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



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I have one big regret about the 2015 JET Memorial Invitation Program: it was the final execution of the program. Other than that, I have no regrets. I have already told my stories of the wonderful trip to many friends and family, and I enjoy their reactions each time. Everyone I talked to was impressed by the amount of activities fitted into only two weeks of being in Japan. I was surprised that many who previously did not have much contact with Japanese language and culture also expressed their wishes to encounter Japan for themselves. However, one of the most interesting reactions happened just today. I was talking to a friend who quietly absorbed everything I said, and later I received a text from her asking how to apply. It turned out that her sister, who is currently studying Japanese, had been secretly listening to our conversation and was ecstatic about the program. I agreed to talk to her sister more about JET-

MIP, but when I apologetically explained that the program was over, she nearly cried with frustration. She explained that she had been looking for a viable way to finally understand Japan for herself before continuing the language in college, and JET-MIP seemed like an ideal program.

I hope JET-MIP can continue in some form or another so that others may have a chance to feel the great experiences I went through and to obtain memories as valuable as the ones I have. The program was a way to commemorate the work of Taylor Anderson and Montgo Dickson by bringing American teenagers to understand and connect with Japanese citizens.

after the Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami. Before the program started, I was excited to finally be able to interact with the Japanese people and experience the country. Talking to previous participants before the trip began, I noticed the numerous amount of former Mippers who were spiritedly expressing their wish for returning to Japan a second time. Now, as a former Mipper myself, I am also beginning to feel the fervor and desire to relive the trip. After the journey, I've realized that the trip has done more for me than I originally expected it would.

Other than fulfilling an amazing two-week experience in Japan, the program has ingrained in me a newfound attachment to Japan that only came with firsthand experience of the country and people. Looking back, I realize that my levels of attachment and excitement grew in several jumps during the span of the program. The opening days were full of anticipation but admittedly quite long. I felt fatigued at times, but my weariness was often washed away, such as during the film *Live Your Dream: The Taylor Anderson Story* and listening to presentations from friends and family of Taylor Anderson and Montgomery Dickson--both ruffled my emotions quite a bit.

The first true jump of excitement came when I opened the curtains in my room on the 16th floor of the Kansai Institute. I remember standing and staring at the great view; it refreshed my mindset, and from then I began to really take note of my environment. To me Japan has a feeling that is hard to put into words: the cities were towering and full of movement while the mountains and countryside were refreshing and clear, but I loved both. I appreciated that we were able to easily experience both during the program.

The event that really hooked me was the High School Summit in Rikuzentakata. It was the first time meeting with Japanese people of our age and I was thrilled to interact with them. I particularly connected with a girl named Kaho; she was all smiles and very willing to talk to me. Throughout our day together, Kaho told me a bit about life after the disaster and pointed out the temporary housing in the town. The night before the Summit, we had a question-and-answer session with Mayor Toba about the disaster and reconstruction, which was helpful in solidifying my impression of what the citizens were going through. I was impressed with the welcoming nature of the students and officials in Rikuzentakata, and at the end of the day I felt the first, and very large, pang of regret on the trip while parting with them.

The rest of the program went by very quickly; a few particular events jump out in my memory. East Sendai High School was a great day in terms of cultural experience with firsthand attempts at sadou and kendo, which had only been textbook activities for me up to that point. Our visit through the damaged building of Yuriage Junior High School was another eye-opening experience in understanding the disaster. Near the end of the program was our homestay, which felt extremely short but is something I value tremendously. Compared to our other activities, it gave me enough time to feel like I truly built up a connection with the Japanese people there (my host family), let me see some amazing places such as Osaka-jo, and finally gave me a chance to use only and all Japanese for two days.

The farewell at the end of the program was quite rushed, and I felt like I was already saying goodbye to my friends before I got to fully digest the fact that I was on the trip at all. Only a few days after it was over did I start to feel the true impact of the experience. In Japan, we were always busy, and I didn't realize how much more the two weeks made me enjoy Japan and its people until returning to the the U.S. Now, I have a big yearning to wind back time to the start of the program. But I am also beginning to realize that in some ways the trip has not ended yet.

On the surface, JET-MIP only lasts for two weeks, but it leaves an amazing impression of Japan that lasts much longer. I, my friends, and no doubt all previous Mippers have come out of the program with a new goal of returning to Japan as a JET member, for work, volunteerism, or just for another visit. Before attending the program, I had finished all four years of Japanese at my high school with one year left, and wasn't totally sure where to go from there. But after the trip, I feel resolved to continue studying on my own for the upcoming year and into college. I plan to keep talking to my new Japanese friends, and continuously look forward to going on another trip to Japan in the future. I am extremely grateful for receiving this unique chance to attend the JET Memorial Invitation Program as an unmatched first experience of Japan.

Taylor Anderson and Monty Dickson,

Though I never knew you personally, I've taken your stories to heart. I was struck by both of your energy, fun attitudes, and diligence after hearing about you from your family and friends. Just as you have inspired your school children, Mr. Endo, my fellow Mippers, and many more, you have also inspired me to think of what I have and to love Japan. Thank you for loving Japan, and thank you for helping me develop my own feelings for the country and its people.

NIPPON THROUGH MY EYES PHOTO SUBMISSION

“Broken mirror from Yuriage”

The trip through Yuriage Junior High was also a unique experience for me, because walking through a damaged school and seeing the destruction with my own eyes made the disaster feel more real to me.



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