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“Omotenashi”

On the plane ride to Osaka, I was completely nervous. Many thoughts shot through my mind saying “What am I going to do” and “What is going to happen”. My brain jumped from scenario to scenario thinking about every outcome. When we landed I was quickly put to ease by the kind nature and comfort from the people of Osaka. The phrase was “Omotenashi”, which roughly translate to hospitality was something that I learned and reflected upon. Everything that I experienced are connected with this phrase. Through this trip I saw how welcoming the people of Osaka are and it left an impression that will never go away.

When we first arrived, we met our correspondent, Chikako Yabbuchi. She was polite and aided us throughout our stay in Japan. During the trip, she spent an immense amount of time with us, making our trip very unique. Since my host family worked at night, we spent most of our time with her in and out of the program. She took us to many different parts of the city and even invited us to her apartment complex. She made us feel like we were at home and went far beyond what was expected to show us the city. Chikako was a big example of Omotenashi. Her kindness and help made the trip more than just another trip. With her, Florence and I had created so many memories that would stick with us for a long time. She was with us until the end of our trip where we unwillingly said our goodbyes right before entering the custom inspections.

Another example of Omotenashi was through our host families. While we were in Japan, we had different host families for the beginning of our trip. Then on the final week, we left our old host families to a new family. Both families were very welcoming, the first family was great and I had many memorable moments with them. I am grateful because they opened up their home to me, helped me settle in and be comfortable on my far journey from home. When we left our first host families, I did not want to leave them. They helped me understand the daily life in Japan and since my host father was from the United States, I was able to connect with him through many other ways. He took my summer reading book and finished it in a day. After that, we had a good discussion which helped me understand more of the book and see a different perspective. The second host family was different to my first. They were both born and raised in Japan, and did not speak English. This was scary for me because I am not good at Japanese. I was quickly put at ease because they were kind and caring. They saw how I struggled and helped by speaking slower and trying to use English. They also opened up their house and showed us how they lived their daily lives. It was great and they taught us about their past and daily life in Japan.

On our trip to Osaka we met many people, many were from all different backgrounds including college students, high school students, government employees, and many more. All of them were amazing they all tried their best to help us in anyway they could despite the language barrier we had long talks on all different topics. They really make me feel like even with a language barrier we can still talk and get to know one another. There were many moments

where Florence and I felt as if we were out of place, and did not really belong, but then the people around us really tried to make us comfortable.

After our trip I had to think about the different things I learned. Writing this essay was difficult because I had learned so much. However, the biggest takeaway is probably from Kuboi Sensei. Kuboi Sensei was a teacher from Osaka University. He was smart and caring for the people around him. He was respected among his peers and his students. He constantly focused on “Happy Planet Index” and a phrase which to this day I do not know “Ichibiri”. Kuboi Sensei wanted us to focus not on the present but the future and emphasised how he may not have much time left but his mission was to set a foundation for the future. He praised this program for letting people like me to see places like Osaka. Additionally he wanted us to network , build friendships and connections because he saw how this will benefit not only us but the relationship for the two cities. Our lessons from Kuboi Sensei showed us how we are the future and how we need to connect with others for a better world. The importance of this program is to share and build relationships, because it is what we need to do if we want our world to be a better place. The friendships that we make from moments like these will benefit us in multiple ways.

Japan was a great experience for me and I can say the care and compassion from the people of Osaka city. This experience opened my eyes and gave me a lot to learn and think about for a long time. The people of Osaka were amazing and everything they did showed us the hospitality of Japan and represented the country in a great way. I hope I can take these lessons to

heart and try to be that bridge that Kuboi Sensei wants us to be. This trip was amazing and I hope that many others can see the city as I saw it and meet the amazing people that I met.