

Speech to JETs Departing in 2011

Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen. New JET participants, congratulations on your selection. Welcome to the JET family and welcome to my residence.

I. Introduction

Today I would like to pay tribute to Ms. Taylor Anderson and Mr. Montgomery Dickson, the two JETs who passed away in the March 11th tsunami, and to share a little about their lives and experiences in Japan.

II. Ms. Taylor Anderson



**Ms. Taylor Anderson when she was in Ishinomaki,
Miyagi Prefecture on the JET Program**

Taylor Anderson from Virginia was inspired to go to Japan by her love of anime such as “My Neighbor Totoro.” She arrived in Ishinomaki, Miyagi Prefecture on the JET Program in 2008 to teach in 8 elementary and junior high schools. While there, she connected with her community through her knowledge of Japanese language and playing taiko drums.

As you will soon learn, it is common for students in Japan to stay in their homeroom all day, while the teachers move from the staff room to different classrooms and back. Some of Taylor’s young students would be so excited to see her that they did not wait for her to come, but would run to the staff room to bring her to their homeroom.

In reference to Taylor's life, Ambassador Ichiro Fujisaki of Japan commented that "one's life should be valued –not only by how long they lived or by how high they reached in society or by how much wealth they gained. One's life should be valued by how much one has done in the area that he or she wanted to do and by how much they contributed to others."

III. Mr. Montgomery "Monty" Dickson



Montgomery Dickson when he was in Rikuzentakata, Iwate Prefecture, on the JET Program.

Monty, born and raised in Alaska, became a JET in Rikuzentakata, Iwate Prefecture in 2009. The small town of fewer than 25,000 residents was very welcoming and proved a fertile ground for immersion in Japanese culture. He participated in sports, making friends through his love of cycling and willingness to try new activities such as Japanese soft-tennis and taking part in triathlons.

Many of you are sure to discover the importance of flexibility during your respective JET tenures, as Monty did. He taught at 16 of the 18 elementary and junior high schools in the area under extremely different conditions in each classroom. His kind and enthusiastic personality as well as his great sense of humor helped Monty to have a positive impact on everyone with whom he interacted. Ambassador Fujisaki was

accurate when he said that Monty “played a very important role in building a bridge between the two cultures.”

IV. Legacy Trips

Taylor and Monty were successful as grassroots ambassadors in their respective communities and left behind many cherished memories. Many Japanese who did not previously know much about the JET program have heard about how they both stayed behind at their schools to make sure each student was safely delivered to their parents after the earthquake, among other contributions they had made all along.

The Japanese Government, in recognition of the sacrifices of Taylor and Monty, has initiated two programs in their honor. At this moment, 32 high school students of Japanese language from around the United States, including 2 through our Seattle Consulate, are on a 10 day trip to Japan visiting high schools in Osaka, home stays in Kyoto and even a trip to tsunami stricken areas of Iwate Prefecture.

The government is also organizing a journey for a select number of JET alumni who lived and worked in areas affected by the earthquake or tsunami to visit their former towns and reconnect with friends and colleagues there. Mr. Ben Erickson of the Hyogo Business and Cultural Center and co-founder of Seattle Japan Relief has been chosen as one of the participants. Please step forward Ben! He will be visiting Iwate Prefecture in September.

More people now know about JET and may ask you about the program. It is your turn to take the torch and continue the tradition of positive people-to-people relations and cultural exchange.

V. Recovery

The Great East Japan Earthquake, at magnitude 9.0, was the strongest in the recorded history of Japan, but various earthquake preparedness strategies really paid off. Not a single high-rise building collapsed, and bullet trains traveling in the affected regions at 200 miles per hour began breaking procedures in time to keep all passengers safe, thanks to a special network of sensors that spans the entire country.

You all will have a unique opportunity to be on hand to watch and help Japan recover and rebuild. Remarkable work has already been done. Roads are open for the deliveries to victims. Factories are back to nearly full capacity. The Fukushima Dai-ichi Nuclear Reactors have been stabilized so that the restricted area is only a 15 mile radius. Japan is open for business and travel, so feel safe and confident when you board the plane tomorrow. Your presence will be a huge encouragement in the communities that await you.

VI. Challenges Ahead

There are so many amazing wonders and unexpected challenges waiting for you! When you arrive, know that a lot of what you find there will be a reflection of your own souls. No two of you will experience the same Japan. Keep in mind that your perceptions will color your time there. Focusing on your personal passions and positive ideas will aid you in fitting into your respective communities. Continue the good work of the JETs before you. Persevere through difficulty. Reach out to neighbors, colleagues and students. Have the time of your lives and return safely.

