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



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The Tohoku tour especially opened my eyes to life in Japan. In consideration of 3.11 as a natural disaster, most of the media's focus and subsequently mine was on how the land had changed. We learned a bit of what Mayor Toba is doing to elevate the land in Rikuzentakata before the trip. While that is most definitely a concern now, the most important aspect of the Tohoku trip was to know the people, in my opinion. That being so, I very much appreciated the numerous opportunities to get to know a wide variety of people in the Tohoku region. From Watanohoa Elementary to the Kiwi Club, I was able to at least know one face from each group. And fortunately, I am still in contact with some of the high school students we met, thanks to the internet. Getting to know all these people encouraged me to continue to learn Japanese and attempt to go back.

Stepping off the plane that landed in Japan, many of my preconceptions of the country were confirmed. I saw many traveling businessmen, enough to lament the existence of salarymen who have to sleep in airports. There were few trash cans in sight, which somehow led to a smaller amount of litter. I suppose by experiencing what I had learned through videos on YouTube comforted me a bit. So, being in Japan that first day did not seem as strange as it could have. The most disoriented I felt was when I asked an airline employee a question in Japanese, and they responded in English. That was the only time where I felt uncomfortable on this trip.

The Principal of Kesen Junior High School's speech resonated with me in particular. He posed a simple question asking if we could tell who of the students had suffered through the disaster by losing a loved one. We can't tell, he explained, because all of his students have a bright smile thanks to the community they have at school. Home may be a slightly different story, but school is a reliable constant in a young person's life. This rang true throughout the Tohoku tour. Regardless of which school we visited, everyone was excited to see us. Us Mippers and our buddies that we clung to during each school visit got along smashingly – taking pictures, showing off American trinkets, teaching each other hand games, and of course just talking with each other. And we all continue this exchange over EMS services and web applications, even now.

Getting to know and befriending the people of Tohoku and Osaka motivate me further to pursue a lifestyle in Japan. I wish to study abroad during college in Japan for a year. This trip and especially the homestay had given me more insight into possibly living in Japan in the future. I wish to test my resolve by living and studying in Japan for a year, before deciding if I am ready for an even longer stay in Japan. I have been considering the JET Program for quite a long time, and I believe studying abroad during college may give me more of an idea what life may be like when on the JET Program.

Also, I may have been praised in my ability in spoken Japanese during the trip, but throughout the trip I made blunders (because I am still learning) and I realize I just have so much more to learn. I have already decided to take on as many Japanese classes as possible in college. A comment I received from my host family was to 'keep trying to get those words out'. Perhaps a prolonged homestay will help me connect more with a future host family, giving me more opportunity to speak with them.

This trip provided us at most, two days with one group of people through the homestay. Getting to know someone within a time limit that short seemed daunting. While we got along for that time, I couldn't help but think 'I wish I could stay longer'. While that inflection is most likely fueled by a general wanting to stay in Japan, a longer homestay can also offer a deeper connection with one's host family. With a willing host family in the future, I hope to convey my gratefulness for opening their house to me in an even better capacity.

Dear Taylor Anderson and Monty Dickson, I am glad I was able to learn more about yourselves and your work during your JET employment. If I had not been able to go on this program, I may have overlooked the contributions of someone originally from my hometown – Taylor Anderson. It was sobering realizing how many people you two have affected even today. And I hope that your families, the participants of this program, and anyone involved in memorializing your lives continue on telling your stories.

NIPPON THROUGH MY EYES PHOTO SUBMISSION



“Hotel Boyo”

Hotel Boyo was where I most enjoyed my stay. It was also the place where I was the most conscious of the tsunami disaster. But despite that, I was able to see how people were still moving on with their lives.

Breeze #98



Breeze #97



Breeze #96



Japanese Language Education Update 23

2015 J-LEAP Report: Mio Tsutada

2015 JET-MIP Essay: Stephen Chen

2015 JET-MIP Essay: Josephine Dennis

2015 JET-MIP Essay: Hailley Danielson

2015 JET-MIP Essay: Georgianna Eck

Breeze #95



Breeze #94

Breeze #93



Breeze #92



Breeze #91



Breeze #90



Breeze #89



Breeze #88



Breeze #87



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