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Feature: JET Programme 30th Anniversary

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November 7th held a crisp chill in the Tokyo air well into the early Monday afternoon. Walking into the golden glow of the Keio Plaza Hotel's lobby, there were several groups of people huddled together. They were swiveling their heads in search of others, chatting with hands in pockets, hugging and laughing. Japanese, American, Canadian, Jamaican, and from all over it seemed. Young faces, and faces that had seen some years. But everyone had the same bright eyes. Of being reunited with old companions and meeting new ones. Of celebrating something that all of us had been a part of at some point for the past thirty years. I attended JET's 30th Anniversary Celebration in Tokyo that day as Hokkaido's representative.

The large reception room was packed with media and attendants lining the walls. I greeted the JET woman seated next to me and she asked if I was the only person from her prefecture, too. I was surprised to see that many JETs had come to the celebration on their own dime and vacation days. Though, everyone save one JET alumnus reacted with incredulity that I had traveled from Hokkaido and asked just how cold and wild it really is up there. Don't fret; it was always a great chance to lay on thick how our northern island home is truly amazing. PR work: check.

After speeches from representatives of CLAIR and the other organizing ministries covering the goals of JET from the beginning to now, a heavy hush descended on everyone. A man with sleekly parted hair and an elegant woman, hat, pearls, and pale suit-dress very in vogue with the British royal family, walked to the stage to thunderous applause. Crown Prince Naruhito and Princess Masako had come to offer their own speech as well. Crown Prince Naruhito spoke of the accomplishments JET had made in the past 30 years, and how now more than ever JETs were needed - as teachers, translators, sports advisors, and ambassadors - to bridge the gap in understanding between Japan and the world.

The ambassadors to Japan from Jamaica and Canada also gave speeches, wherein the Jamaican ambassador made some pretty great Cool Runnings jokes and the Canadian ambassador showed off his Trudeau fan colors. They gave examples of former JETs who had traveled back to their home countries to work as diplomats, or stayed in Japan as successful musicians and personalities. They wanted to convey that JET was doing great work that benefitted both Japan and their respective countries, and that our experiences on JET were not narrowly limited in how

they could help us succeed in the future.

The award ceremony for the video contest came last. Emails and links were sent to JETs with details about the videos, prizes, and people so it may seem redundant to mention it again. Yet I want to share with you the emotion and heartfelt words behind many of the acceptance speeches made by these creators and judges. There was true gratitude and excitement to be a part of the JET program. There was true love for their town and the people they've met. In those words and images on screen, I could tell how much their experiences with this program had affected them.

The dinner event held in the grand ballroom started with a very entertaining display of Kumamon breakdancing wildly to a live taiko performance. Otsukaresama to whomever was in that bear suit. I spent a lot of the dinner chatting with the head of Osaka AJET and, surprisingly, a colleague of the Australian girls I lived with during my time at Doshisha University in Kyoto. I also met a couple of high school and Doshisha

BIOGRAPHY: Bree Storey is a 3rd year ALT working in Samani, a small town on the eastern coast of Hokkaido. She has made a huge impact on the people of Hokkaido, working as an ALT in Samani, a translator for both the Apoi Geopark and the Hokkaido Association of JETs. She is a true cultural ambassador, bridging the divide between Japan and America

classmates, as well as people whom I know from interpreting at video game conventions. I and the Aussie remarked together, "It is such a small world."

While that is true in many different cases throughout our lives, in this instance I realized how much JET was a factor in tying up past and perhaps future encounters in my life. I see JET as this tight knot in the middle of a large bundle of strings. These strings, all different colors and materials, start out wide and far-flung, twisting along until they all converge in this knot, where they fan out once more on the other side, leading to new, far, and different places off in the distance. It is an unbreakable knot, one that cannot be loosened and undone. JET has tied a lot of my past experiences and goals together, and no matter where life takes me I am sure I will refer back to my memories and participation on the program. I am really grateful I could attend this event as Hokkaido's representative. Thank you.

-- Bree Storey, Samani-cho (USA)

A Sneak Peek...



Crown Prince Naruhito and Princess Masako



The "Wildly" Breakdancing Kumamon



JET Programme Video Contest Winners



The Official 30th Anniversary Logo



HOKKAIDO JET SPOTLIGHT



There are over 200 participants of the Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) Programme who call Hokkaido home. We come from all over the world and we all have a very unique experience with the island. In each edition of the Red Brick Bulletin, I will introduce a current JET living in Hokkaido. Each has their own story to tell – let's get to know them!



MEET BREE STOREY...

What brought you to Hokkaido?

A I've been studying Japanese and Japanese culture for a while. I studied abroad at Doshisha University in Kyoto and the nicest, most interesting, most laid-back and fun people I met were all from Hokkaido. So I knew I had to pick that big chunk of an island, for the warm people and cool weather (I hate humidity, ugh).

How has your experience been so far?

A Oh it's been amazing. I've learned and grown from so many different experiences and people, while also being able to share and help so many people with my own skills and experiences as well. I've harvested kelp from the wave-rocked shores of my seaside town, interpreted at the Tokyo Game Show, and so much in between. Of course, my idea that Hokkaido people are the nicest and best in Japan still holds true.

What has been your most memorable moment in Hokkaido?

A I had to think about this one, I'm sure this question puts everyone through a loop as they go through their memory bank of many equally exciting moments. Yet I pick training and performing as a miko – a Shinto shrine maiden – in Samani. While learning the sacred kagura dance, I got to talk with the priest about Japanese history, mythology, internationalism, his backpacking trips around the world, other religions, cultural ambassadors, the list goes on. Besides being an opportunity to wear a beautiful outfit and learn a graceful

dance, it was an opportunity to really convey a desire to learn and understand each other between Japanese and American culture. It was an incredibly unique opportunity that I had been dreaming of for quite a while.

What is your favorite thing about your region?

A I have to pick just one? I can't pick everything – the friendly people who love to party, the big and beautiful horses, the kelp laid out like trails of ink along the rocky shore, the quiet and mild winters, or the way you can see every star at night from hardly any light pollution? Well, perhaps my favorite thing is when I am driving riiiiight along the coast after work or incredibly early in the morning, the sunrise and sunset over the ocean highlight how the waters can look so different every single day – from a sparkling Caribbean teal, a swirl of dark blue and brown, to drab, stormy grey. It is a beautiful drive.

Anything else you'd like to share?

A What a catch-all question. To the current JETs in Hokkaido: with winter coming and thoughts of re-contracting or feeling like there is no point, I just want to say for your time here I think it's important to find several different ways in which you can learn and grow; not just in your career but in your everyday life. Try implementing a new element into classes, take up pottery, attend a Japanese tea ceremony, do shadowboxing in your apartment, learn shamisen, or something that has piqued your interest, of Japanese/Hokkaido culture or not, and will give you a new skill and perspective.

All issues of The Red Brick Bulletin can be accessed at http://pref.hokkaido.lg.jp/ss/tsk/akarenga_eng.htm

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