

Presentation by Ruby Wilson Visit to Oyama December 2008

Good Evening Everyone,

As you may know my name is Ruby Wilson and on the 18 of December 2008 I flew to Japan to spend Christmas and New Years there. My trip to Japan has really opened my eyes to the Japanese culture and way of life. The difference between Australia and Japan was challenging and at times difficult but it made the journey for me so much more interesting and enjoyable.

Experiencing the Japanese New Year was awesome! I also totally forgot about the otoshidama and receiving was a real shock for me. It is tradition to eat the same foods for the first few days of New Years. Some of the foods consisted of fish jelly, fish, daikon and carrot wrapped in kelp and sweet black beans. Most of it wasn't too appetizing but I gave it all a shot. The black beans were actually pretty tasty.

I met so many amazing people whilst I was in Japan. My host family was so kind to me; they constantly worried if I was warm, hungry or even comfortable. The communication side of things was very difficult as my family spoke very little English. We managed and pulled through with a very strong friendship. I lived with a host mother and father, grandparents and three siblings.

My first thought when I got to Japan was 'Yay, I'm not gonna die of heat for the next month' then being in Japan really hit me. I was so excited because this trip was also my first time out of Australia. I couldn't wait to start school and see my host family. The drive from the Airport to Oyama was an extra 3 hours but for some reason I couldn't sleep at all. I simply looked out the car window awestruck at the fact of being in Japan. I loved the way Japan was so unique looking. Now and then you would drive past a vegetable patch growing cabbage, daikon and shallots in the middle of a busy town. The houses are amazing, especially the traditional ones. They are exactly what you imagine them to be. With the amazing tiled roofs and the bonsai like gardens.

My most memorable experience was spending time with my host family. I had an amazing host mother, Mama, who catered for my every need. She was the most kindhearted woman I have ever met. My host parents even installed a TV in my room in case I got bored. My host sister, Mari, was 12 and I spent most of my school day with her. She was the cutest and most helpful person. I was also able to teach her 'Shut up' so she could tell her noisy little brothers off Koudai and Shunya. Koudai and Shunya were also a great help when it came to telling me what to do. My host father spoke the least English but always tried to finish his sentences. He enjoyed his sake a lot. My host grandparents, Baba and Jiji were also amazing. They always took me out to dinner and wanted me to eat steak to try and prove that Japanese beef is better than Australian beef, which I eventually agreed on.

The food in Japan is amazing; I now have a new love for noodles. Baba made amazing udon and soba. They also ordered in a lot of sushi, which tasted amazing. My favourite food had to be the Japanese beef. It was all so tender and delicious. I was unfortunate enough to try nato which made me really sick. It was probably the most disgusting thing I have ever tasted in my life. It looked as bad as it tasted. I also tasted sea urchin which wasn't too tasty. It was sort of bitter. Jiji tried to make me eat grasshoppers which I couldn't bear. Grasshoppers are the scariest creatures alive and to eat one would be just as bad. The Japanese milk is also very different tasting to Australian milk, it almost smells off, it has a sour taste to it but I still loved it.

School life was amazing; the students are so polite and hard working. When I attended Ohya Junior High School I was amazed at how welcome each and every person at the school made me feel. The schools are so clean, everyday the students clean them. In Australia we wear one pair of shoes all day, in our houses and in our school classrooms but the Japanese culture is much different. The students have outside shoes and inside shoes for school and don't wear any shoes inside their houses. I joined in on many classes where most teachers didn't speak English but tried their hardest to tell me what was going on. I wasn't able to join an after school club but I watched Mari and her friends do their track and field club everyday. It looked challenging but she always came out with a smile.

For two days I visited the Hakou University in Oyama. This was a major highlight of my trip as I made so many new friends and met so many amazing people. I met Vietnamese people, Chinese, American and even Australians studying there. They made me feel so welcome and we had a great time playing table tennis, playing uno, listening to Australian music and

simply talking. At the university I was also taught how to play the kota.

Whilst I was in Japan I was fortunate enough to be able to go to Tokyo Disneyland, Tokyo Disney Sea and go skiing in Nikko. I got taken to Japans oldest University and went sightseeing and snow watching at Nikko. Nikko is famous for being listed as a World Heritage area. The shrines and temples of Nikko are amazing. I was able to see the 8metre tall Buddha gods sitting on their lotus flowers. They were so beautiful and amazing.

Disneyland and Disney Sea were also great fun. The place is amazingly well made, it all looks old and the rides are a thrill. My favourite place I went to was to see snow in Nikko. This was another first for me and I had a ball. I wasn't able to go skiing but I went sledding and helped build an igloo. It started to get so cold my eyelashes froze together then when the wind picked up everyone got blown over. Although I got cold I cannot wait to see snow again. It was so much fun.

The people of Japan are all so polite, generous and welcoming. Everyone wants to greet you and help in whatever way they can. They want to teach you anything you want to know and they are always keen to listen and learn about the Australian culture and way of life. This trip to Japan has showed me how the people of Japan live, celebrate and enjoy their unique culture. In the future I hope to be an English teacher in Japan, as I would love to return time and time again. Thank you AJS for letting me have the most unforgettable and life changing experience of my life so far.