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My name is Alejandro Montesdeoca and I spent 8 months in Asahikawa Japan. Growing up in Bloomington all of my life I was looking for a change. When I received my acceptance letter in the mail I knew that my life would no longer be the same.

Being an exchange student brought about one of the biggest challenges of my life, not in a bad way, but in the kind of way everyone must encounter and learn from. From the second I stepped off of the plane I couldn't wait to see what Japan had to offer me. With only very basic knowledge of the language I could tell that the year was going to be an adventure. In the beginning it was hard getting use to the culture and the language. For a long time I thought Japanese would be impossible to learn.

It wasn't until 3 months in, when I went on my school trip to Korea. That trip is when everything turned around. Suddenly I was able to talk with my classmates a lot easier, and I could tell my comprehension had improved greatly. After that trip I was able to talk and become good friends with people from my school and from other schools. I was able to talk about movies, games, and sports with them. It was after then I was able to communicate a lot easier, and I even started to have dreams in Japanese(I thought that was really cool).

During my stay I lived with three different host families each with something great to offer. From welcoming me into their home and caring for me, to trying to get me to overcome my fear of heights by taking me to the top of a mountain for my FIRST ski lesson. With the help of my host families and the committee members I was able to have one of the greatest years of my life.

Here's a few things that I did in that one year:

- Learned how to ski
- Made friends from different schools and all around the world
- Learned how to make soba from scratch
- Practiced calligraphy
- Went on a week long class trip to Korea
- Traveled to amazing onsen's (hot springs)
- Learned how to travel around Asahikawa by myself (by biking)
- Saw the beautiful winter festival
- Be a big brother and play with my younger host siblings
- Learned a language I once thought to be impossible
- Experienced having a cool Japanese haircut

- Learned Judo for PE class

From the day I arrived to the day that I left Asahikawa I always learned something about myself as a person or about the culture. It was only on my last day when I was at the airport waiting in line to get some food and talking with native Japanese speakers and seeing the puzzled looks on some other Americans faces, that I realized I had come so far in 8 months, and It was an experience that I will always remember.



