

## OCTOBER, 2015: BREEZE ISSUE #96

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



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The crackle of the pilot's voice over the loudspeaker jostled my conscience awake. I groggily wobbled around in my seat, staring at a blinding, oval light. As my vision cleared, I saw the behemoth structure of the LAX airport through the window, and remembered I was starting my journey to Japan on the JET Memorial Invitation Program. I was nervous, various worries flooding my mind wave after wave. But I was also ridiculously ecstatic. Finally, after five years of studying Japanese language and culture, I was going to dive into a world of endless opportunity. I had high hopes for the trip, which would later be proven wrong. JET-MIP was greater than anything I could imagine, and is one of my best experiences ever.

In the beginning it was a bit tough. I go to a small private school, with only about one-hundred students in each grade. It wasn't every day that I met new people, and certainly not thirty-one teenagers. Despite using all of my social skills, the worry of being unable to find a place within this group of peers gnawed away at me. This anxiety continued through the days of orientation in Los Angeles until we returned to LAX.

Despite my lack of experience, I quickly became friends with many of the other participants, and by the end of the trip had formed everlasting friendships with some of them. These are the six people who, in no particular order, I became the best of friends with. Bailey Wels and I became fast friends due to our plethora of mutual interests, and we often went off with just the two of us to take in the wonders of Japan. He would continuously amaze me with his passion for Japan, its culture, and its people. Nicholas Gallitano, as fate would have it, was my

roommate on both the first and the last nights of the trip, and one of the wittiest guys around. He always had a little quip or action that could evoke smiles and laughs during our most despondent times. Gardelio Mantuhac, more commonly known as Jay-R, was bright both intellectually and emotionally. Always with a big grin on his face and a helping hand ready, his knowledge of the Japanese language as well as his usage of it was astounding. Michelle Lin, though the target of much of our teasing, was always cheerful and ready for any adventure. Whether it was the arcades, the malls, the temples, the convenience stores, the restaurants, or anything in between, she would always be there having a blast. Georgianna Eck was one of the most accomplished and hard-working girls I had met on the trip. Pretty, intelligent, athletic, and mature, she always had something to say about any topic. Amy Waldron, despite being last on the list, was first in being energetic. She was always enthusiastic and laughing, and she was loads of fun to be around. These six people became like brothers and sisters to me, people dear to my heart that I will never forget.

As an aside, Bailey, never stop chasing Japanese women, you will one day find your true queen to shield from all environments. Nick, you're definitely taking hilarious pictures and playing viola at my wedding because you're ridiculously good at both. Jay-R, you'll find the love of your dreams, right after you send me some of that delicious Filipino food. Michelle, I think you dropped your eyebrows somewhere, you're the best. Georgi, you blonde barbie, keep working those eyebrows and glasses and don't worry so much about the makeup because you look fine without it. Amy, you're awesome Ace, never stop being a gamer, just branch out from the mainstream games. All six of you were the best people to have gone to Japan and done this trip with, I'm so grateful that I met y'all and I know we'll meet again someday! Tokyo Olympics 2020?!?

After talking a bit about my thoughts about others, I'd like to share my thoughts on other's impressions of me. I was probably an annoying, ignorant, buffoon in the eyes of many. Just kidding. Jokes aside, I'd like to say I gave everyone I met a new perspective on Americans. We're not all the stereotypical obese warhawks that we seemingly enjoy portraying. We all have our different passions and approaches to life. I think that those who met me walked away with this kind of thought in their heads. Whenever I talked to somebody, I would always talk about the various activities I did. I wanted the person to understand that I wasn't just a student of formal of education, but I was also a musician, an athlete, a volunteer, a man of the world.

Continuing on the topic of human relationships, this experience has increased my drive to learn more about Japan and Japanese culture. I not only widened my interests, but I was also humbled. I learned that despite my five years of learning Japanese, I could barely read a fraction of the language, and only carry on awkward conversations that started and stopped abruptly. The trip added fuel to the fires of my passion for Japanese as well as cleared the fog for the path ahead of me towards a greater knowledge and understanding of everything Japanese.

Japan was one of the greatest places I've ever been to, but to me this trip was less about the venue and more about the people I was with. Sure, I absolutely enjoyed biking around Kansai and visiting both ancient and modern parts of Japan. And sure, it was exciting to meet with all the students in each of the schools and deepen the bonds between our countries. And yeah, I'll admit that Thomas was the best chaperone for the trip, with his commanding tone and his eccentricity. But no matter how much time I spent touring the streets of Namba, or climbing mountains and temples to see glorious views, or eating authentic ramen and okonomiyaki, these experiences would be millions of times less memorable without the people I met and the friends I made.

Dear Ms. Taylor Anderson and Mr. Montgomery Dickson,

I am forever grateful for the experience that would have been impossible without you guys. You guys paved the way during your days as JETs for the future generations to build upon what you guys lived for: a healthy relationship between the U.S. and Japan. But not only am I grateful, I am also inspired. I too want to somehow influence the growth of such a relationship. Maybe I'll become a JET as well. Who knows? But someday, somewhere, somehow I will make my addition to the cause just like you guys did. And once again, thank you. Though the flames of your lives may be gone, the fires of your wills still burn brightly, igniting the torches of each passionate Japanese student to aid them in following their unknown paths towards their futures.

## **NIPPON THROUGH MY EYES PHOTO SUBMISSION**



“Breathtaking”

A shot of the view outside our institute room windows. It was my first breathtaking sight in Japan.

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