

## SEPTEMBER, 2015: BREEZE ISSUE #95

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



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#### COMFORT AND CONFIDENCE

I remember taking my first step into the San Jose Airport. This was far from my first time inside but this did mark the first trip I would be taking without my parents. I stood there both brimming with excitement and throbbing with fear. I'd wanted to go to Japan for the longest time so I kicked myself for being anything other than happy about it. The truth was, I had heard that this trip would be life changing, and that made me nervous. I liked my life as it was - it was comfortable and I was happy. I didn't want change. I didn't want to be taken out of my comfort zone. I feared what would happen to my perhaps-naïve but certainly comfortable view of the world. Little did I know, change was exactly what I needed most.

The first thing that struck me was the independence we had, especially during free time. Looking back it wasn't so different than my life at home but something was both scary and exciting about not having adults constantly looking after you, like parents and teachers do. I had freedom to flourish and freedom to fail. It felt like a preview of what college life would be like – challenging and free. However, I certainly didn't manage on my own. Even though I only lived with them for two weeks, I still feel such a special bond with the friends I made on the trip. The fear of being away from our parents and in a country in which we hardly spoke the language pushed us together and made us grow. After the second day I felt I knew some people better than I knew friends I had known my whole life. I wouldn't have done that if I wasn't out of my comfort zone. Even though we were clueless foreigners in Japan, we fo each other and we found purer forms of ourselves.

I felt confident in my Japanese language abilities from the beginning, less so because I was good and more so because I knew being shy wouldn't help me. I pushed myself to speak in every situation I could, and because of that my Japanese improved tremendously. Now I understand the holes in my vocabulary and perhaps more importantly, I further understand how the language and the culture fit together. I wasn't afraid to make mistakes, for when I did I always learned something. I always knew that I should live life like this. I know that it is an approach that helps in every aspect of learning, but in all honesty this is the only time when I acted on it. Hopefully I will continue being fearless in all my life's endeavors, because failure is only a step closer to success.

Japanese people were almost always friendly in my experience on the trip. They always wanted to help foreigners and were always pleased to hear us speak Japanese. I was a little bit sad that we didn't talk about the tsunami and earthquake more because that was the main purpose of the trip. Then again, it wouldn't have been appropriate to bring up such a tragedy during small talk. However, I met one lady at the Kiwi Club who was very eager to talk about it and hear what I, as an American, had to say about it. The tragedy had changed her life forever. She told me that she couldn't go to the sea anymore – it was simply too painful. I was happy to have talked to her because for the most part my conversations with people were much more on the surface. Still, I don't believe that a single one of the conversations I had was a waste. For a while I felt guilty that I couldn't fix Tohoku, but looking back I don't. When I talked to people my age the conversations felt profound, even if they were simply about video games and food. We came to build bridges between Japan and the USA, and the bridges I built feel solid. I feel connected with them now. We connected through laughing and small talk but they were real and deep nonetheless. They felt that way to us.

I wish I could tell Taylor Anderson and Montgomery Dickson that their work was valuable. I don't entirely understand their love for Japan and Japanese people, but I think that after the trip I am beginning to understand. They went to Japan to dedicate their lives to a connection between two great countries and they ended up losing their lives. They didn't go to Japan with the intention to become martyrs but their death has come to symbolize how the world is connected. The Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami was Japan's tragedy but it affected the rest of the world, not just in the sense that foreigner's lives were lost but also that Japan is simply a part of the world. People of Japan are really no different than people of any other country. In the end, people are people. We are all valuable.

I used to joke and say that I wouldn't want to live without things like running water and plumbing, and there was a bit of truth in each joke. I had always lived a comfortable life. I still do, but visiting Japan and learning about the sacrifices that Taylor Anderson and Montgomery Dickson made makes me realize that I am stronger than that. I believe that people are stronger than that, and I believe that people everywhere are beautiful.

# NIPPON THROUGH MY EYES PHOTO SUBMISSION



“Watanoha Elementary Quilt”

I like sewing myself so this really caught my eye. In a handmade quilt, one puts a bit of themselves in every stitch. I don't know who made this quilt but it hangs in the school hall and I can only imagine the love that was put into it.

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Breeze #95



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2015 JET-MIP Essay: Madison Ball

2015 JET-MIP Essay: Raphael Barnes

2015 JET-MIP Essay: Mary Burke

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