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



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Orientation

Running, yelling, anxiety, and havoc: that is what describes my first day of the JET Memorial Invitational Program. To me this situation was unbelievable, like a dream, I literally did not think I would ever reach L.A. It was a much more plausible idea that the plane would crash or I would fall on the boarding

ramp, break a leg, and be sent off to the hospital, never to see those strange people who were, based on their introduction, probably super sugoi, intimidating powerhouses. Well, lo and behold I made it safely to California with no sustained injuries, excluding the headache I acquired by worrying on the plane (I don't know what it is about middle seats, especially on planes, that drives my anxiety level way up. Beyond my fear of bothering the two people sitting next to me by moving too much or breathing too hard or worst of all falling asleep on them by accident, I get to worry about the next time I get the middle seat, which is basically every part of my life in which there is air that I breathe.) So I got off the plane, wandered around looking for the JET-MIP sign and finally, I made my way to my first acquainting. When I met the family of Monty Dickson, Shelley Frederickson and Ian Dickson, I didn't even realize that they were the family of someone whom I owe my existence in the program to, they were so casual, upbeat, friendly, and funny. When they finally told me their story, there was a solemn look in their eyes and I instantly regretted the circumstances which led them to telling me. I know what it feels like to lose a family member; I saw the pain in my mother's eyes when we lost my uncle and I knew that they had to be feeling something similar. The gravity of our, the MIPpers, missi suddenly hit me. These people had the courage to face the memories of losing someone loved and speaking about it to a bunch of teenagers, whom in some roundabout way ber

from it and knowing that possibly some of those students had no real idea who he even was. I instantly formed some new respect for these people sacrificing their time to be here. Then other participants started rolling in. First was Sam, and I was really nervous while trying to maintain an unaffected face, but he was really nice and smiley, so I felt that maybe I could do this. I started trying to see where I could help out with the others, but doing absolutely horribly, but at least now the pressure was off. Absolutely every one of the MIPpers was friendly and welcoming, we had a really nice atmosphere. There was a really good connection and I don't think I've ever gotten so comfortable with strangers so quickly. It was true that they were amazingly sugoi, but intimidating they were not. By the first official meeting most of us had already introduced ourselves and gotten through our own ice-breaking. Shelley Frederickson had told me that by the end of the trip we'd all be friends and she was right. The MIPpers I've met will be people who stay in my life a long time.

Kansai Institute and The Japanese Cultural Experience

The Kansai Institute was an awesome place to be, trust me I know, we were locked up there for two days. Not only was I given the chance to use all of my Japanese in different situations, for example buying food at the cafeteria and improving on my Katakana reading skills, but I was also given the opportunity to work out, play the piano, study, play badminton, ride a bike, and get the Japanese vending machine experience. We were given a well-rounded experience of pop culture, language skills, healthy living activities, study resources, traditional culture, technology, and team activities. Riding around town individually and mixing in the town, acting like I was a regular resident was my favorite part. Doing Ikebana was highly difficult. I did not expect that arranging flowers could have such a deep history behind it. It was so rich in rules that I just couldn't consume them all in that period and failed miserably, but even so, I'm glad I did it. In America it would not have been the same, it wouldn't have been authentic. The most important part of my experience was actually meeting the children of Watanoha elementary because before then I hadn't felt that we had done anything to make an impact. To me this is what kickstarted the program. The two most impressionable people I met were Mr. Endo, a woodcraft artist in Ishinomaki, and Ms. Sugai, one of the top HS shamisen player from Sendai. Mr. Endo's story of sacrifice gave focus to memorializing Taylor Anderson and made me think that he was a good man with an unselfish heart. I was impressed by the Ms. Sugai's ability to become so good at such a young age. She inspired me to keep up with my own goals.

My Future With The Japanese Language

Everytime I spoke Japanese in the face of the natives, I felt mediocre; however, this was not a bad experience because it just made me want to try harder. For once I was on the opposite side of the language barrier and, I have to say, it wasn't pretty. I am ready to take on Japanese more seriously. I had made Japanese penpals before, but it never worked out, primarily because we hadn't had a foundation of reality to bring us closer. On this trip, though, I've made many penpals who not only seem as eager to learn English as I Japanese, but are around my age group too, which tends to make communication easier. I will be taking Japanese as my language course in college and possibly even major in it. I am ready to go back to see Japan and use these skills. I'm also hoping that I'll have the chance to be able to speak to more

Japanese people in real life. It's comforting to know that now I have at least the elementary aspects of conversation down. I will not give up on Japanese, it's the precious... I need it, it is to me what the ring was to Golem.

Experiences: How I Was Affected & How I Affected Others

I hope that I was able to represent America well in this program. I learned even more extensively the culture and lifestyle that makes Japanese people who they are and where the ideas that make up my favorite media content come from. Most of all, I learned that Japanese people, beyond all the stereotypes given to them by people, are just people; teenagers all laugh about the same thing no matter where you go and the unconventional, hip style of parenting often found in America can be found in Japan too. My host family was a good example of this. I realized, while staying with them, that I could live easily in any family, Japanese or American. I made them some bacon cheeseburgers to try and bring some of my culture to them. When I asked them what American food they most wanted to try that was it and they said they enjoyed it, which relieved me. During my trip I tried to seem as bright and friendly as possible to let the Japanese people I've met know that they would be just as welcome in my country as I was in theirs. I really would like to see all of these people again, because meeting them has made me grow more sentimental.

To Taylor and Monty:

The loss of you two in our society is very painful. After seeing all that you have done to connect Japan with America and encouraging your students and others, I can honestly say that you two have shown more dedication to Japan, being Americans, than anyone else I've ever met. And I can say it like that because after all I've seen about you and heard about you from your families, I feel we truly have met. If you guys were still here today Monty would probably still be making cool Japanese videos and Taylor would be making an effort to get more Americans involved with the Japanese experience. Seeing that your families come out every year to speak to us, they are showing that they have taken your influence and are using it for good to do what you probably would've. Especially with all that Taylor's dad has done to cherish the memories and heart of his daughter and help others, in congruence with the time it takes for him to do his own job, he is a good and hard-working person. The fact that the effect that you've had on your families is not to be filled with hatred or remorse, but positivity and forgiveness speaks volumes on who you were and what your spirit is like.

NIPPON THROUGH MY EYES PHOTO SUBMISSION

“A sign in Taylor Anderson's favorite park which proclaims "May Peace Prevail On Earth.”

I chose this photo because I felt it adequately expresses the sentiments of the Anderson including Taylor, and the rest of Japan. In their time of need, America held out a hand and if ever happen again, America will follow suit.



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2015 Kakehashi Report

2014 J-LEAP Report: Miho Kobayashi

2014 JET-MIP Report: Sadezia Pitt-Ulcena

2014 JET-MIP Report: Jalyn Radziminski-Smith

2015 AJALT Workshop

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