

MARCH, 2013: BREEZE ISSUE #65

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



2012 JET MEMORIAL INVITATION PROGRAM REPORT PART 8 (FINAL): ALL GOOD THINGS MUST COME TO AN END...

by Thomas Lin, Program Officer, JFLA

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The final days at the institute were devoted to class time as the participants talked about their homestays and also learned the basics of writing emails in Japanese so they could keep in touch with their host families as well as the friends they made in the Tohoku region. In preparation for the Completion Ceremony, the leaders of each group also worked on their speeches about the trip, which they would give in Japanese. This didn't exempt the other group members from doing any work as they prepared poster sized collages with pictures they took during the program to display at the ceremony and also at the wrap-up meeting in Los Angeles. In addition, each group had to create a Power Point presentation about their experiences in Japan, which they would present wrap-up meeting.

In the afternoon, the institute arranged for some traditional cultural activities that included wearing Yukatas and playing Taiko Drums. Each participant decided beforehand what they wanted to do and they divided up into two groups to participate in the lessons. Afterwards, everyone gathered in the main hall for an impromptu photo session.

The following day, it was more class work as each group raced to finish their collages and their presentations. There was also a brief explanation of the return trip back to Los Angeles and in the afternoon, the participants were given time to pack. The group leaders gathered earlier to practice their speeches again in preparation for the Completion Ceremony.

Later that evening, most of the host families arrived to attend the completion ceremony along with the local press to cover the event. The program started with speeches by the group leaders, eight in all, and afterwards, certificates were handed out to all 32 participants. The Executive Director, Mr. Makoto Kato, gave his opening remarks followed by a heartfelt speech by Shelley Fredrickson (Sister of Montgomery Dickson). Rounding out the speeches was Tiana Dunn, who was the leader of the 2012 group. Mr. Yamamoto Yoshio, Vice Principal of Senboku High School in Osaka gave a toast to start the evening festivities. The participants spent their last night at the institute with their host families and with each other. Afterwards, they also performed a few songs for the guests and engaged in an impromptu dance session with their host brothers and sisters. When it was time to go home, the participants bid one last farewell to their host families. Later that night, the group wanted to light some fireworks on the beach to celebrate the end of the trip so I accompanied them to the rocky beach near the institute and we lit up the night sky with bright sparkles and colorful flames.

It was exactly two weeks since we arrived in Japan and now we would be preparing to leave. In the morning, the participants had some time to complete any unfinished business before leaving and at lunch everyone had one last meal at the institute. Later that afternoon, we boarded the bus and headed to Kansai International Airport for our flight back to Los Angeles via San Francisco. The return trip, just like the flight to Kansai, had complications in San Francisco because our original plane had some type of mechanical malfunction and we were switched to an earlier flight. This wouldn't have been an issue if we had the original two hours to go through immigration and re-check our bags, but instead, we only had an hour to go through customs and then re-check in our luggage for the domestic flight to Los Angeles. Fortunately, the airport staff got us through as quickly as they could and everyone boarded the plane despite all the dirty looks we received from the passengers who were forced to wait for us.

Once we arrived in Los Angeles, a bus picked us up from the airport and took us to the hotel. Once there, we started getting ready for the wrap-up meeting and even though the participants were JET-lagged, hungry and one was evening missing her luggage, the show had to go on as we had dinner and then each group presented on their experience in Japan. They used Power Point presentations with pictures they took during the trip and it was an emotional moment for all the participants. The last night at the hotel was bittersweet and many just wanted to spend whatever time they had left with each other before going home.

The next day, after a light breakfast at the hotel, one by one, the participants boarded the shuttle bus to the airport and headed home. Everyone made it back home safe and sound, which was a big relief for me. Although the 2012 JET Memorial Invitation Program was official over, my involvement was not yet complete.

Participants were assigned homework to be completed after the trip and the first two assignments were an essay and photo submission, the latter for the photo exhibition "Nippon Through My Eyes," which was originally held at JFLA. The prints were then sent to Washington, DC to be displayed at the Japan

Information and Culture Center. Finally, the participants were to give a presentation about their experience in Japan to their fellow classmates in high school or even in college. As all of the participants were either getting ready for their senior year of high school or their first year in college, time was of an essence and everyone worked diligently to turn in their homework. With the end of the program, our hope is that this would not be the end of the participants' involvement in Japanese language education and US-Japanese relation, rather the start and we hope that they will continue to study Japanese, keep in touch with the people they met in Japan and with each other – bridge building, and get involved by eventually participating in the JET Program or something similar. In the meantime, we will push forward with year 3 of JET-MIP in the coming months and will start the process all over again this July.

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Annual Report

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