

# MARCH, 2014: BREEZE ISSUE #77

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



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Some experiences in life are fleeting memories, while others last a life time. The JET Memorial Invitation Program was unlike anything I had ever experienced.

Even the months of preparation and research did not prepare me for the firsthand experiences I had from the trip to Tohoku and relationships I built with my host

families, students, residents and more. I learned so much from them and seen so much. I don't think it is possible to write down everything I had seen and how I felt about it. However, I will try my best to convey these feelings to you.

"The two themes of this trip are: building bridges and the Tohoku region..." said Thomas during the orientation. What better way to build bridges than truly immersing oneself in the Japanese culture by having the wonderful opportunity to participate in a homestay!

Standing in the chilly gallery room, the participants and I stood ready to greet our Sendai host families. The swell of people pouring into the room made my heart quicken. I recalled the quick Japanese class on how to greet your host family.

Um, let's see. "Thank you for accepting me..." Wait. I forgot to say "Nice to meet you." I can do this!

In moments, I was sent off to greet my host family. They stood near the railings with big smiles on their faces. I felt calmer after their warm welcome and began to engage in conversation. From school to hobbies, I learned so much about Japanese customs and culture during my stay in Sendai. My host family was eager to teach me anything I didn't understand. Even if that meant that my host sister had to constantly whip out her electronic translator.

During my homestay in Osaka, I had similar yet heartwarming experiences. My Osaka host family was very loving and definitely made my stay there very fun and interesting. For one thing, I learned that my previous belief that Japanese people were very conservatives was wrong; my Osaka host family proved me wrong. They were loud, affectionate, and absolutely adorable, especially my 10-year-old host sis who just loved to sneak up and take pictures of me everywhere. We spent a lot of time traveling around

the neighboring prefectures, such as driving all the way to Wakayama Prefecture and climbing up Mount Koya to Koyasan Temple. I had the undeniable pleasure of learning about Japanese history and Shintoism during our time there. From the Okunoin Cemetery to the numerous monasteries in the area, I found the architecture and the history about it very fascinating. Japanese Buddhism was a bit different from the Buddhism that exists in China and making the journey there was worth it. In addition to the famous landmarks at Mount Koyasan, I enjoyed the time bonding with my host family. We shared stories about America, foreign countries and my interests regarding the future. Their welcoming presence made me feel safe and gave me a good learning environment. The more I spoke, the more my Japanese speaking and listening skills improved. Going to Japan and participating in JET-MIP was probably the best decision I ever made. I do hope to continue my Japanese education in college and beyond.

When I spoke to my family about my adventures, they were in awe. Japan and its wonders were a faraway dream much like coming to America would be for the Japanese people. My family members have always found Japan fascinating and encouraged my education in the language and culture. Coming back from Japan, they could not stop grilling me about the smallest details.

“Do Japanese people eat sushi every day?” “What’s their homes like?” “Are they as short as you?” Barely clearing five feet an inch, I would reply with a twitch and a smile, “Sadly all the high school and middle school students are taller than me.” And so on and so on.

When my family heard about the Tohoku region, they were shocked by the devastation and surprised by how quickly the Japanese government have pooled in resources to rebuild the area. My stories of how resilient and patient the people of Tohoku were have changed their opinions of Japan. They look at Japan and remember how the Tohoku people’s “kizuna” or bonds have held them together through those difficult times.

Recalling all those fun and serious memories has brought one thing to my attention, my desire to return to Japan in the future. After learning so much about a culture in a matter of two weeks, I am determined to return to this beautiful country and bond with its people again.

Taylor and Monty, thank you for giving me the opportunity to visit Japan and learn about its people and customs. This trip imparted within me a small part of what you two have obviously experienced in several years. I can understand why you wanted to spend so much time in the beautiful countryside of the Tohoku region and love the people there. I will never forget your courage and passion for Japan. As such, I fully intend to continue to keep your spirit alive in all that I do and whatever I choose to pursue in the future. Thank you for everything and more!

## **NIPPON THROUGH MY EYES PHOTO SUBMISSION**

### **“Raising the Groud”**

After the "3.11" disaster, they decided to raise the ground level of Rikuzentakata to be over 5 meters high before rebuilding.



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Breeze #85



Breeze #84



Breeze #83



Breeze #82



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Japanese Language Education Update 4

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2013 JET-MIP Essay: Sarah Xie

2013 JET-MIP Essay: Jacob Wolter

2013 JET-MIP Essay: Alix Tuel

2013 JET-MIP Essay: Sean Truong

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