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



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Right after I received the email that I had gotten accepted into the program, I went through a range of feelings. At first, I had been ecstatic – I had finally received the opportunity to visit Japan. Then, I became nervous. Since I was “flying solo,” I wouldn’t know anyone on the flight. Plus, it would be my first time flying alone. Also, what if I didn’t make any friends? What if I failed to meet the expectations placed upon me? These questions overwhelmed my head throughout the entire few months before July 6th. When the morning finally came, I decided to put aside these questions and worry about them later.

Now, after the program, I realize that I didn’t have to worry about anything. The entire experience was amazing – I got to know everyone in the program, created connections with people in Japan, and revived my interest in learning Japanese. Before the program, I had been losing the original large interest I had, back when I started learning the language in 8th grade. I hadn’t even planned on applying to this program – it was because of my teacher’s persuasion – and basically making me apply, as well as my parent’s urging – that had me try out for it in the first place. But after actually attending the trip, I fully grasped the idea that while it has been a few years after the Tsunami in Tohoku, the region has not fully recovered yet. While reconstruction efforts have begun, the towns are not even close to finishing reconstruction. For example, Rikuzentakata, the town that was “wiped off the map” by the Tsunami, still has wide areas of both residential and industrial areas still left to be rebuilt. Originally, I thought that the area had already recovered – after all, Japan is known for its’ efficiency. Plus, the media stopped broadcasting about the Tohoku area. I realize now that that is completely wrong. This entire experience has opened my eyes to the Tohoku situation, as well as what everyone else is doing to help the region. All across Japan, organizations are working hard to assist the victims, both right after the disaster, and now, 2 years after it has occurred.

Through my entire experience in Japan, I discovered that I truly did love the country’s culture. Both homestays, the touring of Tohoku, staying in Osaka, the last day when we visited Asakusa and Akihabara – as well as getting lost in Akihabara - would be moments I most likely won’t forget. Before attending the Osaka homestay, we were taught some basic Kansai dialect. By learning the dialect, I was better able to understand what my host family was saying, as well as have a higher understanding of what the people of Osaka are like. Residents of Osaka are often seen as being comical – something that I hadn’t known I

before, but soon learned during the lesson. All these experiences encouraged me to work hard to learn Japanese, even to the extent that I am considering continuing learning Japanese in college. My original plan of dropping it after finishing high school had disappeared. Now, because of this experience, it has completely changed the future of my Japanese learning.

Soon after I returned home, I began Skype-ing a friend of mine that attended the Japanese Governor's Academy earlier this summer. She had been rather interested in actually "seeing" Japan through video chat, though I had to resort to showing pictures instead, as we weren't allowed to use video chat at the Institute. After seeing the photos, she – who will be nicknamed Foo – was rather shocked at the appearance of Rikuzentakata, Ishinomaki, and Kesenuma. As I had little time to properly have a video chat with her, I was unable to tell her of the Ocean Day Festival in Sendai, or of the temporary temple. If I had been able to, it most likely would've caused Foo to have a better understanding of the culture of Japan. Also, through sharing my experiences, I may have inspired her to personally visit Japan sometime in the future to see for herself what the country is like. Maybe, I even had her think about applying for JET-MIP next year, when she's a senior. I am rather glad that I was able to help her realize the wonderful experience I had during the program, as well as understand the current situation and culture of Japan/Tohoku region.

To Taylor Anderson, I would like to wish her a peaceful rest, as well as thanks for helping so many Japanese students learn English through the JET program. While the new students wouldn't know who you are, the older ones would greatly thank you for the great experience they had in your class. That experience has caused them to like the English language even more, with a large number of students wishing to visit America in the future – even live there. Through her love and hard work, she has opened new doors of opportunities to the students, inspired them to continue learning English, and allowed them to continue on into the future.

To Montgomery Dickson, I also wish for a safe rest into the afterlife and a thanks from the students for being a person that they can trust, love, and learn from. The students in his class seemed to truly adore him not just as a teacher, but as an adult they can turn to in times of trouble. A solid foundation is necessary to create a strong structure – in this case, by creating a strong love for the English language and culture, he inspired multiple students to continue on to learn the language, maybe even visit the United Kingdom or America some time in their lives. Some even dream of immigrating to the US because of their great love for the language and culture – this, I would have to thank both Monty and Taylor for, and am extremely grateful for. Through this bond, the friendship between the United States and Japan has strengthened even more.

This program has completely changed my life. By changing how I felt about the Japanese language, I can now truly say that I love the language again, now that I have actually visited the country. The entire experience opened my eyes to look at different things in a new light – for that, I am very grateful. While the Great Japanese Earthquake and Tsunami of 2011 is still fresh in our minds, the pain will soon fade, and a new light will shine to brighten our way to the future.

NIPPON THROUGH MY EYES PHOTO SUBMISSION

"RECOVERY IN PROGRESS"

This photo was taken in Rikuzentakata and represents that while there is much to be done, the reconstruction of the town is currently in progress. Although most of the city was destroyed, there is continued hope throughout the town, including the rest of Tohoku, that the region would eventually recover from the disaster and move on. This photo represents the theme of seeing the current situa Tohoku.



Breeze #74



Breeze #73



Breeze #72



Breeze #71



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2013 JET-MIP Essay: Juliana Choup

2013 JET-MIP Essay: Allyza May Concepcion

Breeze #70

Breeze #69



Breeze #68



Breeze #67



Breeze #66



Breeze #65



Breeze #64



Breeze #63



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