



## NOVEMBER, 2015: BREEZE ISSUE #97

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



### DILLON EVANS

*Columbus High School  
Solumbus, GA*

I peeped at the website for the Japan Foundation after my teacher mentioned a “free trip to Japan,” and I will be honest: I was checking the website to see if the program was actually legit, but it was more than legit. It was extremely life-changing. I also have seen people say the MIP is life changing and that they are still best friends and they will never

forget going to Japan. I will be honest again: I did not realize just how truthful those statements are. I add one more word to the mix in order to explain my experience as individually as possible, and that word is “eye-opening.” Not only has my life changed for the better, but it has made me want to change others’ lives with the simple knowledge of what the JET program is, what happened and is still happening with the event of the tsunami in Japan, what kind of people live in the country, how I liked my experiences, and how those experiences can reflect upon the people I speak to, because I very much believe something as elementary as basic information about Tohoku’s conditions, Japan’s culture, and US-Japan relations can be much more eye-opening than what people find ignorantly profound in daily American life and shortened news television aspects of situations.

I experienced many, many things while in Japan, and I obviously can’t talk about them all here, but I will firstly say landing in Japan was very clear to me. I had a window seat on the plane ride and saw the coast. It was intimidatingly large, considering I never saw the ocean before that. The mountains were large near the coast as we arrived in the plane, whereas I saw beautiful rush of dark blue and even more dramatically darkened white clouds and shore waters rushing towards those mountains almost as if in a hurry. It was beautiful and only

AM with the sun rising before us. If there is one sight I will never forget, it will be of that amazing coastline. However, Japan became much more than sight-seeing and awe and breathtakingly spectacular views. It was all of that and an educational program which would make me aware of my surroundings more than the usual tourist. I took part in many different aspects of that program, and below, I speak of my most memorable events—the ones that resonate the most with what I now believe in as crucial to the purpose of the JET program.

On the seventh day of the program, we participated in the High School Summit. With my group, Group 5, and three other Japanese high school students we were to do fieldwork at our assigned location. Our group was assigned to an AEON grocery store to find ways the store could be more inclusionary, where the word “normalization” is no longer needed. Upon meeting the Japanese students, they were as shy as any others we had met before and didn’t rush to start conversation, but we introduced ourselves and went through the store after departing the bus and after talking about the basics: Have you been to America? What’s your favorite food? What grade are you in? The guide and volunteer who helped us, Yoriko, helped progress the conversation, but before we could get too far, we arrived at the grocery store. We walked first in the doors and saw no electric chairs with baskets which the elderly and disabled sometimes need, no different languages or different sections for other cultures’ food items, and as opposed to larger city’s stores, no English signs. However, these were our ideas of what is missing—the American students’ ideas—with one other idea coming from the three of them. I began to notice quickly the fight against the need for the word normalization would not end with only the efforts of the native people. In fact, after the trip on Facebook, one of the Japanese students called the activities that day a “fieldtrip.” Maybe it is because I was participating in the MIP, but I saw it as much more than a fieldtrip. This made me exponentially more conscious of how I view improvement and social movements at home, because had I been given a fieldwork assignment during the school year in America, I would have treated it as a fieldtrip as well, recognizing its importance but only acknowledging it as a day of school. I do not bash the fellow student for treating it as such, but it helped me be more aware of how serious Rikuzentakata and other disaster areas’ conditions for improvement are and how much I want to help in some fashion later in my own life.

While there is much work to be done in Tohoku, I also realized how much culture and differentiated values there are in Japan as a whole. One of those values is the bike as a form of transportation; not only did I have the opportunity to bike down the streets of Japan, but I got to know just how trustworthy the atmosphere is, everywhere. Because it was rainy season during the visit and the humidity is already high throughout the year in Japan, the skies were grey for all but two days, and that gray light reflected off of greyer buildings. In America, I still find this color to be depressing and de-incentivizing and muggy. However, no matter where I went, the people were very polite and understanding, the customer service was well above par, and of course the light made colors shine off of buildings much more clearly than I have seen before. When biking near the Kansai Institute, whether to Rinku Town (a strip mall), the AEON Mall, or to a 7/11, nothing ceased to amaze me. That is not to mention I was biking with cl--- friends that enjoyed the experience along with me, and it was not hard to experience the types of things, because the bikes are so accessible and so normative.

The most eye-opening experience—probably of my entire communicative life—was the homestay. I have talked as much as I can throughout my childhood thus far, but I never would have expected talking to my host family to be as difficult as it was. The time at my host family's residence was amazing, and they were almost overly nice with their large dinner, famous Osaka mochi, generous hospitality, and overall inclusiveness of me within the family for that one night and two days. I never felt unwelcomed. However, they humbled me. I have always been very competitive in Japanese at my school, and I strive to be the best speaker at least, but teachers don't teach you everything by Japanese II, so I definitely knew my placement and my skill after talking to a family which had relatively low skill in conversational English. They even joked around with me a bit. I did not understand what the rude form of "please" is in Japanese, so my host mother tells me to ask the sales lady for number fifty; she referred to the rude form. I looked at the saleswoman and demanded Number 50 ("Go juu ban kure!"). I did not understand what had happened when my host mother and brother both fell backwards in laughter at the Osaka Castle shop. Later on, she explained, and we all laughed together. Luckily and surprisingly, things like that made us closer even within such a short amount of time.

What I have indefinitely learned from this trip is that even a short time can—well, let's be 三百 here—create some pretty cool friendships for a much, much longer period of time. Even if you are reading this essay five years from when it is published, I will still be talking to the friends I made on the trip, because we all shared an experience that truly does put us at a higher understanding than many people we know. I know, for sure, I want to use that higher understanding of US-Japan relations, tsunami area education, and cultural exploration to tell everyone I know about what I have seen and heard and encourage them to see and hear it for themselves. I never could have imagined—even with videos from YouTube—how devastating and surreal the height of the tsunami waters were at the time of the tsunami hitting the shores of Tohoku. Hearing the people speak of how it affected them and how much they have moved on from the disaster with their friends and family seemed so brave and had an impression on me that I will never forget.

The trip allows me to always remember what is important, and as of now I see many things from a different light and appreciate the efforts that people put forth for causes. Specifically, Taylor Anderson and Montgomery Dickson were obviously so dedicated to what they did and created connections and ties that never could be broken or cut. Their stories moved me to the bone and proved what the JET Program and any other efforts for Japan's international programs are worth. Their enthusiasm, energy, selflessness, and plainly, interest in the culture set a foundation for more people to explore that interest they may or may not have known they have. I am now one of the people to build upon their foundation and set yet another brick with mortar into the surrounding walls. Now, we need people to make windows, walls, a roof, and interior. The ties are long from fully tightened, which is why I wholeheartedly plan on putting my foot forth for international US-Japan affairs. I was conflicted between international business or domestic business for college, but after knowing what such a beautiful country (both in aesthetic and substance) Japan is, I have no other options. I must work towards Montgomery and Taylor's dreams in a niche or else I will be failing my own dream of spreading the message of what I know is an amazingly rewarding and educational path for other people to walk

me. To Montgomery and Taylor: Thank you for what you have done and your inspiration for more involvement. There is still not an end of the road from here. どうもありがとうございます。

## NIPPON THROUGH MY EYES PHOTO SUBMISSION



“Kesenuma City”

Such a beautiful landscape looks like a tropical island, and that's partially what I love about Japan: no matter where you go, there is a mountain and water. However, there are areas to learn about culturally lurking behind the brush as well.

Breeze #98



Breeze #97



Japanese Language Education Update 24

ACTFL 2015

2015 Teacher Training Program: Sueyon Seo

2015 J-LEAP Report: Ami Kaneko

2015 J-LEAP Report: Seiji Arai

2015 JET-MIP Essay: Claire Endl

2015 JET-MIP Essay: Dillon Evans

2015 JET-MIP Essay: Nicholas Gallitano

2015 JET-MIP Essay: Isabelle Joyce

Breeze #96



Breeze #95



Breeze #94



Breeze #93



Breeze #92



Breeze #91



Breeze #90



Breeze #89



Breeze #88



Breeze #87



**Headquarters    New York Office    Center for Global Partnership    Volunteer**  
**ボランティア募集    Japan Related Links    Job Openings (Updated)**

**5700 Wilshire blvd, Suite 100**

**Los Angeles, CA 90036**

**P. 323.761.7510**

---

**Annual Report**

**© 2019 The Japan Foundation, Los Angeles**

**Web Design.**