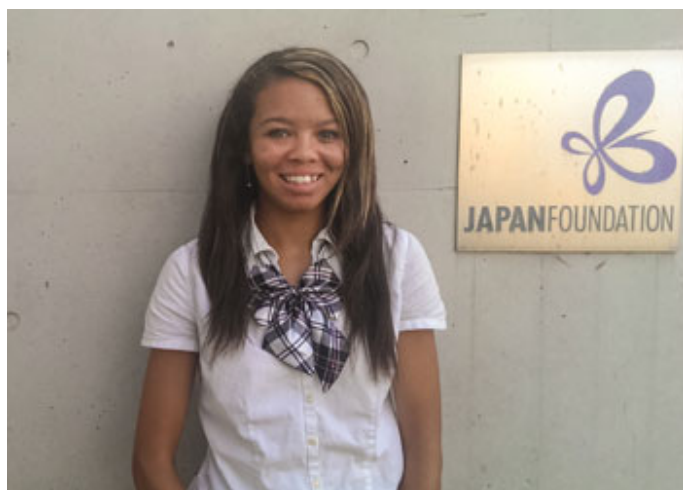


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A FREE MONTHLY E-NEWSLETTER FOR FRIENDS OF JAPAN & TEACHERS OF JAPANESE



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The moment I left my family to get on my connected flight from Indiana to Detroit to L.A. I knew something huge was going to happen, and that this trip will be a huge inspiration and motivator that I will carry with me for the rest of my life. This was the first time that I was away from all family, all friends, and everyone that I knew.

Once the group and I arrived in L.A. with all our luggage, we rushed out to the bus into the bustling city. In Indiana, I never seen so many cars moving so fast, and so many people who looked so sure in a mist of chaos.

Once we got to the hotel, that's where I saw the faces of new friends from all over the states. It was strange, however, because by the power of internet, we already knew so much about one another. We never met one another before, but since we anticipated meeting each other for so long, we all felt like long lost friends.

The orientations in L.A. was long, but it got the message across. We were not in Japan for just a free vacation, no. We were an investment towards the future good of Japanese and American relations. We were being asked to become pieces of a bridge.

After learning more about Taylor, Monte, their friends, and the devastation of March 2011 orientation, I was ready to get down to business, and learn how I could be of assistance Japanese people in any way. I followed the news when it happened my sophomore year

school; I wanted to help, but did not know how. The video made that day all too real, too vivid. It made me question why I did not take the next step to do more back then. I was in awe when we met the families of Monty and Taylor. Never in my life have I seen family so dedicated to preserving a loved one's legacy, or have I seen an outcome of a tragedy be the inspiration of so many positive programs. I felt connected to Taylor, Monty, their friends, and their families. There was so much I wanted to say then, yet I was so lost for words. If I could address those two brave souls now, I would say:

Taylor and Monte,

It amazes me how I never knew people like you existed.

People, who share the same passion of learning language as I do, used your passion in such a way to touch the hearts of many. Taylor, to your very last breath you put the children before yourself, and protected them. Monty, you spent your last moments so afraid of what was going to come. The disaster took your life. It wasn't fair at all for a human being brave and strong as yourself to spend your last moments afraid. You did so much as an English-Japanese teacher, and helped your students so much.

You two are the definition of bringing your dreams to life by living your dreams. How are you now? Can you see that you were the first drop of a ripple? A ripple that grew to become a wave. A wave of hope? A wave of development and strength? Did you have any regrets? Do you realize that you are now forever heroes? I hope to one day live my dreams as you two did.

After the orientation at Japan Foundation, Los Angeles, we went to the Official Residence of the Consulate-General of Japan in Los Angeles for this breath taking dinner. I was in awe when I saw the estate. I saw my other fellow "MIPPERS" talking amongst themselves in a trance from all the beauty and catering and cameras of the press. I however felt quite shy. I walked off on my own to look around.

Then, I saw a Japanese woman who smiled at me shyly. I quickly said Konnichiwa and started talking to her in Japanese. My heart was nervously beating fast. I really wanted to try my best to give a good impression of myself and this program. I figured after two minutes of talking to her in Japanese, that I would crash and burn. To my surprise, this woman and I had a heart to heart conversation for a good 15 minutes, and she was the sweetest woman I have ever met. I was only a second year Japanese student, so I didn't know how much I was capable of. After talking to her, my fear of messing up when talking to Japanese people was thrown out the door. All I wanted to do was to talk to as many people as I could. I refused to let language become a barrier any longer. Now the way I see foreign language is that I might as well try to talk to the native speakers and ask a lot of questions. The worst that could happen is that you may mess up a word or two, but usually they help you or appreciate your efforts.

I was asked to be interviewed before the dinner. In the interview, I said exactly how I felt: "This opportunity is a dream come true. I want to learn how to be able to give more to the wor
The rest of the evening we enjoyed fantastic food while speaking with a past ALT and lis
to her experiences.

The flight to Japan from L.A. was pretty brutal. I never rode a plane for so long in my life. Once we all walked out of the airport I could smell Japan's fresh sea with a hint of saltiness. I am not sure why the first thing I thought was "Home at last"

When we arrived at the institute, I could not believe it. It was perfect in every single way. The resources, the food, the people, the rooms, the view from my window, the convenient location... everything was comfortable and perfect. From reading the resources in the study room and library, to all of the interactions in Japanese, to writing a speech, I felt my passion to learn the language grow stronger, and I grew more confident. I also enjoyed all of the classes we took at the institute, and was so grateful to have learned so much from such kind teachers.

When the college students came to the institute it was even better. I made three friends from Thailand from the college program. My friends from America Gwen, Sierra, and I had tons of fun hanging out together, and when all 6 of us were together we only used Japanese. Our Thai friends did not speak English, so it was always tons of fun learning new words from each other and doing fun things in Rinku and in the Institute with them (like karaoke).

The thing I loved best about the experience of Japan was the people. When we went to Tohoku, that was the moment when it truly felt connected to Japanese people. When we drove into Tohoku, we saw signs all over the bare parts of the land and next to graves that said "とうほくがんばろう", which means Tohoku, do your best!

At Watanoha Elementary, the most breathtaking moment was when we saw a class walking in straight lines down the stairs look up and see us and simultaneously start to shout "Hi!" and "Hello!" with eyes shining bright. Then we heard from some teachers and officials that we are the first Americans many of these students have met before. It was also cute to see some that were shy that worked hard to speak to us. When sitting down with my group of elementary kids I was shocked as to how extremely mature they were. One girl's Tanabata wish was for Japan and America to always be friends. One boy in my group wanted to become the best runner in Japan. I felt connected to the children, and it was as if we were mutually inspired by each other. After we shared our dreams, I told them, "何があても夢のために頑張ろう!" "No matter what happens, always do your best for your dreams." then gave them a red lanyard from my high school. When we had to leave, I saw all the children crowd the driveway of the school and the windows waving goodbye. It really tugged at my heart when I saw the kids I gave lanyards to looking right at me screaming thank you. I never seen a child's eyes shine so bright with such hope.

After visiting the elementary school, we went to see the Rainbow Bridge. This was one of the most defining moments of the meaning of the trip. Endo-san showed us the playground that he made. The symbolism in it was outstanding. There were three pieces of wood pointing up, which meant to always look up and look positively towards the future. The bridge in the playground itself meant to build bridges between Japan and America. The part that got me the most was the altar with the statues of the three children. At the altar there were pops and present surrounding the statues. When I asked Endo-san in Japanese what the statue was he said he made it in honor of his three kids and all the children that passed away on 20

hit me hard I started cry so hard and left a North Side High School lanyard at the altar. That was the moment I knew for sure what I truly wanted to do with my life. I knew for certain that I did want to be fluent in Japanese, so I could have better skills to be able to help people in Japan. I also knew for sure that I did want to work in International Relations to help relations between Japan, America, and other countries, so that we would all know how to help and support one another.

I walked away from the altar sobbing trying to calm down. Then some kind woman who worked at the playground came up to me and told me that everything was okay. In Japanese, the woman told me “It’s okay, times are a little hard right now, however, we are still going to do our best. We all want to go back home.” That moment hit me hard too, and I wiped away my tears. I wanted to be strong for the Japanese, and hoped one day to be as strong and positive as people like them.

Meeting the high school students, ALTs, CIRs, and Kiwi Club members also made a big impact on me. The high school students were so kind, fun, and thoughtful. Our exchanges not only created new, powerful friendships, but we also taught one another more about our own language and culture. The ALTs, CIRs, Kiwi Club members, and supervisor Ono Hikedo were very encouraging to me when I met them and told me they were surprised someone as young as me was so interested and so comfortable speaking to them fully in Japanese. Tonya, a CIR, Kyoko Sasaki, a Kiwi Club member, and Ono Hideko were the people that I talked to the most.

Hideko-san told me to “continue to fight for your dreams and never stop” she also told me to “never forget the Miyagi Prefecture.” After meeting great individuals from those groups, I definitely want to study Japanese every day in college, so that I too can become a CIR in the future. I also hope that, by becoming a CIR, I can make connections later on to do more diplomatic work.

When I had to depart, it was the hardest. I made so many great friends and met so many influential people. All I could repeat in my head was “Ichigo Ichie.” I learned during the tea ceremony which means “one time, one meaning.” I may only meet these people one time, however, I am so grateful for the time I had through JET-MIP.

When I tell people about my trip to Japan, I find it hard to explain my trip well enough for them to truly understand how life changing it was. When I got home everyone asked me many questions about food, culture, people, and experiences. Some of the tiniest details about the Japanese living style, even things like the toilets, simply amazed my American friends. I can honestly say many people in my town contacted me as a resource of cultural or language information now. By younger people, I am told that I am an inspiration, and by older people, I am told that I am a role model for young women to go follow their dreams. So many people followed my facebook, instagram, and social media to see Japan with me. Many of my friends are beginning to ask me about opportunities to study abroad, because many of them also want to see the world now. It makes me happy that my stories make people want to take a step outside of America and learn more about other countries. I hope I live up to my dream to continue be a connector of the countries.

This trip taught me a lesson lesson that I will forever hold on to..

Where there is loss there is recovery. Where there is death there is new life, where there's failure there is redemption. Where there's love there's a way. Where there's a dream there's breathtaking possibility... Reaching your dreams can change the world. Never think that you are small, because you could be the first drop that starts a ripple that starts a wave of inspiration.

I went to Japan in memory of two English teachers that lost their life in Japan while living their dreams. I hope to set up my life and give enough to this world so even when its my time to pass, I can somehow contribute to the success of other people's dreams

NIPPON THROUGH MY EYES PHOTO SUBMISSION



“Memories, Hopes, Faith, and Ganbarou”

This is the Statue made in honor of Endo-san's children at the Rainbow Bridge. It represents post-traumatic recovery. This is where it hit me the hardest when I realized how much these people have went through, what they have lost, and how hard they are working to recover. It made me realize my dreams to help the world as much as I can for families like this.

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Breeze #97



Breeze #96



Breeze #95



Breeze #94



Breeze #93



Breeze #92



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2014 J-LEAP Report: Miho Kobayashi

2014 JET-MIP Report: Sadezia Pitt-Ulcena

2014 JET-MIP Report: Jalyn Radzinski-Smith

2015 AJALT Workshop

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