and in a society that continues to build friendships. I want to drive on the left side and trust that people sitting in the back will be safe without their seat belts on. I want to live a healthy life in the country with the highest life expectancy. I want to be welcomed in whatever shop or local supermarket I run into. I want to go on road trips through the countryside and know that I will be comfortable at any stop I make. I want to learn more of the Japanese culture and even participate in cultural festivals. I want to live in a small home with a view of rice fields or a big home with a view of skyscrapers. I want to own a small box car or a bike that can take me to a shopping center, a conveyor belt sushi restaurant, or even a Ferris wheel down the road. I want to light tall fireworks on the beach and not get in trouble. I want to light sparklers and spell out JET MIP 2012 again. I want to talk to a Japanese man on the street while his umbrella turns inside out and he continues his day with a smile. There are so many things I can picture myself doing in Japan again one day, which makes me more excited than ever to continue my Japanese studies and visit and live there one day.

Visiting Japan and the Tohoku region is something I could only have dreamed of, which made this experience very emotional for me. I remember learning that I was awarded this opportunity and tear came to my eyes. Then leaving my small local airport and family for the first time in a faraway adven

also brought many emotions through my head. I shared my experience with my sisters and it was bittersweet for them. I felt bad because my parents had never given them this kind of experience before. However, I think that they were happy for me in getting this award and opportunity of a lifetime. With all this said, I owe my greatest gratitude for the Japan Foundation and all it has done. My family could not believe that the Japan Foundation had done so much and in such an efficient way. It was bittersweet because they enjoyed my stories about roaming Japan and then learned of the Tohoku region and its many stories. I spoke to them of the destroyed city of Rikuzentakata and the tour guide's story of his cousin barely surviving the tsunami. I told them of Monty's amazing life and what he had done the day of the disaster. They all found it very interesting and had a lot of respect for Monty's achievements. I talked about Kesenuma and the huge ship that had moved inland by the tsunami. We discussed the debate about whether or not the ship should be kept there to become a memorial site. They felt that that was a great question and could say little about it because both sides had such good arguments. I revealed what Taylor was doing the day of the earthquake and tsunami and her commitment to her community. My sisters found her story very inspiring and saw how much she meant to the people she had affected. I spoke about the hot bath experience, the high school summit, and the elementary schools we visited. They were very shocked and entertained by it. Then I spoke to them about my time in Osaka and Kyoto. In Osaka, I spent a lot of time wandering the streets and seeing what the area had to offer. I told them about the skinny dippers on the marble beach one night and how I biked exhaustingly up the huge bridge just to go shopping. My sisters were surprised and amazed. They especially loved my pictures of Kiyomizudera in Kyoto and how nice my host family seemed. I talked about my English loving host family, sister who loved texting, and their shiba dog Pochi. One of my sisters loved how calm and normal my host father seemed. My other sister enjoyed knowing how similar their family was to our own family. Before this experience, I didn't know why I was so interested in Japan and I don't think my sisters really understood either. After living this experience, I finally figured out that I loved the Japanese way of life. And speaking of my adventures to my sisters, I think, has finally revealed to them how I could be so infatuated. However, I think the most important outcome of this sharing is the fact that I've inspired them to explore outside of the country, get out of their comfort zones, and strive for a journey as remarkable as mine. I have inspired others like Taylor and Monty have and this accomplishment is one that I am so proud of. Visiting the communities that Monty and Taylor had made such an impact was an extremely humbling experience. It was an honor meeting the little kids who knew Monty and the Kiwi Club that highly regarded Taylor. Most of all, I am thankful to Taylor and Monty for showing me the importance of giving your all to something so wonderful because it ends up being so worth it.

Monty, visiting the places that you have probably seen several times before, was something that I will keep in my heart forever. I cherished the moments I spent touring Rikuzentakata and know that it will never be the same without you. However, visiting the city 10 to 15 years from now, I will walk on the beach and through the streets knowing that you are very much still a part of that great city. I want you to know that your work was not in vain and that I have so much gratitude for you because you have taught me to love Japan even when things are rough. Thank you from the bottom of my heart.

Taylor, walking on the same streets that you have roamed was very special to me. The walk up and down the hills of Ishinomaki and through the heat was all worth it because I was able to see why you loved the city so much. From the meeting with your Kiwi Club friends, I could see your devotion to teaching English and desire to learn more and more about Japan. I know that you have done so much for your community and that you will continue to be in their minds and hearts. I hope you know how grateful I am for the impact you have made because it lets me know that I can do the same. Thank you from the bottom of my heart.

I cannot thank this program enough. I have seen the great work of Taylor and Monty, the wonderful people of Japan, and the importance of being a bridge between the U.S. and Japan. When I return to Japan it will not be the same like Rikuzentakata and Ishinomaki will not be the same without Monty and Taylor, but like the communities that will remember them, the JET-MIP will always be in my heart.

NIPPON THROUGH MY EYES PHOTO SUBMISSION



"FROM ALL WALKS OF THE EARTH"

IT SEEMS THAT WHEREVER YOU WALK IN JAPAN, YOU ALWAYS END UP TAKING YOUR SHOES OFF WHETHER IT IS AT A TRADITIONAL HOME, RESTAURANT, SCHOOL, OR EVEN A HOST FAMILY'S HOUSE.

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2012 Japanese American Leadership Delegation

2012 JET-MIP Essay: Andrew Juarez

2012 JET-MIP Essay: Andrew Kim

2012 JET-MIP Essay: Anna Lee

2012 JET-MIP Essay: Anna Mai

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