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Musings in Returning Home

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MUSINGS IN RETURNING HOME

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*FIGURE 1: EVERYONE ENJOYING A GROUP DINNER
COOKED BY AYUMI, MY HOST MOTHER, AND I.*

As I prepare to return home and begin to make plans to meet up with friends upon my return, people keep jokingly asking if I'm actually going to come back home or if I'll just end up staying in Japan. While I will obviously have to return home unless I want to pay for my own plane ticket back, I'm not sure that I'm quite ready to leave. I don't want to leave behind all the friends I have made and miss out on wonderful experiences that I could have made. I know for a fact that I will be crying at the airport as I leave behind our friends and my life as an exchange student in Japan. While I have no doubt that I will return to Japan—I have dedicated far too much of my life to the language and culture not to come back someday—I am not honestly sure in which capacity I will return.

While I will miss my time here in Japan, there are a few things I'll be relieved about upon my return home. For one thing, just getting accustomed to speaking English all of the time will be a shocker, having used mostly Japanese in class and in public for the past three and a half months. One thing I am looking forward to is knowing exactly what I am ordering at a

restaurant. Half the time I order at a restaurant here it feels like a game of Russian roulette—you're not quite sure if the fish you ordered will come covered in sauce with a side of vegetables or plain with a salad and side of rice. All I know is that I ordered "fish." On that note, I would like to ask you a question. What is the first thing that you think of when I say Denny's? If you're thinking "somewhere to eat breakfast food at obscenely late hours of the night" then you would be sadly mistaken if you're referring to Japanese Denny's. My fellow exchange students and I were very disappointed to find out that not only is Denny's kind of a nice restaurant in Japan, it also does not serve breakfast food. Needless to say, I'll be hitting up a Denny's within a week of returning home.

There are also a few things I would never wish upon an unprepared foreigner coming to Japan. One of them includes the affectionately-named "rock pillow." In Japan, pillows aren't soft. They're filled with beads and discomfort and sleepless nights. I distinctly remember not sleeping well for the first week in Japan before I got used to sleeping with my "rock pillow." On top of having

problems sleeping, trying to find the appropriate toiletries in a foreign language that you can barely read is another problem. Much like with menus, with detergent and body wash, you're never quite sure what you're getting until you've gotten it. While it certainly helps to have a Japanese friend help you pick out the necessities, if you're trying without such a friend, then things can become problematic—especially if you're looking for specialty stuff.

As much as I do miss the States, however, there are some great things about Japan as well. For one thing, the public transportation is superb. As long as you have a decent grasp of the Japanese language and you know which train station you want to get to, navigating can be fairly easy. After my three and a half months here, I would say that I am comfortable traveling efficiently on the train system by myself. While I don't know how long it would take for others, I know I started to become comfortable within a month of arriving in Japan. Once you've arrived at your station, you'd better be prepared to walk the rest of the way. While I thought that I would end up hating walking after a while, I've found myself quite enjoying walking to destinations. Not only is it healthier, but it's also a good way to take pictures of interesting things on the streets and to observe people as they go about their daily lives. I'm almost going to be sad when I return to the States and I will have to drive everywhere again.

But besides that, it's also the simple things that I'm going to miss. I'm going to miss being able to take naps on the train and wake up to find myself at my destination or miles away from where I fell asleep. I'm going to miss the night view from my balcony as I look across rows of houses and apartment buildings to the moon and stars in the sky. I'm going to miss not having to worry about having enough time to take a shower and dry my hair in the morning. I'm going to miss soaking in the bath after a long day of physical and mental work.

As I keep blinking, the days continue to fly by and I suddenly only have a week left to spend with the people I have grown so attached to. As do most, I wish to stop the hands of time and turn over the hourglass to gain back some time, even if it's only a few grains. Just yesterday we had our farewell party at which I am not ashamed to say that I cried like a baby. Everyone has been so kind to us for these past three and a half months, and we don't know what we would have done without them. Needless to say, it was a night of mixed feelings—those of joy and overwhelming sadness—for the things that have come and those yet to come. While my time here does feel like it's drawing to a close, I simply do not wish to leave. I have too many memories and too many friends here to make the separation easy in any way, but I'm going to do my best to remember the times I have had here and the friends I have made.

I would like to thank all of you for reading my blog as I have explored and had fun in Japan. I may write one last entry next week as an epilogue of sorts, but this is the official end of my journalistic endeavor. If anyone has any questions or would simply like to talk to me about my time here, feel free to contact me on campus or when I return state-side!

See you all soon,
Moniqa Beatty