

Okinawa Student Exchange 2014

The Okinawa Student Exchange Program was an opportunity of a lifetime. I got to interact not only with my host and her family, but students from Hawaii and Okinawa as well. During those two weeks I have learned more about myself and have made new lifelong friendships.

Before we left for Okinawa, my dad had made me a binder explaining our family history, along with photos from his trip to Okinawa thirty years ago. Reading it for the first time on the plane gave me an insight to how important this trip was going to be for not only me, but my dad as well. Once I got to Okinawa my host mom, Naomi called, but my relatives no longer used the phone number. So she drove to Yonabaru to try and find out more information about them. Luckily, she was successful and that Sunday we went and visited them. I recognized some of their faces right away from the photos in the binder. At that moment it hit me that this is my family. I was overwhelmed with different emotions and wanted to ask so many questions. However, they didn't speak any English and my host and her family spoke the bare minimum. Even though we didn't get to communicate very much, it still meant a lot to me to meet

them. I knew I couldn't take this for granted because this will probably be the first and only time I will ever get this experience.

Throughout the trip I began to build friendships with both Hawaii and Okinawan students and from each friendship I learned something new. Talking to students from Kyuyo gave me insight to what their life is like and how it compares to mine. There were some similarities and some differences, but what stood out the most was how accepting they were. Students were introduced to me because of my host, but most just came up to me. I was taken aback at how friendly they were and how well some of them could speak English. Their friendliness has inspired me to be more outgoing especially with new people.

Okinawa has been a great experience, one that I will treasure forever. It beat all my expectations prior to the trip and I'm so grateful to have been given this opportunity.