



## **PRESS ANNOUNCEMENT For Immediate Release**

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### **Cultural Exchanges and Emotional Goodbyes** Takahashi Fellows Share Their Unique Experiences

SAN FRANCISCO (August 5, 2010) – The ten selected participants of the Takahashi Youth Ambassador Fellowship Program sponsored by The Henri and Tomoye Takahashi Charitable Foundation and organized by the Japanese Cultural and Community Center of Northern California (JCCCNC), continued their journal writings as they visited Kobe where they participated in homestays and intercultural activities with youth.

After spending the morning of July 25 in Osaka, where the Takahashi Fellows visited Osaka Castle, the youth traveled to Kobe to meet their host families whom they would be living with for four nights. Here are their journal entries:

#### **Kristen Koyama, 16, Oakland**

July 26 - Today we had homemade bread, ham, egg and french fries for breakfast. Today, my host father showed me how to get to Sannomiya Station, where will be meeting each day. I thought the bus fare of 400 yen was a little expensive. Once we all arrived at the station, we left for the Disaster Reduction and Human Renovation Institution and learned about the Great Hanshin Awaji Earthquake that struck the city of Kobe in 1995. The damage was unimaginable but during their time of need, many came to help and provide what they could. We also learned how they have prepared earthquake bags and reinforced furniture to insure minimal damage in future earthquakes.

For lunch we stopped at Mc Donald's and I had a Big Mac. It was pretty cool to eat at a Mc Donald's in Japan. We then went to Kobe International High School, where we met students our age and learned flower arrangement, kendo and toured the campus. Then we came together to sing two songs, "Sukiyaki" and a popular teenager song, "Kiseki," which means miracle.



For dinner, with my host family, we had tamaki sushi (hand-rolled sushi). Afterwards, my host little sister Sora wanted to take a bath together which I thought was odd, so I said no and she cried for a long time\*. To make up for it, I said I would take one with her the next night, but she said, "no." For dessert we had peach and mochi with kinako...mmm good! We then set off fireworks and played wii. It was a good day!

\*I found out later that taking baths together was normal in Japan, as one of the other Takahashi Fellows took a bath in her swimsuit with her host brother.

### **Angeline Junaedy, 16, San Francisco**

July 27 – I was happy that I finally got to meet my host dad. He is usually busy and leaves for work very early in the morning. I had a good conversation with him and his English is very good. After breakfast I went to the bus stop with my host mother. She is very sweet and caring – she waited until I got on the bus and waved goodbye.

Today is the day I have been looking forward to. I have never been to an orphanage and the fact that I love kids gets me a little emotional. When I got to the Nagata Kodomo Home, a little boy said, "konnichiwa" from a window. I knew right then I would be attached to these kids at the end of the day. We gathered in their dining hall where the kids were smiling and full of cuteness. We introduced ourselves first and then played an ice-breaker hula-hoop game before we started arts and crafts activities. Everything went extremely well.

Lunch time started and the food we ate was simple, but amazing! During dessert I put fruit loops on ice cream and it was really good. To cheer up some of the kids, I put some on theirs and when the smiles appeared, it made my whole day. Saying goodbye was not easy. I saw how their face expressions changed. Although they were smiling and waving, something in their faces was saying they wanted us to stay. I had to look away and when I did tears started flowing like a river. I didn't know that today's experience would hit me so hard. I definitely appreciate my surroundings 100 times more than before. This day overall was amazing! I learned so much and looking forward to learning more.

### **Colin Wong, 17, Moraga**

July 28 – I just finished breakfast with Mrs. Yabuchi. I had white bread sandwiches and fruit in yogurt. My host mother is an excellent cook, but I didn't think ham sandwiches could be so tasty. Today is our "free" day with our host family. I went to Round One, an arcade with bowling alley-pretty cool,



with my host mom and some of her students (she teaches English). We're playing with bumpers which should be a pretty decent handicap because these kids are around 8 or 9 years old. When I was little almost every kid had a bowling birthday party, so I figured I was like Mr. Miyagi (Karate Kid) status compared to these kids. I was tragically mistaken as many of them are pros at bumper bowling. There is one kid that is half my age, using a ball half as heavy as mine and he's getting more strikes than Tim Lincecum.

My host mother took me to the Osaka Museum of history and a shopping area in Osaka. Earlier in the week, I told my host family that I was interested in becoming an architect, so she took me all the way to Osaka to visit this museum. As a guest I feel obligated to inconvenience my host family as little as possible, so their hospitality as hosts always leaves me with an awkward mix of guilt and gratitude. I don't think it's possible to say "thank you" enough. Being part of the Yabuchi family has been the best part of this trip.

As it's just past 10:00 p.m., my day is pretty much over now. We went out to conveyor belt sushi with Seiya and Yuto. Everything was delicious! I tried some really good dishes, like chawan-mushi. It's nice to know that even in areas of Japanese culture that I'm most familiar with there is always more to discover.

### **Mina Kobayashi Han, 17, San Francisco**

July 29 - Upon our arrival at the Kobe City College of Technology (KCCT), we were dumbfounded by the sight of it. KCCT was nothing like what our original idea of a city college would be. The campus was wide open, immaculately clean, and the architecture was aesthetically pleasing.

We were introduced to a select group of students from the college, and they gave us a presentation about the life of the typical KCCT student, which included everything from academics, to extracurricular activities, to love life. The age range of the students at KCCT is 15-22 years old. After giving a similar presentation, we proceeded to teach them a dance from our preteen years named the Cha Cha Slide. We even got the staff of KCCT to do it with us. This dance goes with a song that shouts out commands that tell you how to do it, such as, "Slide to the left" or "Freeze," so we thought it would be an easy and wallflower-proof type of dance. However, we did not take into consideration that some of the commands like "Cha cha real smooth" were a little harder to interpret. Overall, though, it was a fun experience of multicultural exchange where we learned about Robo Cup (soccer robots), iphone applications, *kyudo* (archery) and chemistry, all led by students.



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In the evening, we had a farewell party where we said our last goodbyes to our host families. I was touched when my host mother showed up with all four of her children. We had previously written goodbye/thank you speeches to our host families, but by the time we got up there, nobody was reading off the paper anymore. We were all talking directly to our host families about how thankful we were for their hospitality and how sad we were to leave them. A few of us even cried during our speeches.

That was a marker of how amazing of a bond could be made within the four days we stayed with our host families. Even with the language barrier and cultural differences, they took us in and treated us like we were family, and so we felt at home and comfortable with them. And like we would with our real, legal guardians, we had gotten attached and letting go was difficult.

However, this was a good conclusion to our stay with our host families because it allowed us to properly say goodbye to them and to thank them for all the time and energy they had spent into making us feel loved and at home in a country across the Pacific.

A full summary of the Takahashi Youth Ambassador Fellowship Program Trip will be submitted in the coming week. For more information on the Takahashi Youth Ambassador Fellowship Program, please call the JCCCNC at (415) 567-5505.

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### **About JCCCNC**

Envisioned by the Japanese American community, JCCCNC will be an everlasting foundation of our Japanese American ancestry, cultural heritage, histories and traditions. The JCCCNC strives to meet the evolving needs of the Japanese American community through programs, affordable services and administrative support and facilities for other local service organizations. The JCCCNC is a 501(c)(3) non-profit community center based in San Francisco.