

Japan 2010 – Cathy Pollock’s Experience

Ready to go, all backed and Laura, my eldest is taking me to the airport. She just got her license so she is driving me and picking me up. We are heading east on the 427 we can’t exit. Road is closed due to the G20. Panic! I usually leave myself enough time but I didn’t today. I have missed my plane. Fortunately, I am immediately booked on the plane of the 27th.

I arrive in Japan and a nice gentleman picks me and sends me on the bus to the hotel. I am feeling a little displaced because I have missed day one of the trip. I arrive at a beautiful hotel, check in and head to the room. I am too excited to be inside so I venture out the door and begin to investigate Tokyo. To my surprise, I stumble onto a McDonalds. First picture is taken. I head to bed early as I am all messed up with my sleep and my ankles are kanklesI look like I am 9 months pregnant they have swollen so much.

My first morning in Japan, heading to the lobby, ready to venture to the middle/high school for the day. I am greeted by a wonderful young lady named Meghan whom I decide early on I am going to adopt as my daughter away from home. She is sweet, delightful and I am glad we get to hang in the classrooms together for the day. The classroom visits were interesting. We witnessed two teachers teaching English to Japanese children. In both classes, it was very oral. Very little writing was involved and the students seem to do well orally, much better than our English students in Canada are speaking French.

The day we went to the Kimono store to try on an authentic kimono was an incredible experience. We arrived by bus to this department like store to an audience who clapped as we entered the store. Upstairs there were many lovely kimonos hanging just waiting for the foreign visitors to put on. We learned about the kimono and the woman who still makes them. What an honour to have her with us and share in this memorable moment. It is the one activity I so wanted my two daughters to participate in.

The experience with my host family is one event that truly gave me a taste of Japanese life and a respect for the people who live in this beautiful country. I was blessed to be adopted by an older couple. The husband is president of the university in Nara. His wife is the heart and soul of the family. The special sweet shop and noodle restaurant they took me to gave us a nice opportunity to share stories of our families. We chatted about history, politics and life. We laughed and shared many great meals. Our shopping experience was hilarious as I tried on a pair of boots that I could not take off. My host father had to pull them from my feet. We laughed until tears rolled from our eyes. What an incredible couple who opened their house to me.

The school we attended was so refreshing and encompasses my philosophy of education. The children were engaged in lessons that were hands on and relevant to their learning goals. Each student had an opportunity to share their learning of the day. Students were happy and clearly learning based on investigation opposed to teacher delivery. This certainly was the best school we visited.

Our visit to Hiroshima was so emotional and life changing. I am the daughter of a WWII bombardier. My father dropped many bombs over Germany. My connection to the story was different but relevant in a different way. I could not stop the tears from streaming down my cheek. It is a story of horror but more of the perseverance of a city. It is also a very real reminder of peace. I walked away from there a changed person. I am always aware and a teacher of social justice. To walk along the streets and relive the experience of a survivor is an opportunity of a lifetime.

The funny thing about that day is the morning was filled with reflection. The afternoon was filled with crazy fun. I ate some yummy ice, bought some silly charms and put my feet in a pool filled with fish for a pedicure. Oh yes, I was certainly freaked out and couldn't look at what was happening to my toes. In the end, my feet felt soft and felt great. Oh such fun.

Our last stop was Kyoto. A beautiful city and one I hope to return to. Our trip to the sake museum, our wonderful lunch and our last dinner together brought this wonderful trip to an incredible end. This trip truly was an opportunity of a lifetime and I am thankful for this time.