

JANUARY, 2013: BREEZE ISSUE #63

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



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My time in Japan was the most fun I've ever had. Without the Japan Foundation creating this program I would never have had this opportunity to travel to Japan. Before my trip, I had sporadic emotions. I went from excitement, to nervousness, to anxiety. What if no one liked me? What if I didn't make any friends? What if I completely forgot all my Japanese? Finally making it to Los Angeles and meeting all my peers quickly quieted my doubts. Everyone was so nice and funny. I couldn't wait until we landed in Japan. Minus the heat and humidity, I absolutely enjoyed every moment in Japan. I learned so much about the nature of Japanese people and their daily lives.

I was surprised in the Tohoku area that all the people we met were so kind and friendly. You wouldn't have known they had gone through something traumatic by their actions alone. I was blown away. It upset me even more, however, because there was just so much destruction. I was thinking that most of the debris would have been gone by now and that maybe they were starting to rebuild. I was wrong. There was a lot that was still gone. You could see foundations of houses and whole lots completely wiped away. It made me appreciate my life back home even more and made me reflect on my life. How would I handle my house, town, and loved ones being swept away by a tsunami after being shaken by an earthquake? Going on this trip has really humbled me in so many ways. I never take anything for granted anymore. My respect for Japan has increased immensely.

Being in Japan made me realize how much I still didn't know, pertaining to Japanese. I was at the top of my Japanese class all three years and I knew it. I wasn't outwardly smug about it, but I did feel like I was a natural when it came to learning Japanese. Being in Japan definitely humbled me in that department. I started to feel well, incompetent. I didn't know as much as the other students and I thought I was the only one confused. I've never been in that situation and I felt very uncomfortable. After a while I knew dwelling about how little Japanese I knew wouldn't get me anywhere. Instead I just told myself I would do my best, listen better, speak more, and study harder, especially when I went back home. I slowly started

to grasp conversations and speeches more and my confidence slowly rose. Speaking with Japanese people also taught me that, just like in English, they also have slang and use different dialects. This led me to the conclusion that as I continue to learn Japanese I will also try to study different dialects. Another curious thing I found out was a lot of people spoke informally which surprised me greatly! This means I should also have a better understanding of informal speaking, not just formal. The most important thing I learned was no matter how much I learn there will always be room to learn even more.

Since school hasn't started yet I haven't had the opportunity to make any presentations, but I have talked to some friends, family, and my boyfriend and his family. My parents seemed genuinely interested in what I had to say. Probably because they wanted to make sure I was safe and well my entire stay. They liked all the gifts I brought back and we looked through my pictures as I told stories. My sister and I talked through the night about my trip as we compared and contrasted her time in Germany with mine. It was the first time out of the country for both of us. I was also able to tell my friends briefly about my trip as well and they seemed very pleased that I enjoyed myself. They know that this is all I've ever dreamt about. I also talked to my boyfriend and his family as I gave them their gifts. It was fun seeing the kids play with the Japanese toy, *kendama*. His parents seemed the most interested and I was pleased that they wanted to hear all about my experiences. This is one of the reasons why we were chosen to go to Japan, so we could share our stories with others. I'm so glad I was able to share them with so many people, and I will continue to share them for many years.

The deaths of Taylor Anderson and Montgomery Dickson were tragic, but they were not gone unnoticed. Their lives will continue to live on in the hearts of the many people that knew them. Both were giving and unselfish people and without them this program would not have been made possible. As bittersweet as that is, for five years 32 high school students will have the opportunity to visit and experience Japan and its culture. This experience has changed me, not only to strive to expand my Japanese, but to be a better person and be more active in this world. If I could meet both of them now I would tell them how strong and loving they were. I'm still amazed at Ms. Anderson's bravery as she waited at the school until all her students were safe and with their families. It's sad to think that this program was made possible because of their deaths, but their legacy will live on and that is what's most important. We are also on our way to becoming a bridge between the two great countries.

NIPPON THROUGH MY EYES PHOTO SUBMISSION



"BLOOMING HOPE"

Here Spring may bloom later, but the beauty is a wonderful surprise.

Breeze #73



Breeze #72



Breeze #71



Breeze #70

Breeze #69



Breeze #68



Breeze #67



Breeze #66



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2012 J-LEAP Report: Nobuyuki Umeji

2012 J-LEAP Report: Yuka Nakanishi

2012 JET-MIP Essay: Jessica Kawana

2012 JET-MIP Essay: Kathryn Lasseter

2012 JET-MIP Essay: La'Tia Smith

2012 JET-MIP Essay: Lena Morrow

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Annual Report

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