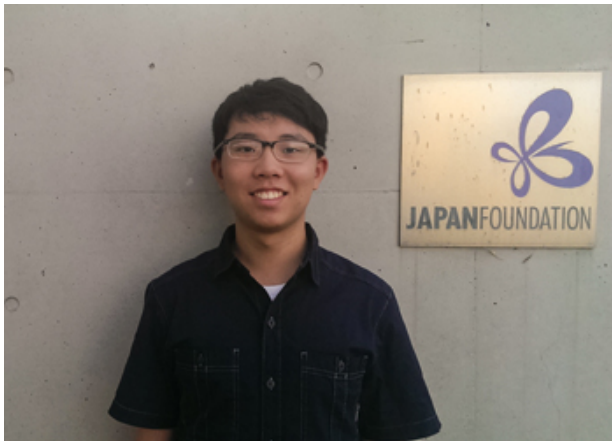


OCTOBER, 2014: BREEZE ISSUE #84

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



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There is a Chinese aphorism: to walk a thousand miles rather than to read a thousand books. The JET Memorial Invitation Program provides a "living textbook" about the Japanese culture, people and courage in recovering from the Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami. Instead of reading these contents on a page, you are living in the content of the book, and the interaction between the reader and the information goes both ways. You will feel

connected to the things and people you see, yet you will also become part of whatever you have experienced.

When we were taking English class with the students at Senboku High school, we were asked to present a one-minute commercial in a group of four working with the Japanese students. This was extraordinary, but also a very uncomfortable task. Not only were we asked to work with strangers, we shared language barriers that prevented us from even discussing about what to do and we were also required to present in a secondary language--the JET-MIPers in Japanese and the Japanese students in English.

This difficult task, I think, is symbolic of the whole purpose of the JET Memorial Invitation Program. We step out of our comfort zone, break the language barrier, and detach from the apprehension about being embarrassed. Speak even if you will make mistakes or say the wrong word. Talk especially with those who share cultural and linguistic differences. We are learning how to build a cross-culture bridge between different nations by simply talking to the people. Making every sound is like assembling a concrete block to build a bridge, which stands firm in the sea that is filled with our fears that other people are different.

In fact, everyone is the same, regardless of his or her nationality. When we began our discussion about the short commercial. I noticed that both American and Japanese students were nervous. We both feared being disrespected by others and were unconfident about our secondary language skills, but we both wanted to talk to each other. So I stepped on the language boundary. I spoke to my Japanese group mates in Japanese, along with a mix of hand gestures and Katakana-pronunciation of English words. That first sentence initialized more conversations, and eventually, our plan was set and we were prepare present our commercial.

After we have finished the presentation, the English teacher asked our permission to show the video tape of the presentation as classroom material. At that moment, I felt strongly connected to everyone we met in the school because we have become part of the classroom. It was a two-way interaction: we would remember the Japanese students as our friends, and the entire class would recognize us as part of the class.

This trip allows me to explore Japan, its culture and its people. It makes me fall in love with Japan so much that I consider it a second home. I am determined to go back again. Of course, to prepare for that visit, I will continue my study of Japanese in college, and if it is not possible, through self-study. Before this trip, I heard about the JET Program. I used to think that it was absurd to stay in Japan when I was unconfident about my language abilities. However, after the meeting with the JET participants in Sendai, I was open to the opportunity for this revisit because the trip prepared me for my future. I have gained enough information about the JET Program that I am certain to apply for it after college.

The experience in Japan did change my plans for the future, but more importantly, this experience could also change others. Although my best friend is in my Japanese class, he shares only a minimum interest in Japanese. Nothing more than a course to complete for graduation. But when I shared my story in Japan with him, he was impressed. I told him all about the cultural experiences, the people and the place itself. I shared my discoveries about the people and their culture. With pictures and videos, I described to him about the entire time from beginning to end. He was first agape, perhaps took in too much information to process. Then he said to me: "Tell me more about JET. I wanna go to Japan." I think I have sparked his interest in Japan.

Besides cultural exploration, there was also a solemn part in this trip. The most difficult task for those living is to remember that others have passed away, so instead, I think that people should remember what those people believed. The stories of Monty and Taylor are heartbreaking. They were taken away while they were in a process of discovering something, and throughout the trip, I think I made the same discovery as Monty and Taylor did. Japanese and Americans are the same. There are people with similar characters and interest in both groups. They both are equally shy to communicate with each other yet have equal desire to interact. Language cannot become a barrier between people when they are similar, the only barrier is ourselves. So I have also discovered that when you cannot change the situation in order to solve an issue, you have to change yourself because you can be the problem. Perhaps, I would forget the name Montgomery Dickson and Taylor Anderson, but I would not forget "you," in fact, I will remember who "you" are as a whole because I will remember what you believe and what I discover from your beliefs.

This is perhaps one of the many journeys I will have in my life. It is like one of the many books you will read about. What I have encountered is perhaps one of the many people, events, objects and places I would see in my life. The key is not to remember every word and sentence in that "book," but to remember what has happened to you.

NIPPON THROUGH MY EYES PHOTO SUBMISSION

"Second Home"

This is a picture of the courtyard and cafeteria at the Japan Foundation Japanese Language Institute Kansai. I chose this picture because it was so comfortable that it healed me from being homesick when I was in Japan. It was like a second home to me.



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