

I want to first say that Kagoshima has become special to me in a very important way. I can't quite write it all down in a meaningful way, but I wanted to attempt to, just to share what I was thinking and feeling when I was let into your lives.

The first thing that struck me was the dense forests. The world has forests, i've been to my fair share of lush greenery, but to see bamboo that was wide and tall, leaning on each other and swaying in-between what little space they had. That was new to me. The persimmon trees were new, and when I got back home, the barren trees I saw here reminded me of them. We have barren trees, and you do too, but your barren trees come with ornaments of orange that weigh down the branches. Ours looked so lonely after what I saw.

I was told of the people who lived here, and what they were supposed to be like. I had no idea that every person I was to meet, without any standout exception, was exceptionally welcoming and tolerant of my weird, foreign ways. In America, being friendly isn't always the standard.

I was constantly astounded by the effortless beauty of the land, people, and places we went to as a family. One particular event I enjoyed was picking oranges. I think it's the best representation of what I thought were the two stand-out aspects of the trip, the land and the people. While picking oranges, we got to meet the farm-owner, her two daughters, and her workers who taught us how to properly take the oranges off the trees.

It was so much fun, I stand by the fact that simply orange-picking was a stand-out part of my trip. Then, after we were mostly done, we decided to take a walk as a group up the hill the mandarin farm was on. You could see for miles, and all across the valley was lush green-and-blue. And while we were gathered admiring the view, I distinctly remember thinking about how happy I was that I could talk with everyone in Japanese.

For me, that was the biggest achievement I could have ever thought to do. Constantly thinking, speaking, reading, translating, living in this other world that at one point I could only think about. This kind of rural Japan was a dream away, the type of life I could only access through photos and stories. And I got to live it with all of you, and for that I am so grateful.

Every conversation we spoke together, with everyone I met and everywhere we went, every sign I struggled to read, and every new kanji I pointed out; I am so glad I had people beside me in this wonderful world to help me learn. Going to Japan was difficult for me, and I didn't think I could make it as an international student.

In the end, I was astonished with how much I could speak, and how similar we were as American people and Japanese people, and how familiar our worlds are even across the world. Thank you for showing me this world. Thank you for making me a part of it.

-薔薇 エブリン