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



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I would like to start out this essay by saying this program was the most amazing experience of my life and Japan is the most amazing country in the world. I learned and gained so much from it, and I think about it every single day. My experiences with the food, people, and the amazing Japanese culture culminated in an amazing experience that I will never forget.

I live in Fairbanks, Alaska: the “Golden Heart City” and the second largest city in Alaska. The climate is categorized as a sub-arctic desert, so stepping off the airplane in Japan was my first shock as I had never before felt true humidity. I felt myself sweating thirty seconds after I got off the airplane, but it actually got better. I loved the heat and the humidity. Coming back to Alaska I missed the rain, and I longed to go on walks with my umbrella in the pouring rain and felt nostalgic when rain would actually come.

Another thing that I found surprising was the level customer service. It was unlike anything I had experienced in America. One experience that I still think about is the time when I forgot my travel pillow when we were going through security. A woman came running up to me smiling very widely with my travel pillow in her hands. I felt embarrassed on account of my forgetfulness, but she just smiled and bowed to me at least ten times. It was an amazing moment and I soon thought afterwards that here in America the pillow might have been thrown away...

This was only the beginning of my understanding of just how polite the Japanese people are. When we were in Osaka, my friends and I went to try the city's delicacy, "Okonomiyaki", which can be described in English as a "Japanese pancake". The cook prepares it right in front of you and my friends and I had never had it before, so we didn't know to wait for him while the pancake cooked, so he left and thinking it was done, we cut into it and he came back five seconds later slapping his forehead and saying, "aaiiii... it's okay, I can fix it." None of us wanted to touch them again so when he finished we didn't know whether to start eating or if he would come back again, and when I called him over he became wide eyed and told us "Eat! Eat!" and this came with even more laughing. After it all we got a picture with him and he gave us hugs when we were leaving the restaurant.

One of the most rewarding aspects of this program was the homestay. That time alone enhanced my Japanese by at least two times of what it was before. I was surrounded on all sides by people speaking Japanese, with very sparse English. Since we were constantly speaking in Japanese my confidence in speaking skyrocketed. Before the homestay when we went to different places during free time I had to have my friends ask people where different things were, but after the homestay I felt confident enough to ask on my own. I miss my host brother and family so much, and I am very grateful for all the experiences we had, from going to a cat café, to riding the largest Ferris wheel in all of Japan, to going to Kaiyukan aquarium and seeing whale sharks, and then to the host Mother's best friend's house where we ate amazing food and went to a festival. That homestay will stay with me forever and I can't thank my host family enough for taking time out of their busy schedule to make a place for me in their home, and in their hearts.

After the program had finished and I arrived home in Alaska, I shared my experience in Japan with my parents, in the form of stories and souvenirs. Their eyes lit up when I showed them things I had bought in Kyoto and shared about my visit there. My Grandmother was from Kyoto and this made the visit to Kyoto even more important to my Father. One of the items I bought was a painting of two cranes walking across a field of gold with a peach tree in the background, and it was from a little store that sold traditional things. It was one of the most beautiful things I had seen in Japan. Seeing my Mother open it up, while I shared the experience in Kyoto, made the moment more amazing. Soon thereafter, I went to visit friends to give them their gifts from Japan. Seeing my friends eyes light up with their gifts and their appreciation of my stories, I was able to see that this trip didn't just affect me; it also affected the people around me and an amazing emotion washed over me.

To Taylor Anderson and Montgomery Dickson, I will proudly say that your lives were not lived in vain. You are two truly extraordinary people that lived an amazing life and you have both inspired me to study Japanese as much as I can and to join the JET program when I finish college. Montgomery Dickson, I actually visit your hometown of Anchorage, Alaska, quite often, and it is a beautiful place, but after this trip I won't ever see it the way I used to, I'll look at things more closely and deeply, and I'll see you in everything there, thank you for being who you were, an amazing Japanese speaker, teacher, and to those that knew you, a friend. Taylor Anderson, one of my closest friends on my trip was from Virginia, and I can't help but thi

you must have been an amazing friend too. Through the videos that we watched of your life you seemed like a friend to all, a very happy and cheerful person that loved to laugh, and I wish that I could have met you, but I'm happy to say that I feel through this program experience that I've had an opportunity to experience things that are important to you.

Thank you to the Japanese Foundation for not only selecting me for this program, but providing an experience that has truly enriched my life. Mr. Thomas Lin, our chaperone, has my gratitude for not only sharing with us the Japanese culture, but for committing his time to the success of the 2015 JET Memorial Invitation Program. Many thanks to all who supported this program and made this experience possible. I hope in the future to continue to share the experience with others, to continue to learn Japanese, and teach others the traditions and culture I was blessed to experience. With much gratitude.

NIPPON THROUGH MY EYES PHOTO SUBMISSION



“My host brother and I out go karting”

During my homestay my host brother and I did many things together. We met up with three other host families and we made traditional Japanese ceramics and went go karting. The track was huge and it was a lot of fun. I'll definitely miss this day.

Breeze #110



Breeze #109



Breeze #108

Breeze #107



Breeze #106



Breeze #105



Breeze #104



Breeze #103



Breeze #102



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Breeze #100



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