

Cold. It's all relative!

I love cold weather. In Cleveland, where I grew up, the average temperature in wintertime is usually around 26 degrees Fahrenheit, or about -3 degrees Celsius. Also, Cleveland is located on Lake Erie, one of the 5 Great Lakes, so we often got a lot of snow that came from the moist air by the lake. It wasn't until I went to college in Washington, DC and studied abroad in France, I realized that I really love cold weather!

When I was a child, I never thought Cleveland was particularly cold because I was used to it. Every winter there would be a few snowstorms that would bring us around 50 or 60 centimeters of snow. I think there is nothing better than wrapping up in a quilt with hot chocolate and a good book when there is snow falling outside. I loved playing in the snow with my brother, and sometimes we would spend all day outside dragging each other around in the sled, making forts and having snowball fights. Sometimes it was pretty cold, but my mom always bundled us up in snow pants and lots of other winter gear so we didn't notice.

Even in high school I loved snow and snowstorms, particularly because if we got enough snow, school would be cancelled! I spent a lot of school nights watching the weather forecast and hoping that there would be enough snow on the ground in the morning so I wouldn't have to go to school. When I learned to drive, I also learned how to drive in the snow—in Cleveland I had no choice! It is dangerous to drive in snow and ice, but if you learn how to do it correctly, it can be lots of fun. Since we got lots of snow in Cleveland, there were always trucks that plowed the streets and sprayed ice so that the roads wouldn't freeze. However, when I was in high school and I went to swim practice before school, sometimes the trucks hadn't plowed yet. I have some funny memories of driving to practice with my best friend at 4:30 in the morning in about 40 centimeters of snow!

You probably think that I'm crazy for liking snow and such cold weather, especially when this week is the coldest this winter! Take my word for it—I am FREEZING!! I don't know why, but it just seems so much colder in Japan than it did at home. I'm sure it is partly due to the fact that I ride my bike here, and at home I used to ride the subway or drive my heated car to work. When I was in high school, my dad left for work just before I left for school, so he would always turn my car on so it would be warmed up by the time I left.

At home, even when it is cold enough to freeze the water pipes outside, we are always nice and warm inside. I never appreciated the invention of central heating until now. With just the flip of a switch, warm air can fill a whole house. My old

house was built around the 1920's, so we had an old-fashioned steam heating system. There was a radiator or two in every room, so it wasn't ever as warm as most other American homes. I used to think my house was so cold—but in retrospect, it was definitely a lot warmer than my apartment now. When I was in college, I used to get mad at my roommates for keeping the heat on so high that I often had my window open even when it was snowing.

Now, I use my ceramic gas heater to warm up my apartment when it gets cold. In the early morning when I can see my breath, I grumble about the cold and long for the days when my apartment was TOO hot. But I know that this system works fine for the climate in Mie. Sometimes I feel bad to complain about the cold to my family at home when it is -18 C there and it is a balmy 5 C here. I just have to remind myself that they are probably sitting in a nice insulated home, wearing a t-shirt and jeans while I am wrapped in 10 layers of clothing and my hands are getting cold.

There are so many things about myself that I never noticed until I was forced to move to a new place. Until I moved away from Cleveland, I never realized that I like the cold. It still took a few more years for me to move to Japan and learn to appreciate the days when I used to go home to a nice warm house. There are so many things that I took for granted when I was at home, so I'm happy that I had a chance to move to Japan and learn to look at things a different way. Now I just have to keep my fingers crossed that one big snowstorm will hit Tsu...