

I'm sure everyone saw my parents when they came to the office today. I'm sorry for the interruption, but I know they were happy to meet everyone and see where I work. They have only been here for 5 days, but I'm so tired that it feels like they have already been here for two weeks! I was happy to see my parents when they finally arrived last Thursday, but starting the very next day, we were off on adventures in Tsu, with friends in Nagoya and then on a trip to Hiroshima.

The weekend with my parents friends was particularly fun, because I saw a lot of people that I haven't seen since my first trip to Japan 7 years ago. I first came to Japan with my mom when I was 15, and although she had studied a little bit of Japanese and her friends had studied a little bit of English, there were a lot of misunderstandings and awkward silences where everyone just smiled and nodded. Even so, I had great memories of the people that I met during that trip, both my mom's friends and friends of my mom's friends, and I always wondered when I would see them again.

As it turned out, a lot of these people heard that my family was coming to Japan, and organized a party for everyone to get together on Saturday night. In some ways, things were different. One of our friends had gotten married and had a baby since our last visit, and my mom's elderly friends were looking older. Even so, it was great to see everyone and reminisce about our first meeting. This time, I could speak enough Japanese to have more interesting conversations with everyone, and they were interested to hear about my experiences and what made me want to come back to Japan.

In some ways, I really hated Japan during my first visit 7 years ago. I couldn't understand what anyone was saying, I didn't like most of the food, and I was so tired and jetlagged that I think I was just in a daze the whole time. But I was really impressed by the kindness of my mom's friends—people that we didn't even know THAT well, and that didn't really speak English. Everyone really welcomed us into their homes and made our visit memorable. I don't remember the names of all the temples we visited in Kyoto, but I do remember the names of the people who took us on a road trip into the mountains of Nagano.

I have always been interested in learning languages, but I decided to learn Japanese and move to Japan on somewhat of a whim. When I was talking with these old friends this weekend, and finally able to express my feelings in Japanese, I felt like all my hard work studying Japanese had finally paid off. I was able to express to them the appreciation that I've always felt for their kindness during my first trip overseas that really sparked my interest in the world.