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Bloomington-Normal-Asahikawa Sister Cities Jr. High Exchange - 1995 Bloomington-
Normal-Asahikawa Sister Cities Sr. High Exchange Student - 1998
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It was 7th Grade.

All I had to do was get my parents to sign up, and we would get a Japanese exchange student for 10 days. I thought this was pretty cool, and my parents were game. We weren't going anywhere for spring break, and this was an opportunity for the international that I had always craved.

We were matched up with Tomoyo, a bright, funny girl from our Sister City in Asahikawa, Japan. We had to do a lot of communication with dictionaries, charades, and smiles. We met other families with junior high exchange students. She stayed for 10 days, and we had a blast. The time passed too quickly. I BEGGED to go to Japan to visit.

My parents finally agreed, and I spent three weeks that summer in our sister city, Asahikawa. As soon as I was old enough, I set my sights on the one yearlong exchange program.



In my sophomore year of high school, I won a sister cities scholarship to live in Asahikawa for a year. I had never taken Japanese, but I learned fast. I was good friends with the other Sister Cities Exchange student. We wrote a monthly column for my hometown paper. I came back as confident and worldly as a teenage girl from Normal could be.

I would recommend study abroad to any student looking to broaden their horizons. I feel very lucky that the Bloomington Normal/Asahikawa Sister Cities committees fund these scholarships. The people skills I picked up making new friends in a different language have served me well ever since. I can feel at home in just about any situation. It was a tremendous experience, and I'll be forever grateful.

10 years after we first met, Tomoyo came to New York City for a year to study English. It just so happened that I had an open room in my apartment, and she became my roommate.

It's pretty amazing that we became friends visiting each others' families on opposite corners of the globe a decade before.