



# My Japanese Experience

By Vonabell Roocke-Sherman

It has been said that at least once in their lives a person will undergo a “life changing experience” which will transform them for better or for worse. I am proud to say that my personal experience has placed me in the “transformed for better” category. Even as I struggle to explain my trip to the orient, which was an immense emotional rollercoaster, I feel that I can never truly relate all the incredible relationships, life lessons, sites, and connections that have blessed my life. The one thing I can say with more certainty than I have ever felt or known is this, “I will be returning to the beautiful land of Japan! It is just a matter of when!” In Japan I learned to appreciate being identified as an American, how to relate to people of another of a different culture and that it is possible fall in love with country other than your own native land.

Having been born and raised in America, I was more than used to seeing “the melting pot” of people that our wonderful country is renowned for. One of the first things I noticed on my arrival to Japan was that the population was not ethnically mixed. I experienced some culture shock when I realized that the ethnicity of these people was clearly and almost exclusively Japanese.

During my trip I was asked many times, “Where are you from?” The first time I had replied, “I’m American,” it hit me that I too am part of a culture. I had never grasped the fact that I was *an American* until I was out of America! I was completely amazed! However, by the time I left Nagano to go to Tokyo where many more foreigners visit, I kept thinking “What are all these foreigners doing in our country?” I had become so accustomed to seeing the Japanese people that looking at people who differed seemed out of place. This was partly because I was treated kindly by all the people I met there, and was accepted by them with wide open arms; which brings me to my second point.

As we all know in America, to be polite is to be mannerly. However, in Japan, they take politeness to another level. Referring back to, how at first, culturally shocked I was, I was amazed to find that a culture can be completely and utterly based upon a level of “politeness.” The way I came to relate to other people shifted entirely when I learned that there are more ways to handle relationships than what I came to think in my mind as “the American way.” I realized that I was mistaken to think everyone thought and acted the way we do in our country. By simply observing another culture, I came to much personal enlightenment which could only be realized from firsthand experience.

The final comment I have to make about Japan is not in relation to the people who lived there but the land in which they dwell. In my opinion, it is the most beautiful, amazing, spectacular place in the entire world! The mountains tell a new story every day as they switch

from hues of greens to shades of gray and blue and red. The water is more clear, fresh, and delicious than any I have ever tasted! The animals are different from those we find in the west and are as dazzling as their environment. The land was fertile and well kept. The air was not polluted, but wonderfully clean! The breeze which floated down from the mountain was enough to make you want to lay in the shade of a tree and take a nap. Japan also has some of the best tasting produce. When I drank some apple juice from the city of Nagano, I was sure I had a taste of heaven.

In conclusion, I wanted to express my sincere gratitude to all those who helped me make my journey to Japan and offer a special thank you to my mother who graciously allowed me to participate in my "life changing experience." ...

...so to all of you I say,

"Thank you or as they say in Japan, "Domo Arigato Gozimashita!"...

Vonabell Sherman