

MARCH, 2013: BREEZE ISSUE #65

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



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If I had to sum up this trip in a few words I would say that, Japan is awesome! I was so excited to go to Japan and I couldn't wait to leave but what I didn't realize was how much of a life changing experience it would be. The days leading up to July 8th seemed to go on forever. I just wanted to be in Los Angeles and meet the thirty one other students, who three short weeks later would become my family after sharing the highs and lows of this amazing experience.

It was refreshing to meet so many students my age who share my same fascination with Japan. When we first met it seemed like no one wanted to start a conversation or even what to talk about, until we started talking about Japan. Through our common interest in a language we were able to break through the awkward silence and truly get to know each other. It amazed me how quickly we let our guards down and began to enjoy each other's company as if we've been friends our whole life. One

thing was certain, if our trip to Japan continued to be as enjoyable as just meeting new friends, then we were in for an awesome experience.

As we said goodbye to the United States my excitement began to grow even more. I have wanted to go to Japan almost my whole life, and since I started learning Japanese it seemed like that dream would be possible. Through this program I was able to fulfill one of my dreams in addition to the inspiring experience I received.

After a long flight I had my first glimpse of Japan and I felt at home. I couldn't believe that I had finally made it to Japan. I don't know what I was expecting Japan to be like but it surpassed any expectations I may have had. As soon as I stepped off the plane I could instantly feel the heat and humidity but I welcomed the heat because it meant that I was in Japan. Another thing that I noticed almost instantly was how polite everyone was; I noticed very little airport chaos. In addition to everyone being well-mannered I noted how clean Japan was. Everywhere I went I never saw any trash just lying around. It was a wel

change from the hectic lifestyle I have been accustomed to from living in the United States. While relishing in the awesomeness that is Japan I knew in a few days I would be traveling to the Tohoku region and I wasn't sure what to expect.

It was impossible to imagine the sights waiting for me or how much of an impact it would leave. The first thing we did was visit local elementary schools. As soon as I walked into the school I felt like I was in a different world, one that was untouched by the repercussions of the tsunami. I was amazed at how genuinely happy the children were. As I was talking to them I couldn't help but smile. All of them were very well behaved and always interested in everything we talked about. But all too soon we had to say goodbye to our new friends and head back out into the aftermath of the tsunami once again.

When we finally toured Rikazentakata, I had no words for what I witnessed. I remember watching the news coverage of the tsunami and trying to fathom how water could be that destructive but it was impossible to completely understand the full extent until I saw it for myself. And while there was destruction everywhere I looked I couldn't help but feel proud of the progress that has been made in just a year. And while there is still a long way to go I was inspired by the great spirits, work ethic and the hope that the people of Rikazentakata have. It showed that even after a great tragedy it is still possible to come back even stronger and to find happiness again. While it was devastating to see all of the destruction I believe that it brought all of us closer together and taught me that even after something that seems like the end of the world that it is possible to start over, rebuild and come back even stronger than before.

After the Tohoku study trip, while I didn't want to leave, I couldn't wait to go back home and to share the experiences I had and the stories that I had heard. I realized that I would never be able to convey the exact feelings I felt and that the pictures wouldn't provoke the same response I experienced but the least I could do was to share those stories so that the Tohoku people are not forgotten.

Every time that I share my experience with my friends and family they are shocked. Like me, they didn't know the current situation in Japan; they figured that seeing there was no more news coverage that everything was back to normal. I hope my story has opened their eyes and helped them to realize that just because the tsunami happened over a year ago that it doesn't mean that it's ok to forget that it happened. I hope they realize that there are still people who need help and that we shouldn't forget about them.

This experience has not only helped better me as a person but it has further solidified my interest in studying Japanese. I plan on majoring in Japanese along with accounting in college. I'm hoping to return to Japan in the future after I graduate college either for international business or as a JET-ALT. I want to continue to do whatever I can to help Japan, no matter how small. I was truly inspired every time I saw a smile on a child's face. That small act helped me to realize that I was able to make a difference by just being there and talking to them. One thing I will never forget is seeing elementary school kids from the Tohoku area run down to us after dinner just to say hi. And then when their parents came down to thank us for just simply being there and talking to their kids I could actually see that we were making a difference and it felt good. I hope I can continue to make positive differences in the future just like Ms. Anderson and Mr. Dickson.

There is so much I would like to say to Ms. Anderson and Mr. Dickson but most importantly I would like to thank both of you. The two of you have left such a legacy for not only the thirty two of us but everyone else to follow. You touched so many lives and left such an impact on the world. As I toured the schools you taught at and the cities you worked in it was clear to me how big of an impact you had on not only the people in those cities but also your students as well. It was a complete tragedy for the world to lose people as dedicated and as caring as both of you were. But, I believe that even though you were taken away so suddenly that in the time you were in Japan you gave those children one of the greatest gifts.

You not only taught them English and helped them in school but you taught them to love learning and life. I would also like to thank you for giving me the opportunity to make one of my own dreams come true. It has been my dream to go to Japan and I know that I wouldn't have been able to go if it wasn't for your sacrifice. I'm so sorry that your life was cut short but in that time you touched the lives of so many others that you will not be forgotten. Even after your tragic death you have still managed to help people, you gave thirty two students the chance of a lifetime and I'm sure I can speak for everyone when I say it means the world to us. So thank you again, for all that you were able to do for others and all that you are still doing. Rest assured that I will do my best to uphold your legacy and make you both proud.

NIPPON THROUGH MY EYES PHOTO SUBMISSION



"RINKU TOWN FERRIS WHEEL"

It was a symbol of our home in Osaka.

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Annual Report

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