

News from Nihon*

*Nihon or Nippon is the Japanese way of saying Japan.

Hello! I was thinking that I can't say hello from across the pond, because that refers to the Atlantic Ocean and saying hello from Europe. I feel like we need a similar expression for the Pacific Ocean and Asia. If you have any suggestions, I'll take them under advisement. Maybe we can start a new trend in the English language.

February was a month of three-day weekends with short excursions and getting the year mostly wrapped up. We finished final exams and I got all of the first year students through their English presentations. Some days were unseasonably warm and then on one mountain hike, I was surprised to run into some snow (it was melting as the sun hit it, but still!) I would not describe myself as an experienced hiker, but rather an enthusiastic amateur. This newsletter might lead you to think differently, but my hikes are usually slow and take a lot of effort. February also brought about some reflection as my first two years in Japan come to a close and my next two years begin in April. I am very grateful for this life.



As many of you already know, the majority of my family was able to visit me during summer break and we had an amazing and eventful two weeks.

My paternal grandparents lived in Tokyo as a part of the American Foreign Service in the early 1980s and during that time my father spent a summer with them. He, along with his father and one of his older sisters climbed Mt. Fuji during that time. It left an impression on my father. Mt. Fuji is covered with scree in certain parts. Scree (a geology term I have picked up from my father) is a mass of small loose stones that cover a slope on a mountain. He remembers climbing down Mt. Fuji and going "step-slide-step-slide-step-slide."



Before



After

The year following my father's hike, they changed the descent path to have switchback turns so that it is not such a dramatic descent, even if you still deal with sliding as you climb down. And how do I know that you may be wondering?

Well, we continued the family tradition and all climbed Mt. Fuji together early on during their trip to Japan. And having seen the original path versus the current path, I cannot believe people used to go down that way. For me, climbing Mt. Fuji was one of the hardest physical challenges I have ever undertaken in my life. It made a huge difference to have my family there with me and I am so glad we got to do it together. We hired a guide, which is the only way I would recommend undertaking this adventure. While it is not inexpensive to hire an expert, he was able to monitor us and keep us from getting altitude sickness and use his connections so we had a place to rest at a mountain hut for a few hours overnight.

We took the hike slowly, but all of us made it to the summit. We were able to see the sunrise from high up on the mountain, although the summit was covered in fog by the time we were able to reach it. We had one of the best bowls of ramen I have ever tasted on the top of Mt. Fuji.

One of the running jokes is that my younger brother would be my father's emergency transportation if something went wrong and he had to be carried. While we were one of the mountain stations, our guide saw an emergency transportation magnet on a truck and grabbed it for a funny photo.

It was an overwhelming experience and I am not sure that words can really do it justice. If given the opportunity, I don't know if I would do it again. Maybe, although certainly not alone. We met someone on the trail who said everyone should climb Mt. Fuji at least once, although only crazy people do it twice. My father decided after his second time up and down the mountain, that perhaps that man was right. His older sister had friends who visited while she was still living in Japan who wanted to climb the mountain. She was happy to accompany them to the fifth station (the common starting point) and then wait for them there. If given the chance to climb it again, that's for future Laura to worry about, whether she will follow in the footsteps of her father or his sister.



Prayer Requests:

- ◇ That the allergies I experienced during cherry blossom season last year were a one time occurrence and I might get through this season without issue.
- ◇ For rest and renewal during my short time between school years.

Climbing a mountain is such a beautiful image for life and faith. While there are times you just want to reach the summit because you are tired and your legs are screaming and your lungs are aching, the summit is almost never as satisfying for me as the climb itself. Paying attention to the different steps of the journey and those climbing with you along the way are what it's about for me. May God bless you as you continue to climb on to sights unknown. And may you have emergency transportation as reliable as my younger brother.

Some Extra Pictures

