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



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Japan struck me in many different ways, from the mundane to the more profound. Take the vending machines: bright, filled to the brim with delicious cold AND hot drinks, and found on almost every street corner, from sprawling Osaka to rural Rikuzentakata. They're extraordinary. I still can't decide if the money I spent on vending machines was a waste or an investment. Or the toilets! What a strange object to use to compare cultures--who thinks about toilets when their mind wanders to the intricacies dividing cultures? But it is the toilets indeed that separate the U.S. and Japan: simply put, after returning to America, I miss the luxuries of the strange multitude of buttons to choose from. But what struck me in a more meaningful way was the people. What I found to be remarkable about Japanese people is how, generally, they are so sincerely kind, so fundamentally thoughtful and willing, even eager, to lend a helping hand. One time my friends and I were walking around Sendai with only an hour and half till we had to be back to our hotel for dinner, wanting to do something fun, but with no clue what to do. So we asked a couple of kids, and what did they do but not only compliment our poor Japanese abilities, give us multiple suggestions, but also walk us all the way twenty minutes out of their way to the mall. Too bad that they couldn't stay; I'm sure they would've liked to, and would have been even more helpful than they were.

One of my favorite parts of the trip was going to Universal Studios in Osaka with my host family, specifically with my host sister, Chika, and my host mom, Yoshiko. We had a blast; we went on the Spider-Man ride, a space ride, a Back to the Future ride, and two rides at Hogwarts. Also at Hogwarts, we got to go in all of the different shops--Honeydukes, Ollivander's, etc.--and

see some performers in Hogwarts uniforms sing and dance. It was magical. Afterwards, we watched the Moonlight Magic Parade, where tons of huge floats covered in lights paraded by us. We saw a Snoopy, a teapot, a Cinderella, and so many more.

Another part of the trip I really enjoyed was in Sendai, during another period of free time. This was after dinner when two of my friends and I decided to go for a walk. We exited our hotel, which was in the middle of Sendai, a decently sized city that actually reminded me of my hometown, St. Paul. It was a nice evening out, and we had several hours before curfew. So we picked a random direction and set out. First we walked around standard city blocks like we have in the states. Then gradually, as we got farther and farther west and farther away from our hotel, things got smaller and more crowded. This was a more residential area than the hotel-- there were the typical Japanese apartments and such. We were wandering, picking streets at random, trusting our memories of where we had been more than our senses of direction to get us back. Then, at random like I said, we decided to walk down an alleyway to see what we would find---and find something we did! An entire river we hadn't known was there! And what a sight it was--the sun setting behind peachy pink wisps of cloud, the wide, shallow river flowing over rocks, and a mountain just on the other side of the river. We were in awe. We suddenly regained all of the energy we had lost on our long walk. It was worth it. It was definitely worth it. We ran to get a closer look, climbed down a short flight of stairs, and there we were at the bank of the river. We flung rocks into the river for a bit, and then we were just content to sit and watch the sun set, perched by the gorgeous river on a pile of rocks. After it got dark, we decided to make our way back. (And this point, the bugs were getting a little bothersome to bear.) We made a wrong turn, and ended up in a closed driving course, and got countless strange looks from people practicing their driving in great big loops. (And here is another culture difference between the US and Japan: no one practices their driving at night?) After we made our way back out of the course, lit by great big fluorescent lights underneath which were huge bug-zapping machines, we walked along the river until we reached a street we recognized, and retraced our steps to the hotel. It was a welcome sight, that hotel, I must admit, as the walk had tired us out so much. My other friend and I wanted to get up early the next morning to make the walk again to the river to see the sunrise, but I looked up when the sun rose and it was around 4 o'clock in the morning, so we decided to hold off on that. We didn't need a gorgeous sunrise to be able to appreciate Japan's beauty.

Having returned to the states, the question I am constantly having directed at me is, "How was Japan?!" I'm never upset or too unenthusiastic or tired or annoyed to gush about what a great time I had. After hearing my speech, people tend to have two reactions: excitement and delight at the wonderful experiences I had, followed by surprise and sorrow and the continued imperfect living situations of those in the Tohoku region. They really have no idea, just like I had no idea before going on this trip.

As to what I would address to Taylor and Monty, I think my message would be simple and brief: I'm sorry you're gone, but if you have to be gone, I think the JET Memorial Invitation Program was a perfect way to honor you. It kept alive the dream you both hoped to make reality: dream of a world united, of Japan and the U.S. connected intricately and infinitely.

NIPPON THROUGH MY EYES PHOTO SUBMISSION



"Twelve Hours Later..."

I chose this picture because it reminds me of all the exhaustion and excitement and relief at finally landing in Japan after being in the air for over half a day.

Breeze #98



Breeze #97



Breeze #96



Breeze #95



Y5 J-LEAP

2015 JET-MIP Essay: Madison Ball

2015 JET-MIP Essay: Raphael Barnes

2015 JET-MIP Essay: Mary Burke

2015 JET-MIP Essay: Megan Chandler

Breeze #94



Breeze #93



Breeze #92



Breeze #91



Breeze #90



Breeze #89



Breeze #88



Breeze #87



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