

## DECEMBER, 2012: BREEZE ISSUE #62

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



### INDICA SUR

*The Harker School  
San Jose, CA*

At my school, every other year a select number of high school students are given the opportunity to travel to the home country of their language of study. Sophomore year, I and 12 of my fellow students, were given the opportunity to go to Japan. Then, spring of 2011, the March 11 disaster struck Japan. Although we were to go to Tokyo, not wanting to put financial strain on our host families, the trip was cancelled. Because the trip had been cancelled, the teachers opened up the trip in 2012 as well. Determined, I applied, and got in, only to have the trip be cancelled again due to lack of participants. My teacher suggested that I apply for the JET Memorial Invitation Program, a one-in-a-million chance. However, luck was on my side, and I miraculously got accepted to this wonderful program.

For a while I still could not believe that I was going to go to Japan. Denied the chance twice already, part of me did not want to get my hopes up. Prior to actually going to Japan, one of the most eye-opening experiences I had was joining the 2012 US JET-MIP Facebook group. Like most, my school's Japanese program was relatively small, with few students. Talking to thirty-one other students who had the same interest in Japan as me was exciting and fun, and helped hype up my excitement to go to Japan. Then we all finally met in LA. They were all people that you could easily hold a conversation with, sharing some experience in a Japanese class, or speak Japanese with, without even knowing the other person's name. After icebreakers and orientations, we were on the eleven-hour flight to Osaka. All of us were excited; even customs and the baggage claim was exciting, simply because we could read the signs going by. Riding the bus and arriving at the Institute, I think it finally struck us that we were in Japan —awesome!

The first week of the trip we spent in Tohoku, the area most heavily damaged by the disaster. Even after seeing some of the damage with my own eyes, I only imagine the feelings and emotions of the people affected by the earthquake and tsunami. While there were many sights that took our breaths away, the strength of the people in the Tohoku area was just as shocking. When information on the disaster w

broadcast in America, all the news casters told us was the statistics of the damage, death toll, etc. What they forgot to mention was the strength of the people's hearts, as a community, and their undying optimism. Despite the terrifying tragedy, the people continue to move forward, picking up the pieces of their lives and community, continuing on. Throughout our trip, the people we met were incredibly hospitable, genuinely welcoming us wherever we went. I know that, if faced with the same circumstances, I would not have the incredible strength to smile that all of the people of Tohoku seemed to possess.

The second week we returned to the Institute in Osaka. After classes in the mornings, we were given free time to wander the surrounding areas; the memories of biking and shopping with my newfound friends are some of my most cherished from the trip. My absolute favorite part of the program, however, was the one night homestay with the family of a high school student. Being a little farther away from the city, my host family and I did not go to the more famous sightseeing spots of the area. However, I'm very glad we didn't. In exchange, I got to experience more of the lives of my Japanese family, going to places they had been before. As an only child, going everywhere together as a family really made me feel at home and gave me many precious memories. I hope to keep in touch with my host family for as long as possible in the future.

All too soon, however, we were on the flight back to the United States. Reliving all of the things I had seen, heard, and smelt, the eleven hours went by extremely quickly. After wrap up meetings and good-byes in LA, we were all headed back to our respective states. No matter how many years pass, I know that all of us fellow "mippers" will have a strong connection to each other through our shared experiences in Japan. I look forward to being able to go back someday—the sooner the better—to this 'awesome' country.

I always knew I wanted to maintain some connection to Japanese once in college. A strong interest in Japan is something that has been with me almost all of my life. My childhood friend is half Japanese, and through her stories and encouragement, I've been dreaming of going to Japan since the age of five. However, recently, my future Japanese studies had been dwarfed by the imposing decision of what to do for the rest of my life. I had thought that as long as I can join some kind of Japan-related student union, my interest in Japan could be satisfied. Then, thanks to the Japan Foundation and the JET Memorial Invitation Program, I was able to fulfill my twelve year wish and actually go to Japan. What we experience there has inspired all of us. It also resolved me to continue to pursue learning Japanese in college, changing it from a hobby to a more serious consideration for the future. The trip has given me a stronger love of Japan and its culture and language, and I know that, whatever I do, in the future I wish to maintain ties with the country. Thanks to the influence of this trip, I also fully intend to study abroad in Japan during college.

A message to Ms. Taylor Anderson and Mr. Montgomery Dickson:

I want to thank you for following your love of Japan through the JET program. By going to Japan, I think we have all gained a stronger understanding of what you both loved about Japan, and it has changed us all for the better. Your passion for the country, culture, language, and people has opened our eyes and stirred similar passions within ourselves. Your presence in Japan has brought strength and opportunity to many people, and I know that we all will strive to achieve even a fraction of the impact on Japan that you two have had. Thank you very much.

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

### **"A CHILD'S DOLL LYING ON A BRIDGE IN RIKUZENTAKATA"**

The doll represents all of the suffering that the people in Rikuzentakata had to go through, but despite this, they are standing strong and continuing to move forward.



Breeze #62



2012 JET-MIP Report 5/8

2012 J-LEAP Report: Chigusa Izumi

2012 J-LEAP Report: Katsura Shimano

2012 JET-MIP Essay: Hillary Nguyen

2012 JET-MIP Essay: Indica Sur

2012 JET-MIP Essay: Jennie Ju

2012 JET-MIP Essay: Jenny Trieu

Breeze #61



Breeze #60



Breeze #59



Breeze #58



Breeze #57

Breeze #56



Breeze #55



Breeze #54



Breeze #53

Breeze #52



Breeze #51



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