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



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All 32 participants of the 2013 JET Memorial Invitation Program were rounded up as we arrived at the Kansai institute; I felt both nervous and excited. Having only known the other 31 participants for a couple of days, getting to live with them for another two weeks was an odd thought for me. As I smelled the salty air (which indeed was as wonderful as a past MIPper had described

it to be) and felt the hot sun beat down on us as we waited for our luggage in front of the institute, however, I knew that this trip would be a once in a lifetime experience that I would never forget.

When we participated in icebreakers and spent our generous hours of free time together, I began to understand that many of the other 31 kids shared my views and had an earnest passion for learning about Japan and its culture. Getting to meet people from all over the country was a great experience as I got to learn about their homes and lives, and I learned that there are not only cultural differences between countries, but also cultural differences between states. Over the short two and a half week period of time, I also became acquainted with two great people who I have come to think of as very close friends of mine, and I am truly grateful that I had the chance to meet them through this program. Biking through the streets of Kansai and visiting the many attractions nearby such as Rinku Town and Aeon Mall are but few of the memories I share with them and will cherish forever. Having free time to do what we pleased in a completely new country was definitely one of the things I was looking forward to on this trip, but when I learned about having classes in the institute, that definitely put a damper on my mood.

To be honest, sitting in a classroom didn't seem quite as exciting as riding a bike down unknown streets. As we began our first class, however, my perspective was almost immediately changed. Our teachers were engaging and fun and they often cracked jokes to keep us laughing. They taught us about Japanese culture and certain words that you would only pick up from native things you wouldn't learn straight from a textbook. Not only that, but our teachers seemed genuinely interested in all of our backgrounds. They asked questions about our homes, cities, and families. Being teachers though, they also corrected our grammar and tried to improve our writing. This made me realize that I still have a long way to go before I become truly proficient in the Japanese language. One small piece of advice that I would like to off

any future MIPper is to always be striving to improve. If you ask your teachers for help with improving a sentence here or adding a word there, they will always help you find the best route. With the help from your institute senseis and other MIPpers, your skills in Japanese can only improve.

One of the other things that made me feel truly accepted and welcome into a foreign country was being able to stay with a host family. I will not forget the warmth of being welcomed into strangers homes. It's true that at first it was awkward, we couldn't talk much due to language barriers, and I wasn't quite comfortable with all of my host family yet. Through a few short hours through conversations of broken Japanese and English, however, we managed to bond and enjoy our short time together. Not only that, but I also learned that actions can speak just as loud as words. Through the adventures we had together such as travelling to the Osaka Castle with my Osaka host family and exploring Michinoku Park with my Sendai family, the gratitude I felt towards them was immense. For accepting me with open arms and a warm bed, I will always feel grateful and wish to continue building bridges so that we may meet again one day.

Through this program, all of the participants experienced an opportunity that allowed us to immerse ourselves within Japanese culture and language. Although each person's experience in Japan may have been different, I know that I was able to see and feel things that I only dreamed of such as spending time with high school students and getting to understand their daily lives, or taking the subway on a hot day with friends. I feel that all 32 of us 2013 MIPpers were also able to have a greater understanding of ourselves as well. When we were able to converse with actual JETs about their time and memories in Japan, it made me realize that I want to pursue the study of Japanese in the future through college so that I may also become a JET one day. Though I am still not sure what my life past college may be, I do know that my time in Japan has left a big imprint on me which I was able to share with my family and friends.

When I first returned home from our two week adventure, the first thing I shared with my companions was the hundreds of pictures that I had taken. In truth, most of these pictures were lighthearted, and displayed many of the "cool" and "funny" things that I found in Japan. Once I reached the point where we were in Tohoku in my slideshow, however, those watching began to realize the magnitude of how the earthquake had affected Japan, and that there was still a lot of work to be done until things were how they used to be. On the bright side though, some of my friends began to ask questions about what could be done to help, and even gained interest in learning more about the Japanese language. For me, this was one of the most gratifying feelings I have ever had; being able to share my stories and have people express interest in them, while also making them want to go the distance to create bridges between our countries as both Monty Dickson and Taylor Anderson had wanted, gave me an extreme sense of satisfaction and accomplishment.

Though I had never personally met them, I could feel from the words from their families and friends that both Monty and Taylor are still greatly loved and missed. If my words could reach them today, I would honestly like to say:

To Mr. Monty Dickson,

Your humor and personality reached me through the words and videos your sister conveyed to us about you. The educational video you produced was especially useful in giving me an idea of the dedication you had in getting your students interested in learning. I am both humbled and honored to learn about your hard work, and hope to one day follow in your footsteps to become a great JET.

To Ms. Taylor Anderson,

My first impression that I had of you was that you were an extremely joyous and loved many people quickly learned that all those who surrounded you loved you right back. All the words spoken by fri

you were nothing but positive, and I strive to someday build strong bonds between those wishing to learn English and Japanese as you had.

To both Taylor and Monty,

The road that you have paved for future generations seems bright, and many JET-MIP participants will likely carry on your legacy. For as we learned the first day in L.A., we have to learn how to build bridges and make people aware of Tohoku. We will work hard as a group far into the future to help improve relations between our two countries. I hope you both will rest in peace.

NIPPON THROUGH MY EYES PHOTO SUBMISSION



“Six Smiling Statues”

Underneath the Tree of Hope, there were six smiling statues that seemed to be watching over the memorial, with coins scattered at their feet. Although I am not sure why these statues were placed here, their calm, smiling faces accompanied with their small stature, juxtaposed against the cool marble memorial where they stood and cloudy gray made them stand out even more .

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