

Recently, I have been talking with some friends about stereotypes and how we assume that people live in other countries. I remembered something that happened to me last year that made me think more about the kind of stereotypes that many people have of American people and how surprised I was. I'd like to share that story with you in this week's journal.

I lived in America for more than 20 years, and in that time I never touched a gun. Does that surprise you? Through the years, I have probably seen a lot more guns than people living in Japan or many other countries of the world. But the only guns I've seen are being held by the National Guardsmen when I go through security at the airport, carried as a decoration in a 4th of July parade or clipped onto the belts of policemen in Washington, DC.

I never thought much about guns before coming to Japan, but last year I had an interesting experience that made me more aware of the American gun stereotype. I was talking with a Japanese person at a party and we started to talk about crime and danger in America. He was telling me that America is a very dangerous place, and of course I tried to convince him otherwise. At one point he said to me, "But you have guns, don't you?," and suddenly I understood why he thought America was so dangerous.

I explained that I didn't have any guns, my parents didn't have any guns, and I didn't know any friends off the top of my head that owned guns either, and he seemed totally shocked. I was surprised, too, because I had no idea that anyone actually believed that America was like that. No wonder he was trying to convince me that it is such a dangerous place!

This conversation surprised and shocked me. This was a person that I thought knew me fairly well, and our conversation was towards the end of my second year in JET. He thought I had guns at home, and that I would use them? Or even know how? It's true that there are a lot of people that have guns in America, and I don't mean to pass judgment on anyone who has or uses them. But as much as it is one part of American culture, it's not the America that I know.