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



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July 5th, 2015, was the day I met 31 other high school students for the first time. To think that I would quickly become lasting friends with so many people with whom I would create so many eternal memories in only two and a half weeks astounds me. I am extremely thankful to have been a part of the fifth and final year of JET-MIP, and I can think of no better way to have spent these two and a half weeks. Even now as I write this many weeks later, memories of the program replay vividly within my head. I remember countless people I met in Japan, their stories, the food, the landscape, the feelings, karaoke at the institute, the evening bike rides before curfew, and more. JET-MIP has given me these memories, and more importantly, allowed me to connect with the people of Japan as an ambassador and a bridge, and maybe more powerfully, connect with the many Japanese students as a peer.

Now onto my experiences in Japan. Upon arrival in Japan, the first thing that I noticed was the humidity. I had been warned, by past participants, the program guide, even at orientation about the heat and humidity, but having been born and raised in the cold winters and dry, not-as-hot-as-Japan summers of Michigan, I was completely unprepared for just *how* humid Japan was. Thankfully, handheld fans and cold drinks are an amazing way to ward off the heat. I even still use my own fan back here in Michigan. The second thing I noticed was that Japan was absolutely and wonderfully amazing. The airports in Japan were so efficient and so nice was extremely impressed. The people were so courteous, and not artificially polite either

every “Arigatou gozaimashita [Thank You]” was well meant, every request was polite and friendly (even things like “Can I run your bag through the scanner again?” at security), and nobody was ever impatient with us for being slow, clumsy foreigners. Rather, they were patient and understanding of our limited Japanese abilities. Throughout the whole trip, the level of respect the Japanese people had for everybody around them amazed me. During our many exchanges with students ranging from elementary school students to high school students our age, everybody was extremely friendly and fun while at the same time well-behaved. Until I visited Japan, I had never met so many well-behaved elementary and middle school students. I had never thought that I would actually make friends with a group of kids within a few hours and then have to say goodbye to them as they run after our bus as if in a movie. I also never realized how amazing solving a Rubik’s cube can be to students until pulling out a Rubik’s cube and solving it would receive comments like “Sugoi! [Amazing!]” and “Hayai! [Fast!]” (and on one occasion “Kowai! [Scary!]”). The congeniality of the people of Japan truly made me feel comfortable as a foreigner in a foreign country.

Something I cannot overlook is the amazingly wonderful entity that is Japanese food. There were so many foods that I had never heard of that I got to try, and all were amazingly delicious. While in Japan, I never had a meal that I did not truly enjoy. I remember one of my first meals in Japan, when a group of friends and I went out on my birthday to eat okonomiyaki, and then, being the oblivious foreigners that we were, we managed to mess up the okonomiyaki. Thankfully, the chef was super nice and fixed it for us and we all had a good laugh about it and had a delicious meal. In Sendai a few of us found a restaurant that specialized in gyuutan [beef tongue], a Sendai specialty and it was delicious. We later found out that that particular restaurant was a local favorite. To be completely honest, the food that I had in Japan was some of the best food I have ever eaten.

Now aside from my small divergence on the glorious topic of food, Japan itself was beautiful. There was a wonderful combination of the natural and the constructed; and perhaps more breathtaking, the traditional and the modern. In Kesennuma, we could walk down the street from Hotel Boyo and see a shrine, and simply glancing to the right grants us a view of the city. Even in the area around Kansai Institute, we would find shrines in between houses and within view of a shopping mall. During our bike rides around the Institute, there were so many views around the city that were so beautiful, like the view of the bay from the bridge at dusk. During the Tohoku tour, I realized why Tohoku had been a tourist destination before 3.11. The mountains which guarded beautiful forests far enough inland to avoid the tsunami were beautiful, and the sight of the lone Miracle Pine, the lone surviving pine tree of a forest of 70,000, was moving. I wish that I could have visited that coastline which had once been lined by a forest of beautiful pines. Perhaps one day, that forest will regrow. All the things we saw during our trip to Tohoku evoked some sort of emotion, be it awe, empathy, sadness, hope, anything, and each sight was moving in its own way. Our trip to Kyoto and my time with my homestay family showed me some of the more “touristy” sights in Japan. At the time, I thought to myself “There is a reason why these places are tourist sights.” since everything we saw was beautiful or spectacular, each in its own special way.

In addition to the food and the sights, one of the most important things I learned from this trip were the stories. During the Tohoku tour, we spoke with many people and many shared their stories with us. I remember the story of Kato-san and Hotel Boyo and his experiences immediately following the tsunami. I remember the story of the kind lady who owned the small bakery in Kessennuma down the street from Hotel Boyo. I remember the story of Endo-san, his own experiences after the tsunami, his respect for Taylor Anderson and why he created many Taylor's Reading Corners for the local schools, Team Watanoha, and the creation of Rainbow Bridge in memory of his three kids and the happiness that filled the place. I remember these stories, and many more. Of course, I cannot forget the stories of Taylor Anderson and Montgomery Dickson, for it is in their memory that this program was created.

In the short time that I stayed in Japan, I had grown to feel as if I could live in Japan. Leaving Japan was one of the hardest things for me to do; as I left, I promised to myself that I would return. Looking towards the future and in regards to my future with Japanese, I had considered the option of minoring in Japanese and perhaps studying abroad in Japan in and past college. Now, I know for sure that I will continue my Japanese studies and I will return to Japan, be it through study abroad, research, work, travel, or as a JET. The time I had spent in Japan had flown by too quickly and I now await the day when I return. Within my own community, I hope to spread understanding of Japanese language and culture and promote Japanese language education. After talking with other participants on the trip, I realized how small Japanese programs were in most school compared to my own school's program. Even then, my school's Japanese program is one of the smaller, although quickly growing, language programs offered at my school. Today, Japanese language education in America is actually very small compared to other languages like Spanish and French. I want to help increase Japanese language education by promoting Japanese in my school, and then other schools in my district. I hope that in the near future, Japanese language education around the world will increase, and even more ideally, overall foreign language studies around the world will increase. This way, we can create a more interconnected and global community.

Ever since I returned from the trip I have told my family and friends all about the trip and the many great things about Japan and the people I met. After telling them of my experiences, many of my friends and family asked if they could one day go to Japan, (with me as a guide). My younger brother is now entering high school and is now heavily considering studying Japanese as a foreign language as a result, and he doesn't end up choosing Japanese, he plans to at least pursue whatever language he chooses and study abroad. Since school has not started yet, I haven't had a chance to tell my classmates and sensei about my trip but I am looking forward to sharing my experience with everybody and giving them even more reason to continue their studies.

To Taylor Anderson and Montgomery Dickson: From the bottom of my heart, I thank you for everything that you have done as teachers, ambassadors, and friends to those that you met. I respect your courage and appreciate the passion you had for Japanese and for teaching. You represent the epitome of what an Assistant Language Teacher should be: Fun, caring, empathetic, kind, open-minded, amiable, and so much more. You built the foundation for

stronger America-Japan relationship that many have already worked to build ever stronger. I, as well, hope to follow and spread your legacy and build upon that foundation so that one day, we will have created a bond that lasts indefinitely. Taylor Anderson and Montgomery Dickson, doumo arigatou gozaimasu.

NIPPON THROUGH MY EYES PHOTO SUBMISSION



“Tsunami's Peak”

When I first saw this sign out of the back of the bus, I didn't notice the blue arrows on the sign. Later, I was told that these arrows indicated the level to which the tsunami reached; an frightening 15.1 meters, and this sign was already very far inland. Every time I see this image, I realize again how powerful that tsunami was.

Breeze #110



Breeze #109



Breeze #108



Breeze #107



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Breeze #105

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