

## NOVEMBER, 2014: BREEZE ISSUE #85

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



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On my journey across the Pacific to a faraway land which I have long dreamed of visiting, I found myself lost in a sea of culture. Japan, an island nation in East Asia, was not only full of people eating their traditional cuisine but people deeply rooted in their culture, ideology, customs, and history. Finally I would be able to put into practice the language that I studied for the last four years of high school.

Although I have traveled abroad before, this time was quite different. It was totally new. With bags in hand, I boarded the plane somewhat anxious and slightly apprehensive. I questioned what I was getting myself into. Nonetheless, I continued boarding with the many other passengers to include the party of students I had recently met. My preconceived notions of a seemingly more traditional Japan rooted in the past as portrayed on American television was short lived. Through this program, I came to the realization that television portrayals are most often inaccurate. Japan has an ever-intertwined historical and present culture that most foreigners do not have the opportunity to see. This epiphany brings forth the thought that America and Japan have more in common than one may think. Weather, food, and culture are particularly noteworthy for discussion in this paper.

Family and friends were excited to the opportunity to vicariously experience Japan through the eyes of this young teenager. General inquiries involved questions like: what is the weather like, do they really use chopsticks all the time, and do they really bow instead of shaking hands? The reporting of a "super typhoon" on the weather channel caused concern and many inquiries from home during my initial departure. I explained to family and friends that the weather was very similar to the humid climate of the East Coast (Honshu being more humid) and the typhoon was not much different from tornadoes and thunderstorms that are very common during the summer months. I enjoyed the food and the market experiences. I shopped for unique finds that I could not purchase in America. Although okay with me, the idea of eating plain rice at every meal instead of some other starch like potatoes, pasta, or bread was not appealing to most inquiring minds. Oddly enough, I was questioned about the custom of taking one

shoes off when entering the home. Although I am accustomed to this practice apparently other Americans are not. The reactions varied from those who do not like the idea because of the possibility of foot fungus to others who think the practice is worthy of adopting.

JET-MIP served as a way for me to increase my experience in the Japanese language while helping me meet lifelong friends both American and Japanese that share similar interests in both cultures. Overall the program was very worthwhile and fun; the experience I gained, the friends I made, and the things I learned will stay with me for life as well as help me in my future relations with Japan and its people.

America has a great amount of history with European countries because of wars, treaties, and conventions, and as nationalities, cultures and ethnicities of these nations fused together. Over the years, the societal norm has been to learn "practical" languages like Spanish, French, or German - European languages and Japan was excluded. Although we have a lack of interpersonal relations that does not mean that we cannot increase our relations.

Although I studied Japanese in high school for the past four years, the JET-MIP trip served as an excellent real world introduction to the Japanese learning experience as I begin my first semester of higher education. This fall I am taking Japanese 110, a Japanese language and culture class, at George Mason University. I am also taking three Asian culture classes featuring Japanese religion and philosophy with plans of eventually transferring to a college where Japanese language and literature are offered as a major. My dream is to become a Japanese instructor in the United States, a teacher in Japan, or a translator of some kind.

Soldiers are routinely commended for honorable service and sacrifice to the country they serve, particularly American soldiers who serve abroad. Like those soldiers, thank you Tayler and Montgomery for your sacrifice. Thank you for being ambassadors and laying a solid foundation for young Americans like myself and the group of friends I traveled with this summer. We aspire to not only learn the Japanese language but to use it for the greater good. This summer we not only had fun, but we also represented our country, America, with the same dedication and commitment that you showed. My only regret is that we couldn't meet you in person. Like JETs, I hope to one day serve as a bridge between our two countries. I want to live abroad teaching and translating in English and Japanese. I want to be immersed in the culture like I've dreamed of the last four years.

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



**“Lunch at the Kagatsu”**

Claire, Ella, Ryan, and I were looking for a ramen and/or somen shop but we had a mishap in translation so we ended up eating at a Kagatsu restaurant.

Eating a traditional Japanese meal is and watching the guy cook it was like a masterwork.

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