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



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THE EXPERIENCE OF A LIFETIME

Deciding to apply for this program was one of the best decisions I have ever made. As someone who has gone on quite a few international trips and attended many summer camps with similarly aged people, I can say that I have never had such an all-around positive experience like I did on this trip. To start, all of the participants worked together to make the time we had enjoyable and constructive; by the time we were sitting in a circle by baggage claim at LAX playing “Heads Up!,” I could already feel the social barriers breaking down, letting us become friends. I was amazed at how close I became with so many people in the span of just nineteen days, and how the friendships I made in such a short time are, in all honesty, closer ones than many that I have made over the span of many years. On top of the social aspect of the trip, the wide range of (largely cultural) experiences I was exposed to was truly a gift. This includes everything from the homestay to the 茶道, 剣道, and 書道 to our stay at Hotel Boyo to our ability to explore Japan by ourselves during free time; all of those were equally invaluable to my discovery and enjoyment of Japan.

The final element, which is so important that I feel that I have to devote a separate point to it, is our exchange with the people of Japan. Every encounter that I had with a Japanese person, whether it be a seventh grader, a fourth grader, a journalist, my host family, an old woman, or anyone else, was a positive one; everyone was engaged and interested in talking with me, and I was equally interested in talking with them, and in learning about their story. I gained so much from just talking, eating, sharing, and laughing with them. I also like to think that they enjoyed my company as much as I did theirs. For instance, when we visited Watanoha Elementary

School, I know my group had such a fun time; I could also tell, however that the kids were almost anxious to play with us, and to teach us a new game, just as we had them. I am guessing they don't often get to meet a bunch of American high school students, so they used their time to the fullest. Another time (that I am still fondly recollecting on) is my homestay. Like many of the JET Mippers, I had an amazing time. I shared with them so many different aspects of my life, from living in the Boston area, to playing viola, to entering college in America. They were so fascinated by all of it, often saying 「へええ??」 or 「すごいな～」. I think we were all equally mystified, to some degree, of each other, and I think that that makes for such a great way to get to know other people.

As a recently graduated senior headed off to college soon, I was (and still am) unsure of what my future holds, especially when it comes to any course of study. Quite honestly, before this trip, I was a little unsure of even my future with the Japanese language. However, leaving Japan and the eye-opening experiences I had there, I know one thing for certain: I can never stop learning the Japanese language. It is too fascinating to me! Not to mention, I have so many Japanese friends (and family) that I now need to keep in touch with. This is not to say that none of them will learn English (which I hope they do), but I loved the fact that I was able to communicate with them somewhat effectively in Japanese. It felt empowering. I owe it to all of my new Japanese friends/family to continue my studies in Japanese. Thankfully, my college, Oberlin College, provides instruction far enough to prepare for the JLPT Level N1 test. Needless to say, I intend to study as far as I can go, and definitely pass the JLPT.

I really wish that Taylor Anderson and Monty Dickson were still alive today. Of course, I wish that no one had to die at such a young age, but going to Japan and visiting Ishinomaki and Rikuzentakata and seeing the legacies Taylor and Monty left behind in their respective towns was eye-opening. As my friend Georgi said in our group presentation, it was as if Monty blew a new wind into Rikuzentakata (and Taylor a new wind into Ishinomaki). If I could say something to Taylor and Monty, I would say this:

Thank you for your work for and your sacrifice, both to the people of Japan and to the people of the United States of America. It is obvious that you have both sacrificed your lives for the Japanese people. Living your lives in Japan and dedicating your life's work to teaching children (the future) English is not an easy thing to do, especially since you are leaving your families and loved ones behind in the States, where they miss you every day. However, the impact you have made on hundreds of children's lives is truly inspiring. Yes, you can never really know just how many children you may have impacted deeply, but even just one child who grows up wanting to be a teacher or who wants to be an English major or who wants to visit the United States is more than enough evidence of your effect on the Japanese people, and more than enough evidence of (both of) your dreams: to be bridges between Japan and the US. What may be less obvious to both of you is that your actions and missions in Japan have also meant a great deal to so many people in the US. For instance, you have inspired one hundred sixty US high school students to continue their studies in Japanese and to continue their relations

with Japan. Personally seeing your legacies in Rikuzentakata and in Ishinomaki have so greatly impacted me; I feel so compelled to go back and to get to know everyone a little better, and to extend the bridge that both of you have begun to build. Thank you both so much.

I am so incredibly thankful for everyone that participated in this program, for the Japan Foundation, for all of the tour guides and teachers we had, and for the whole nation of Japan. This unbelievable and life-changing trip would not have been possible without all of these people/entities, and I will never forget that.

NIPPON THROUGH MY EYES PHOTO SUBMISSION



“Afternoon at Kansai Beach”

On our second day in Japan, we had some free time, and I went exploring to this beach near the Kansai Institute. This picture was just so beautiful, and I think it is a good example of how there seemed to be beauty everywhere we went in Japan.

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