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



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Going to Japan had been my dream ever since I started learning Japanese in 3rd grade. However, it was impossible due to financial issues. I was filled with hope after hearing about JET-MIP from my Japanese teacher. Although I knew that it would be highly competitive, I tried my best and I was accepted into the program. The moment my teacher told me that I got into the program, I jumped, screamed, and hugged her in front of my class. My countdown for my trip to Japan had started that very day.

I was excited and nervous at the same time. It was my first time going to the airport and on the airplane alone. I was also going to Japan with a group of 31 other students, all of whom I didn't know at all. I was afraid that I wouldn't be able to fit in with them, or maybe I wouldn't be liked and become an outcast. I was reassured since I realized that we all had one thing in common: interest in the Japanese language and culture. I knew that this

trip was going to be so much fun and would be the best experience in my life.

I was wrong when I thought that this trip was just going to be fun and games. Many times it was, but most of the trip was educational. The first week was spent in the Tohoku region, the region that was most impacted by the March 11 earthquake and tsunami. We visited Rikuzentakata, Kesenuma, Ishinomaki, and Sendai. We visited Rikuzentakata and Ishinomaki because it was where Taylor Anderson and Monty Dickson had taught as JET-ALTs until the disaster took away their lives. While I was there, I was able to see and experience the same things that they had. I was able to see why they loved Japan so much, and why they loved what they did so much. It influenced me to want to follow their footsteps; it made me want to become a JET-ALT myself in the future.

I learned that there is so much more to the current situation in Japan than what is shown and publicized in the United States. I thought that Japan was all rebuilt and fine by now. In actuality, many parts of Rikuzentakata and Kesenuma are still in rubble and filled with debris. The JET-MIPpers in general

group of rowdy kids. When our bus passed through the disaster area, everyone was silent; we all couldn't believe what we were seeing, and we were all trying to take in what we were seeing. With the study tours in Rikuzentakata and Kesenuma, we were told of stories and what had happened before and after the March 11 disaster. Seeing the disaster's aftermath up-close is so much different than seeing it on the news or in pictures. We felt sad, and we all wanted to help the Japanese people, but we didn't know how. We all tried to put ourselves in the Japanese's shoes, and most of us didn't know how we'd react nor continue to live. The strength of the Japanese is amazing. Even with nothing, they make something out of nothing; in actuality, the most important thing is that they still have their lives. They continue to live on, and help each other in need whenever possible.

I learned that just by visiting these cities and being willing to learn about the disaster and their current situation, it was already helping the Japanese people. Being able to go to elementary schools and high schools in the area provided us with some ideas on how we can help. The high school summit in Rikuzentakata forced us to come up with ideas to help build a stronger bridge between the United States and Japan. A meeting with Taylor Anderson's Kiwi Club in Ishinomaki forced us to talk with the Japanese English learners; we were able to exchange our culture and learn more about each other's' lives. I never knew that there were so many Japanese people who are interested in the American culture and language. Through all these meetings, we created bonds that we want to keep forever. Although these study tours and meetings may sound boring, it was really fun.

Basically being with each other was enough fun for us. Anything that is boring becomes fun because we make it fun. Boring hour to two hours long bus rides became a karaoke party. Chatting with each other never failed to bring us laughter. We were also given free time. We got to tour Sendai City with college volunteers. In Osaka, we had free time almost every day after our classes. After classes, we went out around the neighborhood to malls, convenience stores, and other places as groups; by shuttle buses, by bikes, or by walking, every moment that we spend with each other made the bonds that we made with one another stronger.

The most fun event that was home-staying with my host family. My host family took me to Namba, to a sushi go-around restaurant, to Osaka Castle, to a small festival, and to shopping malls. We ate takoyaki and okonomiyaki—the most famous food in Osaka; I was able to make my own takoyaki at home with my host family too! I became so close with my host-family that they're like my second family. The most frustrating thing was the fact that I was unable to understand half the things that they tried to tell me, but at the same time, I was surprised at how even with a language barrier, we became a family. They were so considerate and nice to me that I felt that they spoiled me too much. It was so hard to say good-bye and to part from them, but I plan to continue to keep in touch with them.

Parting from the JET-MIPpers and from all the teachers and chaperones was equally hard. We became a family—they are my family. We went through so much together, and we were together every day for the whole trip. I definitely plan on visiting Japan again in the future, so I hope I get to see some JET-MIPpers in Japan in the future; it is the most beautiful place that I have ever seen. This trip made me decide that I will continue to learn Japanese; no matter what field of study I choose to go into, I want to continue learning Japanese. After actually being in Japan and experiencing their lifestyle and learning about the Japanese culture, I wish to experience and learn even more. I want to become proficient in Japanese to become a bridge between the United States and Japan. To start off, I will share my experiences with everyone that I know: family, friends, and classmates. To ensure that the disaster in Japan wouldn't be forgotten, it is my job to educate others about it.

Ms. Anderson and Mr. Dickson, what you have done will not be wasted. My generation is the Tomodachi generation; what you have done will forever be in our hearts and will continue to inspire us to strengthen the bridge between the United States and Japan. Thank you for what you have done for Japan, and thank you for being my inspiration.

NIPPON THROUGH MY EYES PHOTO SUBMISSION



"OSAKA'S HORIZON"

A view from my room showing the calmness of the horizon with beautiful colors from the water and bridge.

Breeze #74



Breeze #73



Breeze #72



Breeze #71



Breeze #70

Breeze #69



Breeze #68



Breeze #67



Breeze #66



2012 JET-MIP Essay: Suzanne Barrientos

2012 JET-MIP Essay: Susan Zhao

2012 JET-MIP Essay: Tiana Dunn

2012 JET-MIP Essay: Yu Ri Kim

Breeze #65



Breeze #64



Breeze #63



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