

Next school year, I will be studying abroad in Okayama University in Japan. I chose Okayama University because the campus looks beautiful and green. I've also heard from people that have studied abroad here that it is a good place to go as a Japanese major. I prefer places that are more laid back, and Okayama seems to me out of the way of busy cities, but close enough that I could visit by train. I feel like in this environment, I could learn Japanese the best. I really need help to learn kanji, which are the Chinese characters that the Japanese language uses. My spoken Japanese fluency could also be improved, but I am already quite fluent because Japanese is one of my first languages.

I was born in Yokosuka Japan. It was there that I was raised in an American naval base by my Japanese mother and my American dad. Although school was in English and when dad was home we all spoke English, I spoke and lived in a lot of ways Japanese. I remember doing mamemaki, decorating with a koinobori, and hanging a lot of laundry to dry. I also traveled with my family throughout Japan, and visited Japanese relatives. However, my familiarity only extends so far. My family left Japan when I was seven, and from then on, my Japanese speaking ability gradually degraded. While in high school, I realized how much of the Japanese language and culture had been lost to me. I researched many of the words and cultural practices that I had forgotten or never quite understood. Doing this answered some questions that I never knew the answer to. Even when I lived in Japan, having grown up in an American naval base I experienced some cultural mishaps, such as not showering before going into a bath or leaning into a paper door. These incidents serve as a reminder that until I live in Japan, completely

immersed within the culture, I won't have a complete picture of what it means to be Japanese. Although I am Japanese, unless I go there I never quite will be.

Right now I'm at an interesting crossroads: I could live in Japan make a life there if I really wanted to. One of the best things to do with my Japanese degree is going to Japan to teach English. Going abroad to study in Japan for a year is something that I would like to do to figure out if teaching is the career I want, and it would help me see if I could start a life there. It might be expensive, but if I don't do it, then years from now I'll be asking myself what my life could have been like in Japan.