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



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Participating in the 2013 Jet Memorial Invitation Program has without a doubt been the most fulfilling experience of my life, and has made me aware of paths towards the future that I was previously oblivious to. Since I was a child, I have been always interested in Japan and things related to it. I've always found the Japanese culture to be very exciting and my desire to be a part of it has

constantly grown stronger. I spend a lot of my time listening to Japanese music, reading Japanese books, and watching Japanese Television. So when I found out that I would be given the opportunity to visit Japan, I was beyond thrilled, so much so that I literally jumped out of my chair! Going into this program, I did not really know what to expect. I simply thought that I would be going to Japan and be learning about the people of the Tohoku Region, all the while visiting important places and talking to important people. I knew it would be fun, but I did not expect the emotional impact that the trip would have on me, nor the kinds of bonds that I would create.

When one spends three weeks practically living with 31 other people, it's almost impossible to not become close to each other. The bonding that occurred with my fellow JET MIP participants was one of the most amazing parts of the trip. When I first arrived at Los Angeles and met with my fellow JET MIP Participants, I was scared, but extremely excited. I knew that these were the people I would be spending the next three weeks with. I knew that we had all been looking forward to that day, and that we all shared a love for Japan. The awkwardness was there, but it wouldn't be long before it all disappeared. By the time we were ready to board the plane to Japan; the bonding was already well under way. Every bit of our experience in Japan was shared. We were constantly helping each other out. There were times when I would be asking the others questions about Japan, and other times when I would be asked the questions. We worked together on issues like how we could share our love of Japan with others, and building lasting connections between our nation and Japan. We exchanged every bit of what we knew and subconsciously watched as our pool of knowledge grew. Having done all that we did, it was a very sad moment when we had to part ways.

In a very different, but similar way, the time we spent together with the Japanese people who we met on our trip was just as special. In each of these exchanges, the time that we spent together was short, but the way that we interacted was almost like relatives who hadn't seen each other in a while. Despite the lack of perfect knowledge of each other's languages, we were able to communicate and talk to each other about ourselves and our home countries. We were able to have a good time together. One example of this was our meeting with the high school students of Rikuzentakata. We had dinner with them, and during this time, we taught each other new games, sang to each other, and even danced. I really did not want our time together with them to end, however, that night I remember sitting in the hotel lobby and thinking about what had happened, and I realized that I would never forget them. It doesn't matter if I cannot physically be with them, because the bonds that we created were strong. Another one of these exchanges occurred during our stay at Hotel Boyo in Kessenuma. I was having my first experience in a Japanese bathhouse. As I was sitting there, an old Japanese man started a conversation with me. It was awkward, and I really did not know what to do. However, there isn't much you can do in such a situation but reply. At the end of our talk, I was a stunned. I had just been in a conversation with a Japanese man I had never met, all while naked, and yet I enjoyed every bit of it! I continued to have experiences like these throughout our time in Japan, and created bonds in the most unsuspecting places.

As we traveled around the Earthquake and Tsunami area of Japan, Tohoku, I came to a simple conclusion. The people of Tohoku are strong. They possess a Will mightier than any I have ever seen. They refuse to be beaten down and they are determined to emerge from their horrific past as not simple survivors, but victors. For that cause, they are united as one. Before I went to Tohoku, I expected that the people living there would be heavy hearted and full of sorrow. During our very first drive in Rikuzentakata, I saw a countless number of destroyed homes, with only the foundation remaining. I saw abandoned buildings that were barely standing. This made me even more certain that the people living there would still be devastated. However, I could not have been more wrong. When I actually met and talked to residents of the area, I noticed that they do not dwell in the past but the future. Their faces were not gloomy, but rather they seemed to be focused bettering their situation. On our first night in the Tohoku Region, we met several individuals who volunteered after 3.11. One of these individuals, named Naru, told us about the community in Rikuzentakata. He told us about the organization that he was in and how they are working on rebuilding. There is a Japanese proverb that goes "Sanbon no ya nara orenai". It means "Three arrows cannot be broken". If a person tries to break a single arrow, then they will be able to do it very easily, however, if you try to do the same to three arrows, it will not be as easy. This proverb basically says that people are stronger when united. The people of Tohoku are currently putting this proverb into practice. They've come together for the goal of rebuilding their home. They are exhibiting their true power.

My time in Japan has made me reconsider my plans for the future. I've always wanted to spend some time living and working in Japan; however I wasn't sure if I could really make that happen. I now have a burning desire to make sure it does. This trip as motivated greatly and I want to do everything I can to be able to go and witness more of Japan and its wonders. I want to make my dreams into reality. I know for a fact that there will be issues regarding my Japanese studies, in terms of formal education; however, I refuse to let that stop me. I've come to know that there is much that I want to learn, and I want to take my Japanese Language ability to the next level and beyond. Whether it is in class, or self-study, I will continue my studies of Japanese, and Japan.

This Program was everything and more than I expected it to be. When it ended, I felt a little empty inside. However, I am comforted by the fact that the connections that I've built while in Japan are ones that will last. In order to strengthen the bonds between our two nations, I will do my best to share my experi with friends, family, acquaintances, and to those who I will meet in the future. Monty Dickson and Ta

Anderson lived their lives doing just this. They worked hard as representatives of our nation, and they did so with love and passion. For this, I must thank them for all of their hard work, and also for inspiring me to follow my dreams. I will do my best to carry on what they have started.

NIPPON THROUGH MY EYES PHOTO SUBMISSION



“One for all, All for one.”

This image shows a drawing done by the students of Watanoha Elementary School. I chose this picture because it shows exactly what the people of the Tohoku region are currently doing. They are fighting together.

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