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



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MY 2014 JET- MIP EXPERIENCE

You will most likely see this phrase in the 31 other essays as well, but being a 2014 JET-MIP-per has been the best experience of my life. I got to study in Japan for two weeks, meet some of the best people in the world, try to make a difference, and learn about two incredibly amazing teachers.

I heard about this program back in 2012, when my sister applied and was the 2012 JET-MIP rep. This was my sister's second time to Japan, so first off, you could say I was slightly jealous. Despite having a few opportunities to go, and after learning the language since kindergarten, I never had my chance. Until earlier this year, when I got to apply myself through paperwork, a test, and a Skype interview. Essays and interviews aren't my forte, especially when Thomas seemed scarier than humanly possible through my computer screen, but I was ecstatic when I was selected. I even posted a picture of the email on my Instagram. Then, in what felt like a flash, I was at the airport waiting to board a plane to LA, and that's where the real fun began.

In my time staying in LA, I learned who and what this program really was about, not just 'a free trip to Japan' like my friends think. I got to meet some members of the Anderson and Dickson families, who are seriously the nicest people in the country. There are many tragedies where people lose loved ones, but there are small cases where that loss is turned into something positive to make a difference. And that's exactly how this program came about, from a tragedy, but makes a difference and lets us connect and build bridges between two very different countries.

And by different, I mean Japan is the best country out there. As soon as I stepped out on my first Japanese sidewalk, not only could I see the difference around me, I could smell it. Yes, I sound crazy, but that's one of my biggest first impressions after stepping foot on Japanese soil. Not to mention how nice the people everywhere in Japan are, no one is ever grumpy or rude like some places in America. After the first 12 hours we all were ready to stay for life.

Unfortunately, this year our group was unable to go to the annual High School Summit in Rikuzentakata because of a typhoon swooping across Japan. I remember the days leading up to the typhoon, everyone had mixed feelings when we were told it was cancelled, but had a good laugh when Ms. Nishioka, Mr. Iwazawa, and Ms. Okumura were telling us to stay inside and about our visit to the town with wild deer that seriously WILL bite you. Ironically, when typhoon day came around, it was one of the sunniest days we had.

Throughout the few weeks I was in this program, I visited temples, shrines, schools, hotels, onsen, malls and even a street takoyaki stand. The number of friends and people I met was more than I could have ever imagined. From the cutest, strongest fourth graders I have ever met, to some of the funniest high schoolers, to teachers and Japan Foundation staff, my amazing host family back in Osaka, and 31 other US high school students who were with me from day 1. I have countless numbers of irreplaceable memories with everyone.

Our visit to Watanoha Elementary School was like a dream. To only think of what the fourth graders we met went through as even younger first graders back in 2011, was unimaginable. The song they sang to us brought tears to our eyes even after, when we would watch it in recordings. We also wrote our tanabata wishes together and one boy even helped us with our grammar. Despite going through the earthquake and tsunami just a few years ago and our age differences, these kids were so happy, outgoing and friendly.

Visiting the high schools was a blast. We were all so surprised at many of the Japanese student's English skills, they were so good at it. My most memorable high school visit was to East Sendai High School. Here we did traditional tea ceremony and learned some basic kendo! My buddy for the day was an adorable sophomore named Miki. Aside from the awesome kendo and tea, my most memorable moment was walking to the kendo room making conversation with the students, and suddenly smacking face first into a window that was open while we were walking outside. Surprisingly it didn't hurt too bad, but I'll always remember how funny it was to everyone, making a fool out of myself.

The schools, temples, shrines, etc. were amazing, but my home stay experience really was the best for me. The short two days I had with my family were really the highlight of my trip. We didn't go to do many tourist things, we did exactly what a regular family would have on an ordinary weekend. We stayed at home and cooked, went to the supermarket, did fireworks, had a huge slumber party with a bunch of girls from my host sister's basketball team, and went to cheer the team the next day in their tournament. In those two days I was graciously invited into a family that didn't know me, and ended up with a second family for life.

I could talk about each and every one of the other 31 participants individually, but from the beginning, we were one big family. Throughout the trip we had so many long bus rides and plane rides, I thought it would be memorable to take a 'selfie' with each and every other 'mipper' (plus Thomas). I ended up getting 25 sleepers and only 7 that got away lucky. As many of us have said to each other, I have never experienced a time where I made so many of my closest friends in such a short amount of time. Together we have shared many laughs, tears, late night games, gossip, and even sleepovers in the lounge.

From these few weeks, I learned so much and met so many people, and it is all thanks to The Japan Foundation. I am forever thankful and honored that they chose me to participate in this program. This trip has let me discover more about Japan and myself. Especially the both together. I have my heart dead-set on participating in the JET Program after college. To participate in another program to be a part of the bridges between our two countries.

To Monty and Taylor,

Taylor, getting the chance to meet your friends and family really makes me feel like I got to meet you too. Your story has truly touched me, I love hearing about you. I hope I can one day meet and have a friend as great as you in the future.

Monty, I feel as though we are close even though we have never met. We've graduated at the same place, grew up in the same town, and I'll be attending the same college and having the same teachers as you did. You even have more t-shirts with my elementary school on it than I do, and I went there. From talking with your siblings, I really wish we could have crossed paths sooner in Anchorage.

Although we can no longer meet in my lifetime, you two have most definitely touched my life. The people you two have touched will forever continue to grow, and I hope to help spread your stories and kindness. I look up to you two as amazing role models that I long to be like, as I grow up and take my chance in becoming a JET too.

NIPPON THROUGH MY EYES PHOTO SUBMISSION



“Endo Family”

This is a photo that is located where Mr. Endo's house was located before the tsunami. It symbolizes his family that he lost and what was left of his house. I chose this photo because this is where the reality of what had happened to the Japanese people in 2011 really hit me. I remember many of us were teary eyed and hugging.

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