

**Alexandria (Lexie) Seward – lexieseward@gmail.com**

**Bloomington-Normal-Asahikawa Sister Cities Sr. High Exchange Student 2014-2015**

**August 22, 2015**

My experience in Asahikawa, Japan was one full of learning, loving, overcoming, and sushi eating. Never in my wildest dreams did I ever imagine I would go to Japan, let alone stay there for an amazing 10 months. It seems like almost yesterday I was hugging my family and friends goodbye at the airport! Looking back now going to Japan was the best thing that ever happened to me. I truly found myself. I learned a lot about my hidden strengths and conquered many of my weaknesses while in Japan.

The process of breaking through my comfort zones was hard at first but extremely rewarding. From talking Japanese every second of everyday, to making new friends and participating in traditional Japanese customs. Everything in Japan was very new, at times nerve racking, but always exhilarating. I've never felt more alive. I was successful as an exchange student not because I was the best at Japanese or even because I knew everything there was to know about the Japanese culture, but simply because I wasn't afraid to try! I put my whole self into everything I did in Japan, and the outcome was new friends, amazing memories, and lessons that I will forever carry with me.

I will also always be indebted to my host family that went out of their way to make my stay in Japan one I will never forget. From skiing for the first time and wearing a kimono, to going to karaoke and eating great food, my family was always there ready to help and encourage me to do my best. I also met a ton of very funny, kind, and selfless friends while in Japan. My best friend Misa and I did everything together. We were and still are complete goofballs. I also had many friends from the volleyball team who pushed me far beyond what I thought I was capable of as an athlete. My teachers and Japanese Sister Cities Committee were also always there to make sure I had the best experiences. They made it possible for me to visit Tokyo, Tokyo Disney Sea, Kyoto, and Osaka during my class trip. The class trip was an amazing way for me to learn more about my peers, the Japanese language, and culture.

Being chosen as the Sister Cities Ambassador was a life changing experience, it in fact changed the course of my life. I am currently a freshman at Denison University where I play volleyball and majoring in International Business and Political Science with a minor in Japanese. I aspire to join the Peace Corps then work for the United Nations. I would never have had those aspirations if I hadn't had the opportunity to learn, love, overcome, and eat sushi in Japan. The people of Asahikawa will forever have a place in my heart and hopefully someday in yours as well! I would also like to give a special thank you to the Sister Cities Organization for giving me the journey of a lifetime! Thank You!

If you want more in depth details about my stay in Japan you can visit my blog at <https://myjapaneseexperience101.wordpress.com>