

## JANUARY, 2013: BREEZE ISSUE #63

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



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#### BUILDING A BRIDGE FOR TOMORROW

The JET Memorial Invitational Program was an experience of a lifetime. I cannot express how grateful I am to have been given this opportunity to visit Japan and expand my knowledge of Japanese language and culture. The memories of the days I spent in Japan this summer with my newfound friends will stay with me always.

The 2012 JET-MIP itinerary is different from an ordinary vacation in Japan. Some of my family and friends who have visited Japan told me about the various tourist attractions or their favorite foods. Although I agree that the landmarks are remarkable and the food is delicious, this program showed me a different side of Japan and the spirit of the people is what impressed me the most.

After the 3.11 disaster, I had seen the videos and photographs of the devastation. I heard stories about people who lost their homes, their family, or their life. Yet nothing could have truly prepared me for my experience there. Watching videos of the waves while you are snug at home is nothing compared to walking through a town that has been washed away. Looking up facts and figures is not the same as seeing the one pine tree left standing from a forest of 70,000 or standing in the shadow of a 330 ton fishing vessel that was carried into the middle of a town. The damage dealt by Mother Nature was of epic proportions.

Before the trip, I also felt unsure about how I should act towards the people of the Tohoku region. These people experienced more hardship in a day than I have in my lifetime. However I was quickly put to ease by their kindness and generosity. If I met them anywhere else, I would never guess that these were the people struck by catastrophe just last year. The strength and resolve they exhibited was incredible. I was especially impressed by the high school students. One girl in my group at the Rikuzentakata High School Summit, Keika, told us about how she wants to work harder to become successful so that she can g

back to her community. Another girl I met in Ishinomaki gave a speech at the end of our exchange meeting about her experience in the tsunami. It is mind blowing to realize that although we are about the same age, they have experienced tragedy that I can barely imagine.

Seeing the remaining damage and meeting the people who were impacted by the earthquake and tsunami really hit home. I kept thinking, what if a tsunami of that size hit Hawaii? What if it was *my* friends, *my* family, and *my* home that was lost? I hope I would be able to carry on like the people of Tohoku. This experience has brought a whole new perspective to how I view my own life.

This trip also made me realize the importance of exchange and building connections. I plan to keep in touch with all the new people I met, both Japanese and American. I consider all of the JET-MIPpers to be part of my family. Although we are spread across the nation, from Alaska to Texas to Michigan to Kentucky, we all share these same memories that hold us together. The same goes for all the people we met in Japan. Despite the fact that we live in different countries and speak different languages, we still share commonalities that can bridge the gap.

This fact is probably best demonstrated by experiences I shared with my host family. While I enjoyed the time we spent in Kyoto or at the Osaka Museum of History, I feel that it was the little things that connected us: when my host sisters and I all fell asleep in the car on the way back from Kyoto, when we played games after dinner, or just watched TV together. Or when my host mother showed me pictures from their vacation in Hawaii and pulled out a map so I could show them where I live. These ordinary, everyday things made me realize that we really are the same. Overall I am so grateful to have met them and I hope that we will meet again someday.

This fall I will be entering Willamette University in Salem, Oregon. There I will continue my study of the Japanese language and plan to join student organizations such as Japan Studies Student Leaders and the Asian Student Association to help share the Japanese culture. Additionally, Willamette University has a long term partnership with Tokyo International University, so I look forward to meeting more Japanese students and I hope we can learn from one another. I also plan to return to Japan through study abroad programs offered by my University as well as after graduation by participating in the JET Program. This chance to visit Japan through JET-MIP has not only improved my language skills but provided me with new insight into the country's culture and people. This unexpected gift has reinvigorated my passion for Japan and I hope to share that with everyone I meet.

Finally, I would like to close with a message for Ms. Taylor Anderson and Mr. Monty Dickson: I truly admire the passion that you both felt towards Japan. I was very inspired by your families' stories and by our visit to Rikuzentakata and Ishinomaki; I think the impact you each made was clear. I hope to honor you two in all that I do—bridging the gap between America and Japan.

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

### **"CROSSING THE BRIDGE"**

Together we can bridge any gap and overcome any challenge.



Breeze #74



Breeze #73



Breeze #72



Breeze #71



Breeze #70

Breeze #69



Breeze #68



Breeze #67



Breeze #66



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