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2012 JET MEMORIAL INVITATION PROGRAM REPORT PART 7: RETURN TO OSAKA

by Thomas Lin, Program Officer, JFLA

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It had been exactly one week since we arrived in Japan and we had just completed the core part of the program by visiting the cities of Rikuzentakata and Ishinomaki where Montgomery Dickson and Taylor Anderson were assigned during their assignment as JET Assistant Language Teachers (ALTs). It was a tough few days for the participants while in the Tohoku region as we witnessed the remnants of the destroyed by the tsunami. We also witnessed the strength and perseverance of the people in the pe

we met and made many new friends in the process. This part of the trip was also the main difference between the 2011 Program and the 2012 Program because the 2011 group was not required to go to the Tohoku region, but going forward, the experience of visiting the cities where Dickson and Anderson called home will be a good learning experience and the main focus of JET-MIP.

In the morning, our bus driver would drop us off for the last time at Sendai airport as we said goodbye to the region that suffered so much through the Great East Earthquake and Tsunami. It was a short plane ride back to Osaka and then a brief bus ride back to the Institute. The participants had the afternoon to unpack, do laundry and familiarize themselves with Rinku town and the area around the institute. A small group decided to travel into Osaka for a short cultural excursion into the city, but sadly a few didn't make it back in time for curfew and were later penalized for their actions.

The following day we visited Senboku High School, which the Institute had pre-arranged activities and homestays with. We met some teachers there including some JETs as well as a group of students who would guide us through the morning activities. The JET-ALTs had the participants and the local students play a series of games to break the ice and then the divided up into two groups. One group attended a Japanese calligraphy class where they created fans with Kanji. The other group attended a fine arts class where they made animal cutouts. For lunch, the participants met with their host brothers or sister who they would be staying with during the weekend as part of their homestay. They had lunch together in the balmy cafeteria and got to know each other.

Afterwards, we headed to the United States consulate General in Osaka-Kobe to learn about their activities and participate in discussions as part of the Tomodachi Initiative. We met with Consulate General Patrick Linehan who gave a speech emphasizing the importance of international diplomacy between Japan and the United States and then we broke off into smaller groups to have discussions about important aspects of Japan US relations. Then we headed back to the Institute as our Japanese counterparts headed home, but this time apart would be brief because they would meet up again over the weekend for a homestay.

The next day was filled with classwork as the participants spent an entire day at the institute giving feedback about the Tohoku trip and preparing for their upcoming homestay. In the afternoon they learned about the online resources developed by the Institute to help with learning Japanese like the Anime & Manga website. Rounding out the day was a class covering Osaka dialect, which would prove useful during their homestay. This was also the first day the participants were able to have all three meals at the institute and at night, some of them found their way to the karaoke room to test out their Japanese singing skills.

The weekend was finally here and in the morning, the participants headed back to Senboku High School to meet with their host families for their weekend homestay. This would be the only time they were able to visit touristy areas in Osaka, Kyoto, Kobe or Nara, where one girl even got into a physical altercation with one of the aggressive Sika deer there and ended up bringing home a nice reminder that although cute, deer do bite. Everyone enjoyed their homestay and the short stay gave them an idea of family life in Japan. Many made life-long friends during the process and will hopefully continue their friendship for many years to come.

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