

## NOVEMBER, 2015: BREEZE ISSUE #97

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



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For me, the gravity of the impact the JET Memorial Invitation Program had on me and my life did not properly sink in until I had been back in the United States for about a week. While at my next summer camp, I found myself particularly missing the Japanese convenience stores and vending machines. It was little things like that that truly tipped me off as to what the program really provided, cultural exchange.

I was very impressed with the program itself. It had just the right balance of structured activities and personal freedom. I was almost shocked at the amount of trust placed in us from the beginning. However, I feel like with that trust and freedom, we flourished and were able to fully appreciate our time in Japan.

Going on JET-MIP, I had expected a few things. First, that I would further my language skills, and second, that I would learn about the impact and effects of the earthquake and tsunami that devastated the Tohoku region in 2011. While both of these ended up completely true, the exchange aspect did not hit me until I was literally in the middle of it. I think it's very hard to describe "cultural exchange". When my friends and family asked what I did during parts of the trip like the Tohoku tour, I would reply with something like "We visited schools, talked with the students, and sometimes had dinner parties". While to them that probably seemed like normal, even boring socialization, it was an incredible experience for me

Although my Japanese teacher is a native speaker, I had never gotten a chance to informally speak Japanese with someone my own age. I think it really helped me in many ways. It definitely helped my conversational technique, but also helped me with a personal barrier.

Generally, I'm not a very outgoing person, and I have a lot of trouble talking with people I've just met. However, after so many of the school exchanges, I of course had to open up, and ended up making incredible connections with some of the friends I met there. As I returned home, going to other unfamiliar places with unfamiliar people was a lot easier than it had been for me. There was almost a feeling of "If I can hold a conversation with a teenager from halfway around the world through a language barrier, I'm sure I can do this".

Going into it, I was much more worried about that language barrier than I needed to be. I was surprised at the amount of English spoken, and even more surprised at the amount of Japanese I ended up knowing. While it sounds absurd, I had definitely never put my skills to the test like this before. I think that confidence boost, as well as the practice, definitely pushed my Japanese speaking skills up a level. In addition to helping me, now that I know I can make it in Japan as well as I did it, it gave me more incentive to study harder and find a way back as soon as possible.

Of course, those with Japanese students weren't the only lasting bonds I made. I would think it's impossible to travel with people nearly a month and not end up having some kind of connection. In the case of me and my fellow mippers, the relationships created were all too positive. I can't think of a single person I ended up disliking. There were those I got to know more deeply than others of course, but overall I think I did get to know all thirty one of my companions.

A couple memories really stand out among the rest. My favorite, as I mentioned in my presentation, is from the first day we arrived at the the Kansai Institute. We students had gone from plane to bus to plane to plane to bus and so on, then through endless orientations, and were completely exhausted. However, that evening, eight of us girls decided to head over to Rinku Town anyway. We went in several shops, and finally the onsen. The experience was truly incredible. The water itself did wonders for our travel-weary bones, and I think without the onsen atmosphere I would never have gotten so close to those girls.

Several other experiences blur together, such as those of doing karaoke as often as possible. That experience is one I will definitely, have definitely missed now that I'm back in the states. Karaoke over here is definitely not as widespread. Getting to do it with the others was amazing, and I hope they remember my voice if nothing else!

Finally, to Taylor Anderson and Monty Dickson: I wish I could thank them for how much their dreams helped me, and helped so many other students. While I am so sorry that they could not realize their dreams themselves, I hope they would be proud of how we are trying to continue to realize them for them. When I heard this was the last year for their program, I was devastated, because I think it's an incredible opportunity for American and Japanese stu  
alike. In addition, as we saw, the effects of the earthquake are still very present, so I think

effects of Ms. Anderson and Mr. Dickson should be too, and this program is one of those effects. All in all, there is no way to express the gratitude I feel towards these two JET individuals, as well as the JET Memorial Invitation Program for giving me this incredible opportunity.

## NIPPON THROUGH MY EYES PHOTO SUBMISSION



“Progress”

Of all the pictures I took of the rebuilding in Rikuzen-Takata, this one is my favorite. I like the light the sun in the background provides.

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2015 J-LEAP Report: Seiji Arai

2015 JET-MIP Essay: Claire Endl

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**Annual Report**

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