

## NOVEMBER, 2013: BREEZE ISSUE #73

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



### DEVONI GUISE

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My interest in Japanese culture started when I was 13 and I would always watch anime (not that I knew what its name at the time). I never expected to be able to actually travel to the Japan and experience the culture first hand. It wasn't until I said farewell to my family that it became real – I was going to Japan.

It wasn't until my third night in Japan that my mind fully processed that I was living in the country I dedicated 4 years of my academic life.

The highlight and main reason for our trip was to explore the areas of Japan that was devastated by the earthquake. It was an eye opening experience. Seeing the massive strength Mother Nature has was awe-inspiring, but at the same time a scary thing to behold, knowing that at any time that power can be unleashed shattering the lives of thousands.

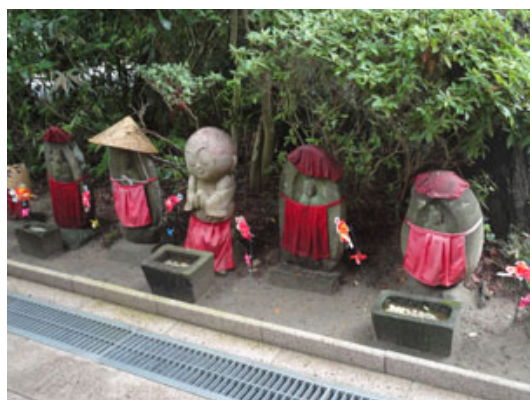
While in the Tohoku area we saw the damage caused by the earthquake and learned about the current recovery efforts and what brave people did during the disaster. One of my favorite parts of this experience was the high school summit in Rikuzentakata. We were able to talk to high school students and pick their mind about what they felt needed to be done to repair their home, and where exactly 32 American teens stood in that plan. Listening to their opinions really changed my perspective on what my abilities were when it comes to helping people in need. It was thought provoking and really challenged one to explore all the aspects of government, the people, and foreign agencies when it comes to repairing a damaged state. Not only was I able to practice my Japanese in the process, but I was able to *build bonds* with Japanese students through discussion of such a personal subject matter. I learned a lot from these discussions, for instance, in areas such as Kesenuma, Rikuzentakata and Ishinomaki, a lot of press coverage of the disaster has stopped and these areas have fallen to the wayside in the wake of more “interesting” “popular” or “less depressing” stories. We all felt this was something that needed to change. This was especially true in America. To solve this problem we thought that at certain Japanese festivals both in Japan and the US flyers could be given out updating people about these areas. Another way that can help, similar to the reason I was able to build these connections with the Japanese students is to just communicate with people, and share what I've learned.

There are three things that I can say are the main reasons I want to go back to Japan, the food, people, and historical sites. During both of my homestays I was able to explore two historical sites in Japan, Zuihoden in Sendai, and Osaka Castle in Osaka. Zuihoden is the mausoleum of a famous conqueror, Date Masamune. It was so beautiful, and it was like a step through history walking throughout it. Osaka Castle was just as beautiful and really impressive. Even though the Osaka heat was out and working overtime, that didn't ruin the experience at all, the people I was with and the attraction made it all very much worth it. Speaking of the people...what can be said? They were great...one of the kindest people I've ever had the honor of meeting. At times, it may have felt as if it was too much, for someone who you've just met, but that's just how a lot of Japanese people are. Everyone was so kind, my host family in Osaka knew I wanted to try Okonomiyaki, and they made it for me filled with different seafood, it's a definite contender for being one of the best meals I had in Japan, only competition being the gigantic shrimp tempura my Sendai family made. It was so good, not only because of the ingredients and my predilection towards seafood, but because they made it for me, and seemed to be really happy I was there with them. I was touched, and this experience proved that hunger isn't the best sauce, because food made with care and consideration will always taste better.

Besides building bonds, learning about what happened on 3.11, there's another reason this program was created by the Japan Foundation, and that is to honor the memories of two English teachers who passed away during the disaster. There are a few words I would like to say: Monty and Taylor, I can now understand why you decided to dedicate a part of your life to teaching in Japan. I'm sure that during your time on Earth you made an impact on many people, and they're better for that impact. Wherever you are now, that you've changed the lives of many people.

I'm so grateful that the JET Memorial Invitation Program for choosing me to be a part of this experience, and making one of my dreams come true. I'm also indebted towards my Japanese teacher for seeing my potential for growth in Japanese and recommending me. I really want to say thank you. The summer before I start college, and enter a new stage of my life has been one of my best summers because of this program. This experience will go down as a highlight of my youth-never to be forgotten.

## NIPPON THROUGH MY EYES PHOTO SUBMISSION



“Exploring Zuihoden in Sendai”

It was beautiful and I feel that during this exploration I was able to build a closer bond with my host family and get to know more about them.

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