

## NOVEMBER, 2012: BREEZE ISSUE #61

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



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The experience I had in Japan was overall, as over used as the term was, awesome. It was by far one the greatest and most life changing experiences that I have ever had. It has not only increased my drive to increase my understanding of the Japanese language but has also shown me that the tsunami has had a greater effect than what was previously read through sources like the local newspaper. My experiences have also inspired me to be as helpful as possible to the Japanese program that is present at Monroe Catholic High School. I also hope that my experiences will be a kind of divining light to my peers to continue their studies in the Japanese language.

Perhaps the largest part of this wonderful experience was the trip into the Tohoku area of Japan, especially the city of Rikuzentakata. I had read before the trip that the tsunami had caused a massive amount of damage in this area of Japan, but this was not accurate to what I had seen. When I saw the city, the words, "There was massive damage," were immediately replaced with, "The town was almost completely washed away." The state of awe that I was in was on the verge of shock and I was practically paralyzed where I stood. Just seeing a town that was less than a skeleton of its former self was dumbfounding.

While staying at the Institute in Osaka I could not help but feel two very powerful sensations. The first sensation was foreshadowing what college could potentially feel like once I start that chapter next year. It almost seemed like I was leaving high school early to become part of college system through my stay at the Japan Foundation. The second sensation was that I had been brought to see a place that had become my second home. Leaving the institute was, excluding the Tohoku excursions, the most painful part of the trip for me.

The Homestay portion of the trip was one of the most educational and exciting part of my experiences in Japan. Being with my host family and becoming part of each other's lives for a weekend was a very religious experience in itself, but this is comparable only to the kindness and compassion that was

to me by this wonderful family. Initially, when I first met with my host brother, Yudai Takahashi, one of the questions he asked me was where I wanted to go in Japan the most, to which I replied Kyoto. Without even a second thought he told me that Kyoto is where we are going the first day of Homestay. I had to be careful when they asked me if I had my eye on any kind of merchandise inside of a store, if I said yes and pointed it out the object would appear next to spontaneously appear in my hand.

Overall, my experience in Japan contributed a great amount of influence to my future studies in the Japanese language. The first thing my experiences showed me was, as I had expected before the trip, that I had not learned even a fraction of an extremely infinitesimal fraction of the language in the short two years that I have studied Japanese. The next thing that my experiences showed me, which was not quite as expected, was that my proficiency in speaking Japanese was very lacking. My experiences in Japan have been like a mental 2x4 to the back of the head and a somewhat harsh voice telling me what needs improvement. However, the voice was also consoling by providing inspiration and solace.

A hope of mine is that my experiences in Japan will serve as a kind of divining rod guiding the user towards the spring. One of the parts of this hope is that my experiences will show my Japanese classmates that there is more to the language, and Japan, than what they are currently hearing. I pray that their drive and inspiration is increased so that Japanese becomes more than a lesson, but a full time hobby. Another part to this hope is that those who are not taking a Japanese class, or those who haven't even considered learning the language, begin trying to learn Japanese, to see why there is so much excitement to be seen. This modest dream is what I hope to show my classmates and friends so that they too can see the light that I have seen.

To Ms. Anderson and Mr. Dickson, you two have been a huge inspiration in my learning of the Japanese language. Your energy and dedication provide an excellent model of what learning, and teaching Japanese looks like. They provide the foundation of what is necessary to truly enjoy the Japanese language. You are the light at the end of the tunnel that we should be trying to find. May others look to you for inspiration and comfort like so many have done before them.

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