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2012 JET MEMORIAL INVITATION PROGRAM REPORT PART 2: PRE-DEPARTURE ORIENTATION

by *Thomas Lin*

Previous Issue: Prologue

The first participant arrived in Los Angeles at 11AM and my team and I were assigned to the gates where the participants were scheduled to arrive. Earlier in the morning, I received calls from two participants stating that their flight was delayed, which foreshadowed the many delayed flights we would encounter stateside. We were at the airport making sure to greet everyone as they exited their terminal to guide

them to the shuttle buses that took them to the hotel. By 3:30PM, the last of the participants were scheduled to arrive, but one was delayed and would not arrive for another few hours. Back at the hotel, we prepared for the first night of the orientation as 32 high school students, some who just graduated, made their way down to the meeting room to meet everyone face to face for the first time. After initial introductions, it was dinner time, which allowed the participants to get to know each other, but this being the first time, it might have been awkward for some and uncomfortable for others. Halfway through the meal, the final participant arrived with a loud round of applause. Now that everyone arrived, we were able to start the evening activities.

For the first night, we wanted to break the ice between the participants, introduce the role of the Japan Foundation, and go over the itinerary for the two week trip. Deputy Director Rei Suzuki was the first to present and she went over the Japan Foundation and the roles of the Los Angeles office. Next our Program Administrator, Maiko Murakami, covered the Los Angeles Itinerary. Then our lecturer, Hiroko Katsuta, introduced a game so that everyone could get to know each other. The participants basically had to figure out each other's birthdays in Japanese and then arrange themselves chronologically based on that information. In the end, they were able to accomplish this without any mistakes. It was then my turn to go over the entire itinerary including the homework assignment that the participants had to complete during the trip. Finally Katsuta sensei went over some group activities with the participants that would help them prepare for the elementary school visits in Rikuzentakata. At the end of the night, we covered some basic ground rules of the trip and answered any questions that anyone had. It was a long day of travel for everyone and we ended by 9PM so everyone could get a good night sleep.

The second day of orientation started bright and early at 8:45AM when everyone gathered in the hotel lobby after breakfast. A short bus ride later, we were at the office of the Japan Foundation, Los Angeles. This was the first official event at our new office and we worked very hard to get everything ready. A full day's activity was packed into six and a half hours and like timework, the speakers went one by one providing their knowledge of Japan. In the morning session, we had former JET members Bob Nguyen and Canon Purdy talk about the JET programme and also their experience with Taylor Anderson as they were close friends during their time in Japan. Then Bryan Takeda from the US Japan Council gave a speech about the Tomodachi Initiative and also passed out t-shirts to the participants. Finally, Yasuyuki Harada from the Japan National Tourism Organization presented about the Culture and Geographic Information of Japan. Following the morning session was a break for lunch where the participants were able to check out our library and walk around our office complex. Some went to the pond to see our resident turtles and koi pond.

During the afternoon session, we had several members from the local and international press show up to cover the event. It went by equally fast and the pace towards the end of the day was on the verge of being chaotic. Our lecturer, Hiroko Katsuta, prepared some lessons on Japanese language including casual speak and also Osaka dialect. She also had some group work activities to prepare for the high school visit in Osaka. The first guest speaker was Eurico Senna, a participant during the inaugural JET Memorial Invitation Program in 2011 started with a presentation about his awesome summer a year ago. Then Andy Anderson, father of the late Taylor Anderson, gave a presentation about Taylor and his current efforts in helping out the people of the Tohoku region. Shelley Dickson, sister of late Montgomery Dickson, followed with a presentation about Monty and his motivation and determination for studying Japanese. These presentations inspired the participants and invigorated them for their upcoming trip. After a Q&A session and interviews with the press, we left JFLA for the Official Residence of the Consul General of Japan in Los Angeles. There they prepared a sendoff dinner for us with remarks by the Honorable Consul General Nimi, the family members of Taylor Anderson and Montgomery Dickson, and finally the 2012 JET-MIP representative. We were back to the hotel by 9PM for a short rest before

departing early the next morning for the airport. Many of the participants did not sleep that night and took ice breaking to a whole new level where they claimed to have obliterated the ice. The next morning, we assembled in the hotel lobby at 5:45AM and headed to the airport to make the 8:21AM flight to San Francisco.

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