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Class of 1968 - Bloomington High School

August 15, 2012 - 45 Years Later

I was the first exchange student from Asahikawa to Bloomington, IL in 1967.

When you are at High School in Japan, you are expected to behave as a member of a group. Harmony is the most important thing you have to learn at school in Japan. But, when I get the States, it was entirely different from what I was taught in Japan. You are expected to behave as an independent individual and you have to speak up what you believe in. Independence and originality come first in the States.

I still recall my American history teacher. To graduate from BHS at that time, American history is the only mandatory subject you have to pass. Without any background about American history, I spent very hard time in American history class. A teacher treated me just like an ordinary American kid. He gave me F, F, F, --- and F in many exams. So, I had to turn in many reports on some historical events to him. I went to the library, read many reference books and summarized what were written in reference books. That was what I was expected and usually did in Japan. My American teacher was not happy at all what I wrote. He said to me, Tommy, this is just summary of what was said by others. What I want is your opinion and what would you do when you were at that time and facing some historical events?

In another occasion, he distributed a sheet of paper to the class. The first question was 'Are you favor for the Democrat or Republican?' Following questions were relating to internal or foreign policy of each party. I had to choose one from two. After scoring all answers, what he said to the class was 'Oh, you said you were favor for the Democrat, but, what you actually choose was Republican policy. What he taught us was 'Do not have prejudice, judge based on the facts.'

At graduation day, he came up to me, wearing Cap and Gown and said, Tommy, you did it, you got B+, Congratulations!

From 1981 to 1983, I was back to the States at Johns Hopkins Medical School as a post-doctoral research fellow. His lessons build up my foundation as being a Scientist and Professor at University. Without being as a sister city exchange student, my career might be entirely different from what I am now.

Considering what I get from the States, I may not be able to pay back enough to Americans, but I will pass your goodwill, hospitality, and dedication to other foreign students, hoping that we can achieve world peace and mutual understanding someday. What I keep saying to the my students are 'respect the difference and enjoy the

difference which exists between different civilizations.' Thank you America and Sister Cities.

Although I could not say this at the gathering of former and current exchange students, one thing I would like to add to my letter is as follows; YOU ARE THE FIRST ONE to come to the coast area hit by Tsumani, saving and hugging our people, hopelessly waiting for help on the roof of crushed houses or isolated area. YOU KNEW that our atomic power plant in Fukushima was in danger, yet YOU SENT US your troop to save us. Thank you all. I will never ever forget what you have done to us.



Tommy with his host mother during his visit to B-N in 2012.