

Rocky Mountain JETAA Newsletter



March 2008

Spring Edition

Year of the Mouse

Happy New Year! From all of us at RMJETAA, we want to welcome you to 2008 and the Year of the Mouse!

The year started off with our 2008 Shinnikai celebration on February 2 (see page 4) and we've been busy ever since. At the March 9 meeting we held annual elections for this year's board officers and members (see page 2). At the April meeting we'll begin planning this year's agenda and events, so we hope you can join us. We'd really like to see membership increase in 2008 and welcome new members to RMJETAA. Whether you are a new JET preparing to depart for Japan, a current JET already living and teaching there, a recent returnee looking to meet and network with others, or an alum wanting to share your experiences, our goal is to be a resource and to offer you as much information and interaction as possible. We're here for you and we hope you'll come check out our meetings and events.

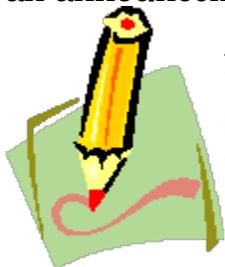
Our next meeting will be April 13 at 11:00 a.m. at Venice on the Boulevard (formerly Coffee on the Lowell) 4995 Lowell Blvd, Denver, CO 80221 (on the southwest corner of 50th Avenue and Lowell). We hope to see ee you there!

You can check out our new website for the latest details and future meetings at our website at www.rmjetalumni.org.

Newsletter Articles Wanted!

Now that we've gone to an electronic format for the newsletter, we have more room (and more need!) for announcements, upcoming events, photos, essays, and articles from RMJETAA members.

Do you have a great story from when you were in Japan (see page 8 for a really good example), a Japanese cultural event you'd like to let everyone know about, photos from your travels to Japan, or an announcement you'd like to share with the RMJETAA?



Any articles submitted by non-board members will be entered into our quarterly drawing for a \$25 gift certificate to a local Japanese restaurant. Please send your articles, announcements, events, or photos to newsletter@rmjetalumni.org.

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Meet the RMJETAA Board

An election announcement with candidates and platforms was sent out at the beginning of March asking RMJETAA members to vote for 2008–2009 board members. The election was held at the March 9 meeting and we are happy to introduce this year's board and members at large. We hope you can join us at our next meeting on April 13 and find out for yourself... Friendly people, fun events... And did we mention the free coffee???

Our next meetings are tentatively scheduled for April 13, May 11, and June 8, so mark your calendars and check our website at www.rmjetalumni.org for details!

President

Hello fellow Rocky Mountain JET Alumni! My name is **Gina Carosa** and President of the Rocky Mountain JET Alumni Association. Since returning from Japan in 2004 I've been actively involved with the RMJETAA. During my first year participating as a RMJETAA Board member I held the positions of Vice President and Newsletter Editor. During my time as a board member I have experienced various events and projects that the RMJETAA puts on to promote Japanese culture in the Rocky Mountain Region and to support the JET Program. I'm very proud to be a part of such a supportive, dedicated and fun organization. I hope to help continue the success and growth of the RMJETAA as President. I have many ideas and goals for the RMJETAA which include expanding our presence and promoting Japanese culture in the local community as well as growth of the association through increased alumni involvement. As President I will do all that I can to meet the needs of our alumni and to assist future and current JETs. Please feel free to contact me at president@rmjetalumni.org.

Vice-President

My name is **Stephen Cacciatore** and I have been a part of RMJETAA since 2006. My ties to Japan began after high school when I joined the Army and attended the Defense Language Institute in the first Japanese class for enlisted personnel offered in nearly two decades. After my service I went to the University of Wisconsin at Madison and double majored in Japanese language and literature and International Relations. As a JET I went to the Niigata prefecture from July 1990 to August 1993. After two years as an AET in Kashiwazaki city, I moved to Niigata-shi as a CIR and worked on the sister-state relationship between Niigata and Illinois and the economic development of international trade between Niigata and the Japan Sea Rim nations. I currently serve as the executive director of the Japan America Society of Colorado, a position that lends itself to a natural, beneficial relationship with RMJETAA. My JASC position has made me familiar with the Japanese business and cultural environment in the Denver area and I'd like to help foster a more collaborative effort with RMJETAA, JASC, and the Consul General's office. I would also like to work on efforts to reach out to more potential JETs and encourage their interest in Japan and involvement in the JET program. I am open to any suggestions for JETAA events and can be reached at vicepresident@rmjetalumni.org.

Treasurer

Hi, I'm **Jessyca Wilcox**, and I was on the JET Program from 2003-2006 as an ALT in the fantastic town of Urahoro-cho, Hokkaido. Aside from JET, I have a long, personal connection with Japan, having spent 8 years of my life there. Upon returning to the U.S. after JET, I quickly became as involved as my schedule would allow me with RMJETAA, attending as many meetings as possible and supporting activities and events with my time and energy. My current employment as JET Program Coordinator at the Japanese Consulate here in Denver keeps me closely connected and tied to all things involving JET. My professional position also allows me to easily and consistently keep track of all finances as well as deal with all the paperwork and budget requests that need to travel back and forth between the Japanese Consulate in Denver and Tokyo to ensure that our organization here in the Rockies remains financially successful. I believe JETAA is an important organization that provides supporting community to returning JETs and also an avenue for past JETs to remain involved with Japan. My goals as treasurer are to keep the finances in good organization, report our status accurately to the board members, and to use our budget in a way that best supports an active JET Alumni Association here in the Rocky Mountain Region. Please let me know if I can help you in any way by e-mailing me at treasurer@rmjetalumni.org.

Secretary

My name is **James Barron** and I am the secretary for the RMJETAA. I have been living in Colorado since 1992 and went to college at the University of Colorado in Boulder, receiving a bachelor's in mathematics and another in physics. Then I was a JET in Takayama, Gifu from 2002 to 2004. Now I am a computer programmer for a GPS company in Boulder. Since my return, I have been very active in RMJETAA. I was initially a member at large, then web master, and now have been serving as the secretary since 2007, where my duties have been keeping the minutes, maintaining the member database, helping with the planning, buying supplies, and whatever else needs to be done. Please feel free to e-mail me with contact information updates or requests at secretary@rmjetalumni.org.

Newsletter Editor

My name is **Cami Cacciatore** and I am the Newsletter Editor and a member at large and have been involved with RMJETAA since 2006. In addition to the newsletter, I also create postcards and fliers for our events. I'm a "JET by default" since my husband is also the new Vice President, a JET alum, and director of the Japan America Society of Colorado. I attended my first RMJETAA meeting with him in the fall of 2006 and we have been involved with all the events since. Although not an official JET, I love being part of this organization and getting involved with the people and events. I think my creative, editing, writing, and publication skills have been a great benefit to RMJETAA and I'm really enjoying my role as Newsletter Editor and helping to spread the word about RMJETAA. I encourage you to submit articles, announcements, feedback, and ideas for the newsletter at newsletter@rmjetalumni.org.

Webmaster

Hello, my name is **Sam Goodman** and I was a JET in Kyoto from 2001 to 2004. I've been involved with RMJETAA since I've returned to my home state of Colorado. I have served as Secretary, Newsletter Editor, and now currently as RMJETAA webmaster. I also attended last year's JETAA national conference in Atlanta, which gave me a broader perspective of this important organization. My goals for the coming year at RMJETAA are to increase membership, create new events, improve the website, and help with the transition to an electronic newsletter. Please feel free to contact me at webmaster@rmjetalumni.org.

Members at Large

Catherine Higbee Ishida

I was an ALT (1995-1996) and a CIR (1996-1998) in Fukuoka. Professionally at the University of Colorado, I administer K-12 outreach and professional development programs about East Asia for teachers. I've been involved with the RMJETAA since I moved to Colorado from Maryland in 2005. As a member-at-large I intend to continue to support the RMJETAA board in event planning and decision making. Last year, I led the RMJETAA book club and this year I will continue to write reviews of Japan-related literature for the newsletter.

Shingo Ishida

I am from Vancouver, Canada but I participated as a JET from Toronto, where I went to university. I was a CIR/Prefectural Advisor for two years at the Fukuoka Kencho/Prefectural Office (1997-1999) and a JET Programme Coordinator at the Council for Local Authorities and International Relations (CLAIR) for three years (1999-2002). I married Cathy and immigrated to the U.S. upon my return from Japan and worked for three years as a Field Producer for the Washington, DC Bureau of TV Asahi America before moving to Colorado in 2005, when Cathy got her gig at the University of Colorado. Like my wife, I am Colorado State property—I work as the Professional Development Coordinator for the state's tobacco prevention and cessation program at the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment.

Desiree Thorp

I have been a member of the RMJETAA since 2003. I was President one year and a board member all the rest. While I was President, I organized an art show of photos of current and past JETs. Art is one of my hobbies. I was born in Longmont, Colorado, grew up in the Black Hills of South Dakota, and did five years at the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis. I have spent a year living in Milan, Italy and one year on the JET Program in Miyazaki on Kyushu. My B.A. is in Italian Studies and I recently earned my Master's in International Development from the Graduate School of International Studies at the University of Denver. Currently, I work for a local non-profit called the Institute for Environmental Solutions. We work with stakeholders to arrive at multidisciplinary, sound solutions for environmental problems along the Front Range.

Hans Thompson

After graduating from the University of Arizona with a BA in East Asian Studies, I spent two years in the lovely little burg of Tottori, before moving to Boulder, Colorado in 2005. I recently moved to Denver, and have worked in various Japan-related fields since my return. Currently I am a Project Manager for a small localization firm in Denver, but prior to that I worked in the Japanese food industry and for the Japanese consulate as a JET coordinator. I am currently pursuing a Masters Certificate in Translation Studies from the University of Denver. I am involved with JETAA as much as my schedule permits, mainly because I want to maintain ties with Japan and because I hope to help others realize the same amazing opportunities that we all had in Japan.

Congratulations to the 2008-2009 RMJETAA Board Members. Here's to a great year!

Recent Events

2008 Shinnenkai

Our annual Japanese New Year's party, or Shinnenkai, was held Saturday, February 2, at the DU International House. This year's celebration of the Year of the Mouse was a huge success. RMJETAA members, friends, family members, and members of the Consul General's office attended and enjoyed the festivities. We had a delicious array of sushi from Sonoda's and an assortment of traditional Japanese snacks. Board member Shingo Ishida entertained children and adults alike with origami sessions and attendees were invited to write their name tags in both English and Japanese.

This year's event was highlighted with two amazing musical performances. The first performer was Junko Shigeta. Shigeta-sensei is a member of the Japanese community in Denver and has been teaching and performing on the koto for many years. She played four beautiful songs, some traditional and some modern. In between pieces, she explained the instrument and its music notation and answered questions from the audience. The participants enjoyed the chance to try playing the koto themselves as well.



The second musical guest was Taiko with Toni, who treated the audience to both new and traditional Japanese drumming pieces. The music was fun and lively, and one performance even included an incredible yo-yo display by the group's youngest member, Darren Kim. The group, led by Toni Y. Yagami, also included Joyce Nakata Kim. As always, they were energetic and entertaining and after their show, they invited attendees to try their own

hand at playing Japanese drums, which was a real treat for the lucky participants and the audience alike.

After the festivities, the Shinnenkai ended with a raffle, where guests won an assortment of pretty textiles and gift cards. Everyone left with their choice of a Japanese art calendar or JET wall or desk calendars donated by the Japanese Consulate's office. Thanks to everyone who helped make this year's celebration a huge success!

Left: Junko Shigeta plays koto for the Shinnenkai guests.

Right: Darren Kim amazes the audience with his yo-yo skills.

Below: Taiko by Toni performs one of several modern and classic drumming pieces.

Bottom: RMJETAA members, friends, and family pose for a group photo after the event.



2008 JET Program Interviews

Do you all remember going in for your JET interviews? Wondering if you were going to be tested on your Japanese language skills (even though you supposedly don't need any language skills...); hoping you found the location in time; seeing the veteran JET Alumni helping out with the interview process and wanting to ask them a zillion questions, but afraid that you'd come off as a completely annoying ko-hai and then ultimately get kicked off the program for simply being irritating? Or, maybe that was just me.

Anyhow, we just recently completed the interview process for all the 2008 JET Program candidates that applied through the Japanese Consulate in Denver. Interviews were held in Denver at Denver University on February 12 and 13 and also in Salt Lake City, UT on February 20. We had a total of about 100 candidates to interview over those 3 days and it couldn't have been done without the amazing local community we have that supports the JET Program. We had several Rocky Mountain JET Alumni volunteer their time to join us on the interview panels as well as running the registration desk. Along with RMJETAA members, we had several professors and instructors from Colorado universities and folks from the Japanese-American community in Denver take time out of their schedules to act as panelists.

If I had any idea the amount of time, hard work, and energy that went in to sending me to Japan as a JET Program participant, I think I would have been just a tad more appreciative of the effort. It is an enormous task that involves people on so many different levels and support that goes far beyond the walls of the JET Program Office at the Consulate here in Denver.

That being said, I think this year's efforts were a complete success. I was delighted to meet so many young adults that were eager to experience Japan and jump into the unknown with both feet. It was really interesting to be on the other side of the table, interviewing the candidates and imagining how they would hold up as an ALT in my little inaka town of Urahoro in Hokkaido. How would they deal with Sambongi-kun's constant boisterous imitation of Reiza-ramon HG in the back of the classroom? Or Yuki's kyou-iku-mama who was always asking me to come over for dinner (which was always delicious) and coach her daughter for the upcoming speech contest? Or what about Shota in my shougakko ichi-nensei class who had a tendency to lick my hand during class?

It was a nostalgic trip back in time for me, but just the beginning of an adventure for so many candidates. I wish them all the best of luck, and especially the ones who I will see on departure day. And perhaps if they are lucky, they'll have a Sambongi-kun, an eager kyou-iku-mama, and perhaps even a Shota (just for kicks) in their town, too.

—Jessyca Wilcox, JET Program Coordinator, Denver

RMJETAA Book Club

My Mother is a Tractor by Nicholas Klar

Nicholas Klar's *My Mother is a Tractor* is a realistic look at the life of an Assistant Language Teacher in rural Japan. The author does not dwell on idealistic views of the beauty of Japanese culture we often find in Japan travel accounts like the quiet tea ceremonies, pristine Zen gardens, martial arts, or delicate cuisine. Rather, it offers cynically amusing accounts of what surprises lay around the corner for any foreigner visiting this unpredictable land.

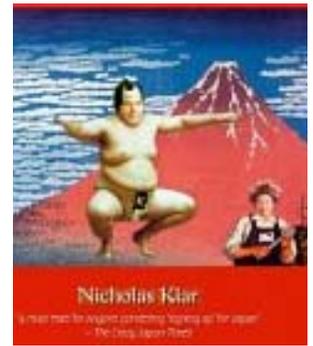
Klar, an Australian from Adelaide with a bit of a case of wanderlust, came to Japan after his university studies, applying to the JET program after two of his university buddies were accepted into the program. Klar does not delve into where his wanderlust came from and the reader can discern that he brought with him surprisingly few assumptions about what he was going to accomplish in Japan and what he expected to find.

The book follows his daily experiences from mundane tasks associated with setting up housekeeping, to the amusing portrayals of the enkai experience. Nothing seems ordinary in the world Klar has just entered. Residence in this small town on the Sea of Japan in Niigata Prefecture sends Klar out on numerous adventures and parties with fellow JETs and Japanese colleagues.

Klar does touch on the difficulties of his job as an English teacher in a system that does not place a high priority for learning English despite the funding being poured into the program that supports his position. In his day to day accounts of his job, a sense of bewilderment and cynicism are expressed. Yet, the author maintains a good balance by ending chapters on a positive note or with a curious observation.

This book was a refreshing break from other analytical or epic travelogues on Japan. Throughout the story there were many funny insightful episodes which made me feel somewhat homesick for my own small town in Aomori. For those of you who are either nostalgic for your days in rural Japan or just looking for an entertaining laugh, this will hit the spot.

—Katherine Buranapiyawong (Aomori '99-'02)



Errata: The RMJETAA would like to offer our sincere apologies to Consul General Kazuaki Kubo, whose name was mistakenly misspelled in the December 2007 newsletter.

Upcoming Events



2008 JET Program Q & A Session

Although June sounds like a long ways away (especially with snow still lingering on the ground), here at the JET Program Office, I am furiously slaving away trying to prepare the 2008 JET Program participants for their entrance into their new lives as ALTs in Japan. We are planning a Q & A Session for all selected candidates in June. This is an opportunity for veteran JET participants to share their wisdom, insights, and experience with this year's participants. It's essential to have as many JET Alumni available to help answer questions, calm fears, and share stories so that the new JET's can be as best prepared (heh, heh, heh...) as possible for their future lives in Japan. This is the first opportunity for candidates to be in a relaxed environment with human resources to turn to. Although dates for the Q & A Session are not yet set in stone (I'm still recovering from the interviews!) please keep an eye out for future announcements regarding this event.

If you are interested in being involved, please do not hesitate to get in touch with me. (Read: Get Involved!!) The more JET Alumni we have to reach out and share their experiences, the better prepared and supported the participants will be prior to their departure! I can be reached at **303.534.1151** or at **Japanese.Consulate.Denver@gmail.com**. Thanks!

—Jessyca Wilcox
JET Program Coordinator, Denver



March 14 White Day

The opposite of Valentine's Day: Men give cakes or chocolates to women. It is not a national holiday.

Around March 20 Spring Equinox Day *shunbun no hi*

During this national holiday, graves are visited during the week (ohigan) of the Equinox Day.

The 2008 JASC Japan Cup

The Japan America Society of Colorado is proud to announce the 1st Annual JASC Japan Cup in partnership with the Colorado Japanese Language Education Association (CJLEA). This day-long student competition devoted to all things Japanese is scheduled for Saturday April 5th, 2008 at Sturm Hall on the University of Denver campus beginning at 8:30am.

The event is free for spectators, and during the morning preliminary rounds parents, teachers, students, and spectators are invited to browse and partake in an array of cultural activities. These activities will include Aikido, go, anime (Japanese animation), and Japanese pop culture. In the afternoon, sit back and enjoy watching the top-three teams from each level compete for the top prizes.

Since volunteers are so invaluable to the process and success of this event, we wanted to ask you in advance if you would consider serving as Moderators, Assistant Moderators, Scorekeepers, and general Volunteers at this year's event.

Please let us as soon as possible if you are interested in helping us this year by contacting the JASC at **303-592-5364** or **jascolorado@att.net**. We thank you and look forward to your participation!

—Stephen Cacciatore
Executive Director, Japan America Society of Colorado

April 29 Showa Day *Showa no hi*

The birthday of former Emperor Showa, a national holiday. Before 2007, April 29 was known as Greenery Day (now celebrated on May 4). Showa Day is part of the Golden Week.

May 3 Constitution Day *kenpo kinenbi*

A national holiday remembering the new constitution, which was put into effect after the war.

May 4 Greenery Day *midori no hi*

A national holiday, that, until 2006, was celebrated on April 29, the former Emperor Showa's birthday to honor his love for plants and nature. It is now celebrated on May 4 and is part of the Golden Week.

Announcements



The New Girl

Our very own RMJETAA member Jessyca Wilcox was recently chosen as the new JET Program and Public Relations Coordinator for the Consulate-General of Japan, Denver. We asked Jessyca to take a few minutes from her (very!) busy schedule and introduce herself to RMJETAA. Congratulations Jessyca!

Just over a year ago, I wrote an article for the JETAA newsletter in which I whined and lamented over living with my parents, having no job, no car and no friends—always something to be proud of. I had just returned from my three years on the JET Program and moved to Denver. Having never lived here before, I quite literally was starting over again.

A year later, I am happy to give you all a much-awaited update. (I am sure you have had countless sleepless nights worrying over what has become of me!) I am Jessyca Wilcox, the newly and proudly appointed JET Program and Public Relations Coordinator at the Japanese Consulate here in Denver. We are responsible for the states of WY, UT, NM and CO. My parents are also extremely proud of me. (They'll tell you if you ask... or even if you don't. Although, I suspect their pride is a masquerade for the joy they felt as I finally moved out of their house in 2007.)

I am not a saleswoman. In fact, as a child, I was always the worst cookie seller in my Girl Scout troop. (I never even came close to winning that darn contest.) But, the JET Program is something I really believe in. I am happy to “sell” the JET Program, just as I was happy to “sell” English as an ALT while on the JET Program. I truly believe that creating cross-cultural, personal relationships at the grassroots level is what has the power to make the world a more understanding and peaceful place. I believe this truth lends itself to any international friendship, not only the Japanese-American relationship. Governments can be partners, but until the individual citizens of those two countries create



personal relationships, the friendship has a tendency to be hollow.

The JET Program makes this cross-cultural exchange and friendship a reality for thousands of people globally. As JETAA members, you all know what an impact JET has had on your life. You've made friends, you've experienced a different way of life, and hopefully, you've grown to love the culture, people, and country that you've made those personal attachments to. So, I am extremely excited to be the JET Program and Public Relations Coordinator here at the Consulate in Denver. Once again, I have an opportunity to promote relationships between a country I truly love (Japan) and young adults from the country I ultimately call home (America). Only this time, instead of engaging in that experience myself, I am in the position to provide that experience to others.

RMJETAA Stories ~

As the RMJETAA newsletter goes electronic and we are no longer limited to the printed format, we would like to extend an invitation to you to share some of your personal stories and experiences with us. Any articles submitted by non-board members will be entered into a quarterly drawing for a \$25 gift certificate. To submit a story or article of interest, please send an e-mail to newsletter@rmjetalumni.org.

My experiences among the (naked) Japanese by Hans Thompson

When I first headed down to Okayama from my home in Tottori city, I had no idea what to expect at the “Hadaka Matsuri”. Well, I did expect naked men. A lot of them. It is, after all, the “naked man” festival. But believe me when I say that it is pretty hard to fully comprehend until you’re right down in the thick of it. The naked man festival is like many other matsuri, traditional Japanese celebrations that most places in Japan still observe. There are even naked man festivals elsewhere, although Okayama’s is perhaps the most well-known of these. At any rate, this nominally religious celebration is, as most matsuri, accompanied by lots of street vendors, festive clothing and decorations, and lots and lots of alcohol. I would argue that naked man festivals require even more alcohol than your average Japanese festival, but I digress.

I was first intrigued by the idea of going to the naked man festival not, as you might think, because of the throngs of naked men, but because of an anecdote a fellow JET told me about the previous year’s event. Apparently a man had stepped in front of my friend in line, and my friend proceeded to tell him to get lost, in a considerably more vulgar fashion. I asked him if he had said it in English or Japanese, and he replied, “I tried him in English first, and then told him in Japanese to make sure he got the point.” Undeterred, the gentleman in question simply pulled up his shirtsleeves, pointed to his many tattoos, and said “yakuza, yakuza!” Needless to say, my friend let him pass. Not that I had never seen a yakuza member before; indeed, they are fairly prevalent in the sort of remote areas many JET participants end up. However, any event that gangsters were that interested in seeing...

For whatever reason, I found myself on the way to Okayama, drinking beer on the train as was our custom. Since we’d heard rumors of what we would have to do that night, we wanted to be nice and alcohol-laden by the time we actually had to run. My friend who had

the encounter with the yakuza the year before was running for the first time, as he’d had a broken arm (from a separate incident) the year prior. We got to Okayama and switched trains to the small burg where the event took place. It was already dark, and the temperature hovered at right around freezing. Keep in mind, nudity (or near-nudity, at any rate) is the theme of this particular festival.

We reached the changing tent, a massive, poorly-lit circus tent type affair, and waited for instructions. Before long, a staff member came over and sold us our fundoshi and tabi. These are basically a long strip of cloth that is worn much like a diaper, only wound like a turban, and socks with split toes and nominal soles. We stripped down, and then in perhaps the most unpleasant part of the night, our fundoshi were wedged into the cracks of our butts as far as they would go. I mean, they were wrenched up there – the guy even put his foot on my backside to really crank it. It is said that sumo and ninjas would coax their genitals into their bodies to prevent enemies from striking them there, and there is no doubt in my mind that they employed fundoshi for this purpose.

So there we were, in a tent with hundreds of other men, wearing diapers and split-toed socks, and both wishing we’d had the foresight to drink far more alcohol. By now, our belongings, including our money, were tied up in plastic garbage bags, so we had to rely on handouts of warm sake and amazake (warm sweet sake), which were few and far between. We ventured out into the street, feeling not a little ridiculous as I stood out like a, well, like a massive diapered gaijin in rural Japan, I suppose.

Then the race was on. We ran around the shrine that was the staging ground for this event for what seemed like ages. Fortunately, our socks had been taped to our ankles. Unfortunately, they soon came undone after we made our way around the course and through the pool of water that seemed to serve no other purpose than making life in subzero weather even more uncomfortable.

After perhaps a thousand laps, we all gathered around the shrine. Although the mob was so tightly packed that I couldn't even raise my arms, at least it was warm. You could see huge clouds of steam rising off of the swarming mass of nearly naked men. We stood in this state for some time, and people chatted nervously as the priests prepared for the main event. Then, without warning, the lights went off, and pandemonium ensued.

You see, the point of the naked man festival, if there is one, is to be the first person or team to grab an incense scented stick that is thrown into the crowd, and race with it back to the gates of the shrine, a distance of probably 50 meters or so. Simple, right? Simple, except for the fact that the winner will get several thousand dollars in prize money, so everyone there is basically willing to do anything at all to get the sticks. This includes beating the stuffing out of each other, especially in the case of the ominous yakuza runners in their black loincloths. Complicating matters, there are some decoy sticks, which apparently aren't scented. I only had a very vague understanding of this part of the ritual, since I had been drinking for hours when a similarly intoxicated fellow reveler attempted to explain the rules to me in slurred Japanese.

All of this was, in the end, quite academic, as I never even saw the sticks. I heard the cries go up when someone apparently got them to the entrance and won the prize, but for me everything was too dark and too insane to even think about getting the sticks. I didn't get to punch anyone, either. So, we headed back to the tent, at which point I realized my pants were gone. There are very few feelings on earth, I think, quite like realizing that one is in a small Japanese village, a full 20 minute train ride from the place one is staying, clad only in a diaper and socks, and that one's pants are missing. But it is exactly this type of bizarre, unpredictable, and (dare I say it?) unique experience that sums up why I would recommend the JET program to anyone.

A Rocky Mountain JET Goes to Washington DC

Our own Jessica Oppenheim has been keeping us updated about her studies abroad in China. With her studies complete, Jessica is now in our nation's capital for a State Department internship, and she has sent us the following to share her experience with us.

It was about two and a half months ago that I returned from a semester of graduate school at Beijing University. Not only did I return to America, but I moved to where all of the action takes place, Washington DC. The adjustment has been exciting, but I realize now more than ever how important the JET experience has been for me.

In addition to a couple of friends I met from American University in Beijing, I have met a whole separate group of friends from the JET Alumni Association out in DC. In fact, the first day I walked into my State Department internship at the Foreign Service Institute, I was met by two JET alumni and we automatically connected. I was introduced to the JETAA in DC and attended their Shinnenkai bowling party the second week I was here. Last week I attended their election meeting at the embassy as well as a reception party at the Ambassador's house.

You may ask what I did to deserve all this... I participated on JET. It is all about networking in DC and not only is JETAA a great networking group, but it is also a great way to stay connected with the great memories I have from Japan. Through JET friends I found out about a Japanese Hyper-Culture event at the Kennedy Center, and attended many modern Japanese dance performances and plays. I also got a first-hand look at all of the robotic technologies Japan is pursuing.

My passion for Asia continues to grow as I search for the right career. Even after settling into a new life, I hope to stay connected and help out with promoting the JET program and all it has to offer.



RMJETAA 2008 Calendar of Meetings, Agendas, and Events

Although RMJETAA meetings are scheduled for the second Sunday of each month at 11:00 a.m., dates, times, and agendas are subject to change. Please visit our website at www.rmjetalumni.org for updates and announcements.

Quarter 1	April, May, June
Quarter 2	July, August, September
Quarter 3	October, November, December
Quarter 4	January, February, March

April	Meeting May 13 Q1 Planning Session	October	Meeting October 12
May	Meeting May 11	November	Meeting November 9
June	Meeting June 8	December	Meeting December 14
July	Meeting July 13	January 2009	Meeting January 11
August	Meeting August 10	February 2009	Meeting February 8
September	Meeting September 14	March 2009	Meeting March 8 Elections

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