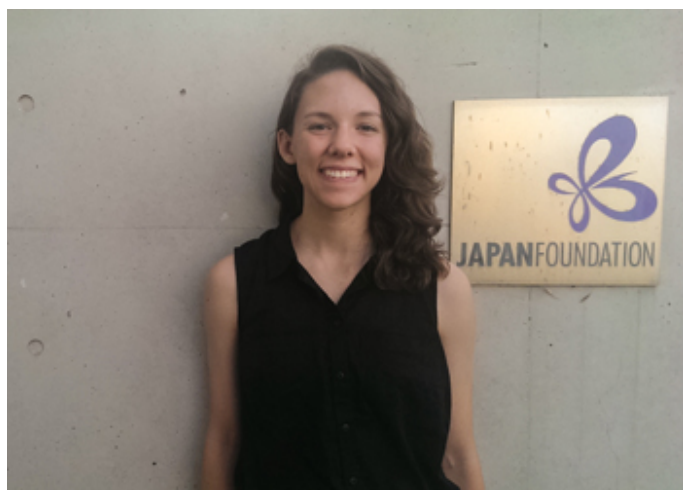


## JANUARY, 2015: BREEZE ISSUE #87

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



### CLAIRE NORD

*Athens High School  
Troy, MI*

Before participating in this program, I had never done a spontaneous video interview on a street for elementary-school girls. I had never seen rocks wearing aprons, worn a face cover (that looked sort of like a dryer sheet) in a changing room, or seen a deer steal and eat someone's money. More importantly, though, I'd never traveled outside of North America or

made so many dear friends in two and a half short weeks. The JET Memorial Invitation Program allowed me to do all of these things and more. The program gave me so many priceless memories and experiences that have changed the way I interact with and think about the world. Most importantly, this program has changed my impressions of the Japanese people and Japan itself, influenced my future aspirations, and given me the ability to connect deeply with so many people.

Firstly, I was surprised by the kindness of Japanese people. Despite being an intrusive and socially clumsy foreigner, I was welcomed by every person I met. I was especially surprised at how polite young Japanese children were. The children that I talked to at Watanoha Elementary School as well as two girls I met in Nara were extremely courteous, enunciating clearly and using polite speech forms. That's not to say that the Japanese people I met were uptight. Rather, they displayed a blend of courtesy and friendliness best embodied by the jovial "Irasshaimase! [Welcome!]" said by every employee in a ramen shop when a customer comes in. These enthusiastic greetings and friendly interactions put me immediately at ease in.'

Another reason why I enjoyed every day I spent in Japan was the diversity of the landscape. I had heard in class that Japan is a conglomeration of modern and traditional culture, but seeing it in person made me realize just how true that is. Biking through Osaka near the Japanese-Language Institute Kansai, one would see a number of compact, modern Japanese houses followed immediately by a shrine. Entering the shrine muffled the sounds of bustling bikers and drivers and made me feel peaceful and reflective. I was struck by the vastness of Japan's history compared to America's history.

Naturally, traveling in Japan for two weeks significantly improved my Japanese skills. Beyond learning new vocabulary and grammar and improving my listening comprehension speed, I also gained skills that transcend language. When you're in a foreign country with five hours of free time, you learn to be more outgoing. I loved exercising my spontaneous side while in Japan, from buying a cheese yogurt drink at the airport to eating Ramune ice cream and french fries before running for 20 minutes to get back to the Institute before curfew. Being outgoing doesn't mean just doing fun things on a whim. I learned to be more outgoing by asking for help when I needed it. I learned to be more humble because there were so many things I didn't know. Luckily, everyone I asked for help was generous and accommodating. I learned to accept that I would make innumerable blunders and that those mistakes helped me learn.

Regarding my plans for the future related to Japanese, this trip hardened my resolve to travel to Japan again in the future. Next time I travel in July I'll target somewhere cooler, though, like Hokkaido! Japan's culture really appealed to me and I think that I would enjoy living there for a longer time, perhaps during college. I've been looking at study abroad programs at various schools and I hope to spend a semester or summer in Japan continuing my studies through a Japanese educational institution. As I stood at the door of my room at the Institute on the day we departed, I felt like I was leaving my home. Living in Japan felt right. Before this trip I wasn't sure if I'd be able to adjust, but I did, and remarkably quickly at that.

While I was able to keep in touch with my family and close friends in Japan, I didn't have the time to talk about my trip in its entirety until returning home. The people that I have spoken to now have all been affected in different ways by my trip, but all are glad that I had such a wonderful experience. The people that my experiences will affect most, though, are my brother and other younger students in my school's Japanese program. I spoke to my Japanese teacher recently about my trip, and she and I agree that many of my classmates would love to have an experience like mine. Furthermore, as the first person from my school to participate in the JET Memorial Invitation Program, I can prepare future applicants and help them understand the application process. My brother and his friend start Japanese 1 this fall, and I hope that he can have a similarly wonderful study abroad experience in the future. Speaking with students from different Japanese programs across the country has also given me new ideas about the structure of my school's Japanese program and made me appreciate the quality of my school's program. By sharing these ideas with my teacher I believe that the Athens High School Japanese program can continue to grow.

If I were able to say anything to Taylor Anderson and Montgomery Dixon right now, I would tell them that I respect their decisions. It takes an immense amount of courage to travel to overseas. And they didn't just travel to Japan, they lived there and contributed to their communities in meaningful, positive ways. I would want to tell them that their family members are doing their best to further those contributions. Lastly, I would like to thank them for all of their work. Taylor Anderson and Monty Dickson embodied the ideal JET Assistant Language Teachers: energetic, enthusiastic, friendly, and passionate about Japan. They serve as a model for all future JETs to aspire to.

## NIPPON THROUGH MY EYES PHOTO SUBMISSION



“Jizō statues with bibs”

When I saw these rocks in Kyoto I didn't understand why they had “little aprons” on them. I simply thought that they were cute. Researching their meaning later revealed that the statues depict *Jizō*, a Bodhisattva or enlightened follower of Buddhism that helps others. *Jizō* is specifically the guardian of travelers and children that die very young. The clothing on *Jizō* statues is placed there to

thank *Jizō* and protect the children. I'm glad that I was able to learn more about this fascinating aspect of Japanese Buddhism and culture after my initial misunderstanding.

Breeze #98



Breeze #97



Breeze #96



Breeze #95

Breeze #94



Breeze #93



Breeze #92



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2014 JET-MIP Report: Thomas O'Donnell

2014 JET-MIP Report: Michelle Peterson

2014 JET-MIP Report: Gwenyth Nicoloro

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