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Things started off shaky for me when I first entered Japan as I struggled to make it to my dorm with an abundance of luggage, by metro. If it were not for a kind old man who saw me exhaustedly making my way down the street, I am not sure that I would have made it to my dorm at all. This experience solidified for me just how kind of a country Japan can be. My experience abroad was overall a very exciting and rewarding time; not only did I improve my Japanese tremendously in speaking and listening, but I also began working on one of my future dreams of being a singer in Japan. I had been waiting for seven years to return to Japan after my first time abroad when I was 15, and I will be forever grateful to the Tanaka-Green Scholarship for granting me the chance to go again. I was supposed to study for an entire year but unfortunately left early due to financial struggle and poor health.

Living in Japan has been an interesting experience even though it is not my first time because this time I was on my own; previously I had a host family. Some things were exciting, such as not having to worry about a curfew and getting to do little things on my own like exploring as much of my surrounding as I want and grocery shopping. However, there were some depressing moments as I am not used to living alone because I live with my family in the U.S. In the end, it was good for me to have the experience as I need to get used to living on my own because I will be graduating and moving in the future. I lived in a dorm which was relatively cheap housing compared to an apartment and a comfortable way to live out my semester.

I was initially afraid that my Japanese skills would make my life fairly difficult to get around and uncomfortable to shop or travel, but I was surprised to find that my skills were enough to survive considerably easily. As aforementioned, I do believe that my speaking and listening skills have improved, but I find that this has very little with the education at Waseda University. To be completely transparent, I do not think that Waseda has a very good Japanese Language program; their core language classes do not focus enough on actual language acquisition and instead put all their time into completing basic projects that have no Japanese level requirements. The classes were fully in Japanese and the teachers did not know English, which is not necessarily a bad thing because a lot can be learned through immersion, but I found that I and many other students often were not sure what was happening in class and therefore were not effectively learning the material. In comparison to my home university, I feel that the University of Maryland has much better methods of teaching the language because teachers can explain anything the students do not understand in our native tongue and because we focus so heavy on simply speaking, reading, writing, and memorizing Japanese.

One of my personal goals was to make a lot of Japanese friends as I would not really have the opportunity in the United States, and I did successfully make a few. It was very difficult for many reasons, but mostly because of the language barrier and cultural differences. I found that some things that are normal in Japan, for example not texting for several days or ignoring text messages, are quite rude in the U.S. I still have a lot of trouble understanding Japanese culture, but I know that by being here I was able to learn more and better than if I had learned from the internet. I plan to live here permanently in the future, so it is very important for me to understand Japanese culture. My advice to others who are planning to study abroad in the future and make friends with Japanese is to do a little bit of research on Japanese relationships before coming, try to find at least one friend who knows English, or some English at least, make sure to

ask a lot of questions and remind them multiple times that you do not know the culture well so you will make some mistakes. My favorite memories with my friends are going out to cafes, going shopping, and spending time getting to know one another.

The main way that I made friends is by joining circles and I choose all music circles so that I could get singing performance experience. It was perhaps the most exciting part of my time here; I love singing but had never done it in front of a crowd before and loved getting to be a part of multiple bands and singing various genres of music. I recommend that everyone make friends from circles because you can easily find people with shared interests.

Some of the most important advice that I can give to anyone planning to study abroad, to Japan or anywhere else, is to make sure you are mentally well enough to live in a foreign country, especially if you already suffer from mental health problems. I suffer from PTSD, BPD, anxiety and depression all of which I was being treated for in the United States. However, Japan is not as progressive in their understanding or treatment of mental illness, so I did not receive proper treatment while being there. As a result, my mental health declined, and it began to ruin my experience. Please make sure to put your health first in every situation. Japan is not going anywhere and if you need to take time to get treatment and heal before doing something as life changing and stressful as being abroad, it is best to make that decision, no matter how difficult. I felt that my mental health was in a decent place but the stress of being abroad exacerbated symptoms of my illness which is something that everyone needs to keep in mind.

Other advice I would give is to make sure you have a support system while abroad and back home so that you never feel alone and have someone to talk to when you are having problems. Also do not solely focus on making friends with Japanese but try to make friends with other foreigners as you all will have a lot in common and can support one another during your time abroad.

Even with the problems I encountered, I do not regret going to Japan, I just think it was not the right time. In the end, I still have a lot of good memories and still have plans to return to live out my dreams of being a singer. My favorite memories will always be the time I spent with friends, my performances and going to rock concerts. My plans after graduating are to return to Japan as an English teacher and continue to work on my music career.