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THE REFLECTION IN THE RIVER BY THE BRIDGE

My summer of 2014 could not have been better. I graduated high school, I'm going to college, but most importantly I had the experience of a lifetime. I cried, I laughed, I made all kinds of friends, and I learned so much. For 20 days I traveled with 32 new friends and together we went through all kinds of amazing experiences with them. I could not be more grateful for those 20 days.

I knew the program would be very influential, but I underestimated how inspiring it would be. A friend and previous participant in the JET-MIP program, Alex Leal (2013), warned me Japan might not be everything I had seen in the anime I watch or manga I read. I worried about what might be different, but eventually I told myself that I was going there to experience authentic culture and learn about history and perhaps I might be disappointed, but I wouldn't know until I went. Thanks to this mindset, I had a blast. Certain people on the trip emphasized how excited they were to go to Tokyo, but I focused on things like the day trip to Kyoto.

In the first days of the trip, we were faced with some adversity. Aside from the humidity and gargantuan bug bites, we were to experience a typhoon. The typhoon, although it didn't affect us at the Kansai Language Institute, ruined our travel plans to go to Rikuzentakata, the town where Montgomery Dickson lived. I was crestfallen because I wanted to see the 'miracle' pine and learn more about Montgomery. Aside from the typhoon, however, the trip went according to plan. During the Tohoku portion of the trip I went through so many emotions. I was moved by Endo-san's courage and spirit, I was touched by the sweet children of Watanoha Elementary School.

School, I was melancholy as I stood in Hiyoriyama Park overlooking the city, and I was excited and joyful when I spent the day with my Japanese peers. The Tohoku tour was a memorable rollercoaster of emotions that brilliantly pieces together a well-rounded picture of the Tohoku culture and people of the area.

My favorite part of the trip was all the high school exchanges. The Japanese students were so welcoming. I think I learned the most from doing those exchanges. In fact, I am still learning because I continue to communicate with them through a texting app. I talk to my host sister in Japanese and help some of the students from Tohoku practice English. Those exchanges helped convince me that I want to continue to study Japanese. Even though I am going into Engineering, a very demanding major, I am determined to minor in Japanese now. I feel like it is the least I could do to thank the Japan Foundation, Taylor Anderson, and Montgomery Dickson for this amazing program.

My second-favorite part of the trip is what has come and will come after. Already I have gotten to share the stories I heard and memories I made with family and friends. And I love sharing Japan with these people, from everyone cooing over the Pikachu kiddie ride to their awe at Endo-san and his Rainbow Bridge. I yearn for the next opportunity to share this world with someone. Many people around me say that they are very proud of me for going on this trip and are so glad I shared with them. I am grateful for those comments, but I feel that the admiration should go towards the Japan Foundation, Taylor, and Montgomery.

I am very sad that I didn't get to learn more about Montgomery, but I can tell from the way his family spoke about him what an exemplary person he was. I know I've said it so many times already, but going to Tohoku was such an eye-opening and awesome experience. Visiting Ishinomaki, I can see the beautiful town that deepened Taylor's love of Japan. I am inspired by their example and cannot wait to become a JET Assistant Language Teacher myself. I want to extend my thanks to Montgomery and Taylor for everything they have taught me. They may not have said it directly to me, but I learned everything on this trip through them.

NIPPON THROUGH MY EYES PHOTO SUBMISSION

“Secret Garden Japan Version”

Guardians tucked away near Senso Temple and Asakusa Shrine in Asakusa, Tokyo. In the lower left there is a sparrow, hopping from rock to rock. I was tickled by the paper umbrella with plastic that was placed there over the guardians. I enjoy searching for places that aren't noticed as much or are a bit more quiet.



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Japanese Language Education Update 16

2014 JET-MIP Report: Valerie Santos

2014 JET-MIP Report: Kyle Smith

2014 JET-MIP Report: Jacqueline Tran

2014 JET-MIP Report: Britta Smith

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