

A Japanese Column : part three

The *Mariveraine* Jolianne Loignon-Beaudoin is pursuing her adventure in Japan and offering us her third Japanese Column. Let's remind you all that several companies from Sainte-Marie helped her carry off this project.

Over the few weeks since my last article was published, I have been a little less busy but still very active. However, several events have challenged my life here lately so I would describe this last month with only one word: optimism.

For a while, I really thought I was losing control over my life but I now see the future with a bright new light. For instance, I will be moving in with a new host family at the end of June because my current family is planning to renovate the house which will make it harder for them to take care of me. This is a big challenge for me as I will now have to start from scratch in a new familial environment. However, the best is yet to come. More details in next month's article.

Here are some news of a more general nature. This past month, I went on a mountain excursion with another AFS student (from Australia) as well as his host family. My host father took me to a theme park (Meijimura) on the history of Japan where I had the chance to try on a copy of a student uniform (called hakama) from the Meiji era (1868-1912). I also participated in a workshop on the art of the Japanese dyeing with AFS where we were able to make our own "t-shirt". In addition to these activities, next week-end I will participate in a "Matsuri" (Japanese festival) where I will be wearing a "yutaka" (Japanese summer kimono) provided by the AFS group from my region.

A new perspective

I must say however that the most important activity I took part in has been my school seminar. Four times a year, Seirei Gakuen organizes a special study day on a Saturday. Students are asked to participate in one of the suggested lessons. There is a large variety of lessons: initiation to the Spanish language, improvement of English, learning how to get ready for an interview, to name only a few. The members of AFS Japan who are in charge of me during my stay here are also participating and, as participants (the other two students in my region and myself), we had to act as hosts and give a presentation about our respective countries to the students of our school. This type of seminar will occur at Seirei again at the end of June and then, once more later in the year. We will also participate in another school's seminar (Tokai Gakuen, boys school) where the AFS president is working. I managed to give my presentation in Japanese using only some English vocabulary. This presentation gave me the opportunity to share with the students from my school some of the great history of Canada and Quebec. I used flags, pictures, maps and souvenirs, all of which were very much appreciated.

That presentation gave me a new perspective on my own country and province. Until now, I had only been an external observer; I can now see the immensity and beauties of my origins. I am now feeling more pride in being a French Canadian living in the largest Canadian province: Quebec. When discussing with my peers, I realize more each day that Quebec has its own culture and I see how it identifies itself as part of a united Canada. The human relations with people from different nationalities as well as perceptions surrounding this cultural exchange help me discover a more serious world. I realize what role a country can play and how it can influence world history. Even though I am a beginner in this field, I find it all very interesting.

I can now tell you how I feel about all of the above. Have you ever read a book that influenced you to the point that after finishing it, you wanted to change the world? This feeling is somewhat fleeting however, because you stop thinking about it as soon as you get back to your routine. As far as I am concerned, this feeling isn't fleeting and even seems to increase with time. I would say

that a cultural exchange can have this kind of effect on us. Not only does AFS International gives us the opportunity to forge relations with people all over the world, but it also allows us to discover who we really are, what is our potential, which role is unique to our lives. It also helps us feeling more valuable and, who knows, maybe even to find a career that we had never considered before.

In fact, I was able to find contacts and information that may help me start a career at the international level. Although my projects are not final yet, I can confirm that you cannot know if something will work until you've tried it. I will take advantage of all the opportunities given to me and will do all I can to succeed.

My studies

It is a known fact that we learn a language faster when totally immersed in it so I am using all my spare time to study Japanese (AFS has provided us with very good study books), I listen to Japanese music, I watch Japanese television and, sometimes, I go to an Internet café to share news with my friends and family. An interesting cultural fact I've discovered lately: it isn't customary for students to go out or to go shopping after school. Japanese studies are hard and most of my friends spend most of their time studying. However, the situation is starting to change in 2008 and young people are taking their studies a little less seriously than before. As far as I am concerned, the more I learn the less I feel like a foreigner. Sometimes I even forget that I come from a different nation.

I would like to conclude this article by confiding that I am starting to feel more mature and more fulfilled and I wish to tell all the young people out there to hang on to their dreams and to do all that is necessary to achieve it. No matter what people say or how long it takes, once you've accomplished your goal you will feel so good and ready to go further in life. If you feel one day that you need to see the world, I recommend that you join AFS; they are very good guides and they provide us with a great environment to make friends and to discover our host country through numerous activities organized by them. Let's not forget that each of us is unique and will take away something different from his or her own cultural exchange; one thing's for sure, you will not be going home empty handed.

I would like to thank you for your support and the time you take each month to read my articles, it really touches me even if you don't realize it. The June article is a bit lighter than the previous ones but I am going through a calmer period. I truly believe that I will have much more to tell you in my next article but I do hope you've enjoyed what I shared with you this month.

Looking forward to writing to you again next month.

In the meantime, please feel free to write to me at: joliaujapon@hotmail.com.

Translated from the French by Marilou Nichols