



What's happening?

A Memory to Live By

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A friend told me before leaving for Japan something that has stuck with me

through these past few months living in Tokushima. He said, "Never judge a country based on the people who treat you badly, but more by those who help you out." There have been so many helpful people here in Tokushima. Some helped me to arrive here in the first place. Others helped me adjust to life in Japan. Others were willing to listen to me rant about the stress of living abroad.

When I first arrived in Japan, I felt overwhelmed. As the plane landed, I felt my heart jump into my throat. Everything felt like it was moving in slow motion. Tears stung my eyes as I stepped foot onto Japan. This was a dream come true. The first thing I remember is the bus ride from KIX to Tokushima took us right past a big green Ferris wheel in Osaka. It was surreal to finally be in Japan, getting ready to put to test the four years of Japanese language study. Surprisingly enough, I could not understand a word that anyone said to me. Maybe it was my nerves, or maybe it was my complete lack of actual Japanese usage. Either way, I knew that I would have to study hard to real-

ize my goals here in Japan.

My first semester here found me stressed with the weight of trying to learn thousands of new vocabulary words, hundreds of new Kanji, and the daily commute to school from Kitajima Cho. However, the whole time I was enjoying myself immensely. I grew to love Japanese life and culture. My classes were challenging and at times I felt really confused, and lost. I also found it intimidating to make Japanese friends, mostly because I could not speak Japanese too well, I did not understand their jokes and sometimes I felt like a real "outsider". Nevertheless, as time went along, I learned a lot, changed a lot and began to understand what people around me were saying. As I began to learn Japanese, I felt more confident to speak to Japanese students and make more friends.

However, my most profound moment was at Tokushima Station. I was sitting down waiting for my train and drinking my coffee. Then an older lady came up to me and began speaking to me in Japanese. She was speaking in heavily accented "Awa Ben", but

somehow I could understand every word she was saying. We discussed differences between Japan and America. We even spoke about what it feels like to study alone in a foreign country. We talked for a while, and then, before she left she bought me a pastry and told me, "Benkyou wo Ganbatte kudasai". I have not seen her again but the moment that we shared in the station became a turning point in my life. Speaking to her helped me to realize how much I have changed since coming to Japan.

Life is just strings of moments held together by our memories, and living here in Japan, speaking the language and being able to communicate with beautiful people has changed me forever and given me great memories that I will hold in me for the rest of my life. The fact that I could speak to her, listen to her stories, and fluidly communicate without prejudices or outside influences helped me to find the kind of person that I am. I find that intercultural communication is the essence to human relations. Getting past the initial shock of "being different from me" is a big hurdle, but in the end I found that the process is enlightening, and I would recommend studying abroad to anyone who wants to learn new things about themselves they never realized they could do. It puts life into perspective.

