

## SEPTEMBER, 2012: BREEZE ISSUE #59

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



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#### THE TELL-TALE HEART

I am a highly organized individual who packs efficiently and never forgets anything behind when I travel. Before I leave hotels, I open all the drawers and closets and check under the beds and in the shower at least twice. So far, this approach has paid off, and I have never left anything behind, particularly overseas. I have traveled all over Europe and never left so much as a sock, so I thought Japan would be the same. I took the same precautions, kept an eye on my luggage, and made it home all in one piece--or so I thought. I didn't realize what was missing until the day after arriving back in the States when I woke with a terrible ache in my chest. I left my heart in Japan, and I will have to go back if I want any hope of retrieving it.

The first step toward finding a lost item is thinking about where one last remembers seeing it. Unfortunately, I have no idea where or with whom I left my heart. Perhaps it is with our tour guide in Rikuzentakata or at Hotel Boyo in Kesenuma. Maybe I left it with the Kiwi Club in Ishinomaki or my host family in Sakai. I even could have left it at the Institute, Aeon Mall, or Rinku Town. Most likely, I left a piece of it at every place we visited with everyone we met, and I will never be able to extricate it fully.

One reason I know that retrieving my heart will be difficult is the simple fact that the first impression the country and its people made on me was deep. Even before leaving Kansai International Airport I could feel the spirit of Japan, though I did not know what it was at the time. Only after returning to the States, have I been able to identify exactly what I experienced.

Japan is a warm, welcoming country because it is filled with people who care. From the simple greeting of a 7-Eleven employee to the lack of trash on the streets and peaceful quiet of the subways, Japan demonstrates its consideration for both the community and the individual. Such precursory impressions are only strengthened when one makes individual connections and comes to know the people of Japan at a personal level.

Over the course of the program, I made connections discussing language interest and cultural differences with teachers and chaperones on the program as well as with members of the Kiwi Club and our tour guides in Sendai. Each person I connected with was kind, respectful, and harbored a quiet openness of spirit that encouraged others to share—from the shyest girl at the Kiwi Club gathering to the most outgoing Senboku student. Surrounded by such people, I felt welcomed and at home, so it comes as no surprise that my host family became my second family and their home my home away from home.

While I was with my host family, there were moments when I missed my own home, but now that I am back in the States, I miss my Japanese family and wish that I could've spent more time with them and come to know them better. My greatest regret of the program is that I was not more fluent in Japanese so that I could have become closer with them and all the other people that I met. For this reason, my determination to continue Japanese studies has increased exponentially, and I find kanji flash cards and e-NA sites to be more dangerous procrastination tools than Facebook.

When I returned to the States, my family quickly picked up on these changes within me. They could see the effects of my missing heart in compulsory Facebook checking for news from Japan, an insatiable desire for rice and matcha, and outright moping. They asked if I was okay. They asked if I needed sushi. Of course I said yes to both questions, but what I really wanted was Japan.

The one thing that could ease my aching heart and bring a smile to my face without fail was talking about the awesome country I experienced, so two days after I arrived back in the States, I made a presentation of my trip to my extended family. They were surprised to see the extent of the disaster's effects in the Tohoku region but were also impressed by the resilience and continual hope of the Tohoku people. When I spoke of the spirit of Japan that I felt, my relatives who had traveled to Japan in the past were able to relate, and their connection eased some of the frustration that I had felt coming back to America. I had felt as though no one understood why I had lost my heart—after all, I had never lost anything during my previous travels—but after sharing I realized that what I felt was a sentiment shared by many who have traveled to Japan and built relationships with its people and culture, including Taylor Anderson and Monty Dickson.

Before I went to Japan, it was difficult to describe the reason for which I was going. I knew the program was in memorial of Taylor and Monty, but I was not sure what bringing thirty-two high school students to Japan would accomplish. However, over the course of the program, I learned about Taylor and Monty's passion for and dedication to the Japanese language, culture, and people, and I felt my own passion and dedication grow. Just as my relatives who had traveled to Japan related with my experience, I related with Monty and Taylor's. They helped me understand why I lost my heart in Japan because through their legacies, I knew that they had lost theirs too.

As a famous Japanese poet wrote and Monty Dickson translated, "The most beautiful thing is to live one's life for a cause." Both Monty and Taylor lived beautiful lives, and I am often struck with amazement by the breadth and depth of their affect on my life and on all the lives they touched. The beauty of their lives was such that it enriched the lives of others and left the world a more beautiful place for their having been in it. Their legacies inspire me to live my life in a similar manner as they did, and for that I have nothing but gratitude. Even though the emptiness in my chest pains me, I can say with confidence that I am glad to have lost my heart in Japan. I would not have it any other way.

## **NIPPON THROUGH MY EYES PHOTO SUBMISSION**

**"YOKOTA"**

**A VIEW OF THE RICE FIELDS AND TOWN OVERLOOKED BY HILLS.**



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Breeze #61



Breeze #60



Breeze #59



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2012 JET-MIP Essay: Anna Lee

2012 JET-MIP Essay: Anna Mai

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