

Yokkaichi Trio 2017

Report to the Long Beach - Yokkaichi Sister City Association Board



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Band Shell Building, Recreation Park

Introduction

Without a doubt, Yokkaichi is one of the best places I have ever been to. I like to think that I am fairly well traveled for someone my age as I have been to places like , Paris, London, and Rome along with various other destinations, but what I realize after this trip is that I have been missing out on some great experiences in these countries. For foreigners, I doubt that Yokkaichi is a city they envision visiting, as it isn't one of those big, fancy cities with all of the neon lights that are so mesmerizing. But in Yokkaichi, they don't need all of these lights. They have some of the most kind and welcoming people I have ever had the pleasure to meet and replace these lights with the bright lights in their eyes. Yokkaichi has both the charm of a countryside town, and the energetic feel of a flourishing city with all of the activity during the week created by a buzzing community of local industry.

I am not exaggerating when I say this, but it is hard to put this experience into words that would do Yokkaichi and all of the extraordinary people we met there justice. So, the remainder of this account is my best attempt at conveying my experience.

Part 1

7/21/17 -- 7/29/17



- ❖ Imai Family
- ❖ Welcome Party
- ❖ Making Banko
- ❖ Isaka Dam
- ❖ Disaster Prevention
- ❖ Wagashi

- ❖ Meet the Mayor
- ❖ School Visits
- ❖ Tea Shop
- ❖ Kyoto
- ❖ Osaka
- ❖ Barbeque

Day 1: 7-21-17

Agenda: Arrive in Nagoya, go to hotel

Today, we arrived in Japan, that is of course after all of our time in the air, which was very pleasant for a long haul trans pacific flight. There were no issues with any of our flights. The seats were very nice on our flight to Tokyo from LA and we were treated very well by the crew. When we arrived at Narita, our travel agent, was very nice and incredibly helpful. We had everything squared away with just a few minor issues and even had a few moments to catch our breath before boarding the plane that was to take us to Nagoya. When we arrived in Nagoya, we were all very tired, but the rush from the excitement kept us awake. Once we had retrieved our luggage, our amazing guides (and now great friends) were waiting for us outside of the baggage claim where they were standing waiting for us with a long sign that took all three of them to hold. These fine gentlemen were Ohno-san, the director of the Trio program in Japan, Yoshimizu-san, the director of the Yokkaichi International Center, and Tanaka-san, one of the employees at the YIC and a great guide. They assisted us with our luggage and took us to the cities private bus and we were quickly transported into Yokkaichi from Nagoya through the dark, humid night. Along the way, we caught our first glimpses of the port and the iconic lights of Yokkaichi Port at night. Before arriving at our hotel for the night, we made a brief stop at a Family Mart to get some refreshments. Our

guides wanted to get us some food, but since none of us were very hungry, we just got some small things and some much needed water.

After our brief stop, we quickly arrived at our hotel where we had some help checking in and getting all of our belongings up to our rooms. As the Sanco Inn was a business hotel, the rooms were very narrow, yet they still had plenty of space and they were exceptionally clean. After a shower to wash off all of the travel, I sat down at the small desk in the room and had my first “meal” in Japan; a cold noodle salad from Family Mart. After that, I slept comfortably for the night (after figuring out the air conditioning and the toilet worked that is...).

Day 2: 7-22-17

Agenda: Introductions at YIC, tea house, Yokkaichi Museum, and the Welcome Party

After waking up and having a pleasant breakfast at the hotel consisting of toast, salad, and some egg sushi, our guides came to pick us up. Today, we were accompanied by Ohno-san, Yoshimizu-san, and a new face: Dion, another YIC employee. Once we and our luggage were safely loaded onto a new van which we would continue to use for all local transportation. We proceed to the YIC where we were greeted by all of the staff: Tanaka-san, Wanibe-san, and Yorihuji-san. We had a nice talk in our base of operations AKA the conference room at the YIC about our stay and a few other things they wanted to tell us. At this point, we were ahead of schedule, so we spent 15 minutes writing speeches for the Welcome Party later that evening. Once our little speech writing session was done, we left the YIC and went to lunch at a nice little Italian restaurant just a few blocks away from city hall. Since it was our first real day in Japan, I didn't quite feel like Italian, so I opted for a chicken steak that came with a small cabbage salad, white rice, pickles, and a small cup of consume; a nice light meal for our first real day in Japan.

After lunch, we proceeded on foot through the city and then through a little park until we reached our destination -- the tea house. At this point we had united with our high school guides; Saki, Kaho, and Yuya. Here we were shown a traditional tea room and all of its different

features such as the different preparations of wood, the different heights in the ceilings, the little windows, and the overall layout of the room and how it applied to the ceremony. We then left and moved to the main building of the tea complex and enjoyed our first bowl of matcha along with the expertly prepared *wagashi* that I enjoy so much. On this day, they had decided to give us a blue morning glory *daifuku mochi* before the tea and a piece of brightly colored agar-agar with a crunchy sugar coating after the tea.

Once our time at the tea house had elapsed, we continued onto the Yokkaichi Municipal Museum which is really three museums in one building. It has a planetarium on the top floor which is related to the Japanese space program and a specific satellite, and then below there was an exhibit on the history of Yokkaichi and its place on the *Tokaido* Road, and below that there is a very impressive exhibition about the history of Yokkaichi in relation to its previous pollution issues which also shows how life in Yokkaichi changed over the 60 year period it took to resolve the pollution issues. We had a very knowledgeable guide during this whole museum tour which made this a very good learning experience as well as a great introduction to Yokkaichi.

It was then time to proceed to the Yokkaichi Cultural Center for the Welcome Party. We waited in a very well furnished room for about 15 minutes before we were taken downstairs and sat before a room full of people, mainly our host families and other people involved with our stay including several other directors of the program. There were many

speeches and introductions, including our speeches that we wrote earlier. They had put a lot of thought into this event . There was a large array of food including a Yokkaichi specialty called *tonteki* (soy sauce and pork), along with live traditional Japanese music in the form of a *koto* and *shakuhachi*. After all of the introductions and the musical performance, we got to mingle with the crowd which meant we got to meet our host families for the first time. Both the Imai and the Mori were very excited, and we spent a lot of time talking to each other, probably too much time as we were told off by Dion multiple times to move on and talk to other people. We also met the trio that came to Long Beach in 2016; Hiroki Yoshikawa, Akiho Tanaka & Arisa Nishio. After the festivities had concluded, we were handed off to our host families and headed home.

In the car on the way to the Imai house, there was quite a lot of conversation, or the closest thing we could have to conversation. We got to know each other and they told me about their plans for my time with them. They were especially excited about taking me to Osaka on the host family day and going to conveyor belt sushi the next day for dinner. I then arrived at their home, a very nice, modern design that was much bigger than I expected. They also had a large array of animals including fish, crab, eel, rabbit, and now, in recent developments a very cute puppy. My room was right off the kitchen and had a small little table, full bed, two windows, and the all important air conditioning unit mounted on the wall above the bed.

Although it was late when we got back to their home, we sat up talking for several hours about random things. We discussed school, food, what we do, just general sorts of things. We spoke more about what I wanted to experience while I was in Japan. Then it was time to seep to be all rested for the next day, which was just as exciting.

Day 3: 7-23-17

Agenda: Making banko, art museum, and concert

After waking up from a surprisingly pleasant sleep, I exited my room to find breakfast being made, so I helped out and chopped up some *daikon* and carrot for the *miso* soup. They didn't exactly start me off easy this morning in terms of food. We ate a full Japanese style breakfast including dry fish, pickles, fruit, miso soup, natto, and of course rice. The only thing that I didn't particularly care for, with little surprise, was the natto. It just has a strange consistency and an off puttingly nutty taste that i just couldn't get around. Since I was a bit jetlagged, all of this was done before seven o'clock, so I went out for a walk with Masanori and Yuta (host father and brother). On the stroll, we passed through all of the little gardens that many of the houses have. We then passed the local temple where Yuta was able to find a stag beetle, which then pinched his finger. Once we returned to the house, It was then time to head off to the YIC, so me and Kaori, my host mother got into the car which just happened to be a K-car.

At the YIC, we got ready for our day and then jumped into our trusty van and headed off out into a more rural area of Yokkaichi to go and make banko. Today, our guides were Yoshimizu-san, Tanaka-san, and Ohashi-san, one of the people who works at city hall with Ohno. We then had our banko tutorial, both on a potting wheel and by hand by the banko artist, who just happens to be a friend of Yoshimizu. We each

made several pieces of banko; one on the wheel and as many as we could by hand. I ended up making one cup on the wheel, a little tea bowl, a sake cup, and a little shallow plate by hand. The artist was then kind enough to let us into his home to see his artwork, which was very impressive. We then said our goodbyes as we had to move on to other places that day.

Our next stop was lunch, which was Nagoya-style spaghetti, meaning that it was thick round noodles similar to spaghetti with a tomato sauce thickened by corn starch. I decided to have one that was topped with a runny egg, spinach, *karaage*, and the little red vienna sausages that came on everything at that particular restaurant. By the time we had finished eating, it had started raining, which wasn't exactly great for our scheduled activities. We were scheduled to go to Fureai farm and milk cows and then go to an outdoor amusement park thing called sports land. Due to the rain, plans changed and we went to an art museum called Paramita to look at the exhibits and see a concert.

We drove through the rain to the museum which was in a very nice, green area of Yokkaichi, not too far from the restaurant. We were rushed inside due to the rain and were greeted by the nice cool interior which contrasted nicely with the hot, humid exterior. We had a close to an hour to look around the museum before the concert, and during this time we saw some very nice banko along with a mechanical festival character that did a little dance and some new up and coming artists which we got to vote on to determine the favorite artist out of the

selection. The concert was classical in nature, with two very talented female musicians, one who played piano, and one who played flute. The music was very nice, but due to the temperature, the jet lag, and the fact that we had just eaten lunch, it was very hard to stay awake. All of us managed to stay awake besides Yoshimizu and Tanaka, but we didn't hold that against them, we wanted to take a nap as well.

By the time the concert had ended, it was time to head back to the YIC to be taken back by our host families, except mine had some plans for that evening. When we got back, I again got into the car, and Kaori and I headed off to the Yokkaichi Dome to go to a baseball game in the baseball stadium behind it. It happened to be the quarterfinals of the high schools in that area and Sakura's (my host sister) school, Yokkaichi Minami was playing. It was very interesting to see how coordinated Japanese cheering is. Everyone knew every word of every chant and they were all in rhythm. There was even a coordinated back and forth between the schools led by dedicated cheering sections of students. It was a good game, but sadly, Sakura's school, lost the game. We left the stadium and headed back home, but first dropping off one of Sakura's friends at the train station.

Tonight, they decided to treat me to something special, so we went to conveyor belt sushi. Now, I'm pretty comfortable around all types of food, but there was just so much choice going around you at eye level that it was very overwhelming. I started off easy with basic tuna sushi, then moved up to salmon and onion, finishing off with my

favorite, a type of aquaculture flounder that tasted like orange. After dinner we headed to the supermarket briefly to get stuff for dessert, just assorted ice creams, and I bought stuff to make tacos for the next day. We returned home, ate our ice cream, and then I was off to bed, totally exhausted from the busy day.

Day 4: 7-24-17

Agenda: Meet the mayor, Kawagoe High School visit, Isaka Dam

This morning was much more relaxed than the day before. We had a simple breakfast of toast and we were quickly off to the YIC in a manner that would become the norm for this trip. Once I arrived at the center, we had a short briefing from the centers staff about the mayor and the proper way to act during the visit. The YIC is technically a part of city hall, but it is in the annex building, so all we have to do to get to the main building is walk down a short set of stairs and go into the back entrance that connects the two buildings.

We arrived at city hall within a matter of moments and took the elevator up to the 8th floor where the mayor's office and the Secretarial Division is based, the secretarial division being the branch of city hall that manages the Trio Program. We waited for a few minutes in a small, but very well furnished waiting area where we met Ohno, and a new face, Seiko-san, another city hall employee who would occasionally come with us on travel trips. It was finally time to meet with the mayor and the chairman, so we entered the official meeting room and were shown our seats. The room we were sitting in was also very well furnished with lots of gold fabric accented by a dark wooden table that had been set with both the flag of Japan and the United States.

The mayor and the chairman walked in and everyone stood and bowed. We then sat and began talking while tea was distributed in fine

banko cups. We briefly discussed our experiences so far and what we hoped to experience. They then told us about their desires for our trip. All and all it was a very short meeting with minimal talking. However there was a lot of gift giving and picture taking, as with most formal places we went. The mayor was kind enough to give us a wide selection of gifts including the blue *happi* which many previous Trio ambassadors have received.

After we concluded our time with the mayor, we boarded our van which was waiting for us outside of city hall, and headed off to Kawagoe High School. One thing that was funny about this trip was that on the way, Yoshimizu-san believed that we were going to be running late, so he called ahead and let the school know we would be five minutes late. We ended up being on time, but he didn't want to be early, so we sat around the corner from the school for a few minutes to arrive at our stated time just talking and looking at the person's garden who we had stopped in front of.

At Kawagoe, we were greeted by members of the English club and were graciously taken to a conference room where we met the Principal and Vice Principal, exchanged a few words, and went over our schedule. We then proceeded down the hall and down a few flights of stairs to the field area and eventually to the gym where we were to meet the karate club. Going into this, we expected to be observing, but we ended up doing karate with them, which proved to be a bit difficult as we had come from the meeting with the mayor and were dressed formally,

which isn't exactly conducive for physical activity, especially karate. Nevertheless, we got down to it and began stretching with the students. After the warm ups, we broke up into pairs and began doing straight punches followed up by roundhouse kicks. The session ended with a "massage" which entailed my laying face down on the *tatami* mats and having my two partners climb on my back and dig their elbows into my back and legs. It wasn't as bad as it sounds, in fact it was quite refreshing, just a shock to the system. Afterwards, we had lunch with the the English club which was a nice way to spend the brief break.

After lunch, we headed to the school's tea ceremony room which really looked like a tea house. The ceilings were different levels just like the real one we was earlier in the week, the floors were all *tatami*, and there was a full alcove set with scroll and seasonal flower. It was quite surprising to see such an elaborate room inside of a high school. The ceremony was preformed very well even though the students didn't think they did an especially good job. It was even more informative than the actual tea house that we visited previously, as they took time to explain the actual ceremony, not just the room. If I recall correctly, the sweet at this tea ceremony was another *daifuku mochi*, but shaped to reflect a cool atmosphere.

After we had concluded our time at Kawagoe, we headed back out on the roads and began the twenty minute drive to Isaka Dam. Isaka Dam is a calming reservoir that is surrounded by forest which you can bike through on a path. We did this roughly three kilometer path in

about an hour taking our time to stop and admire the scenery from different positions along the path along with regaining our composure as it was very hot and all up hill. On this part of the excursion we were alone with Dion as Yoshimizu-san and Shintani-san were waiting back at the van enjoying cool drinks from the cooler that was always kept in the car. Together, the karate and the bike ride, which was mostly up hill, made for a very active day.

Back at home, I decided to take a few minutes rest before going back out and making dinner for the family. I had decided to make tacos for them and had come prepared with all of the spices needed. My host mother neglected to tell me that there was a place where I could have bought tortillas, so I ended up rolling them out with a water bottle and a sheet pan, but they turned out decently considering I didn't really have what I needed. During this, my host mother had gone out to drop off and pick up her children, and Sakura had two of her friends over, which was quite nice. One of them had been on an exchange to Mexico for a few weeks, and was a senior in high school, so he could speak english fairly well, which allowed us to have some good conversations. Plus he was able to help me communicate with the others that I couldn't talk to in Japanese very well. The evening ended with fireworks and ice cream out in the driveway. And Japanese fireworks seem more dangerous than American ones. You have to use a lighter, ones that are very small, and they go off almost instantly. Still a very fun experience and one that will be very memorable. We then returned inside for the evening, spoke a bit more until Sakura's friends left. After that, it was

just time to relax and the kids (Sakura and Kentaro) did homework. I wasn't particularly tired that evening, so I stayed up until about midnight helping Kentaro with his summer English homework. After that, everyone was very tired and we all went to bed, concluding another fine day.

Day 5: 7-25-17

Agenda: Yanaya, Inden tea shop, Yokkaichi High School, coffee break rehearsal

As was the new norm, I woke up, got ready for the day, had my toast, and we headed off to the YIC down the narrow, bumpy roads around the Imai house. After arriving at the YIC, where we were greeted in the same manner as every day by Yoshimizu-san and Dion, we dropped off any unnecessary baggage and walked down the street to Yanaya, a local shop that specializes in festival goods. Since we were in Yokkaichi leading up to the Grand Yokkaichi Festival, the shop was in full swing with all of the memorabilia set out in a visually appealing way. There was so much stuff there of all different types. There were various bags, lots on *Onyudo* items, and general festival garb such as *happi*. We didn't spend too long here, but we certainly learned a lot about festival culture in Japan. Yanaya-san, the man who ran the shop was very generous and gave us a collection of small gifts including a sticker, a little button and a keychain, all with the store's name in *kanji* on them.

After taking our pictures and saying our goodbyes, we walked back to the YIC where we got in our van which Ohno-san had waiting for us and headed off to a different part of Yokkaichi to visit the Inden tea store. The thing that made this tea store special is that it ground its own matcha. As you walk in, you are hit with the strong aroma of all of the different teas that they sell there. Visually, the six matcha grinding machines are quite mesmerizing as they spin around in a very constant

and soothing way. Once seated, the owners of the shop instructed us in the different types of tea that they sell, especially *kabusecha*, the type of tea that is special to Mie prefecture and a Yokkaichi specialty. It is a type of green tea that is prepared in such a way to produce a bright green colored tea when brewed, while giving off a mellow smell. However appetizing it looks, it has a very peculiar taste that isn't offensive just foreign. The best way I can describe it, almost like the taste of the ocean without all of the salt. It was enjoyable at first, but I couldn't drink too much of it as it seems it is a bit of an acquired taste. After they prepared this tea and gave it to us to drink, they instructed us in how to prepare it. We each had the opportunity to make two cups, which we proceeded to give to our guides. They even went further to teach us how to prepare matcha the proper way, just without all of the formal tea ceremony actions. As we were about to depart, Yoshimizu-san was kind enough to buy us a package of *kabusecha* to take back and make for our host families, which I did later that night.

After the same procedure of pictures and goodbyes, we headed off to what was one of the best lunches of the trip -- Indian curry. We went to a little restaurant not too far away from Inden which Yoshimizu-san selected for us. Here we had a very nice chicken curry set that began with a cabbage salad with some sort of curry dressing followed up by the bowl of curry and a massive piece of naan.

After we finished up our meal with iced coffee, we got back into the van and headed out to Yokkaichi High School. Here we were

greeted by the 2015 trio students who then transferred us to the administration in the conference room for a brief presentation about Yokkaichi High School and the programs that set them apart from other schools. After the video had ended and we exchanged some words with the administration, we were led to the gym where we met with the *kendo* club who was just about to begin practice. We watched them drill for a few minutes then the instructor told us to grab one of the wooden *kendo* swords and to imitate the students actions on him. We began slowly with striking him as hard as we could on the top of his head, followed up by the more intermediate cut to the ribs. For the minimal amount of activity we did, we were incredibly hot and couldn't even imagine how hot it was for the students under all of that thick padded armour.

After our time with the *kendo* kids ended, we were shown upstairs to the music room where we had the chance to sing a few songs with the members of the music club. The songs were simple Japanese children's songs, but never the less it was a fun experience to share while discussing the different aspects of their school and personal lives. Since Lily and I are both in the music program at Poly, it was a comfortable way to get to know the kids.

After that brief stop, we went to the tea ceremony room where we were again treated to a tea ceremony by the students. After that unscheduled extra, we moved on to the art area where we practiced calligraphy. I decided to work on the *kaze* or wind kanji. After practicing

for about 15 minutes and receiving some feedback from the instructor and calligraphy club members, we wrote our kanji on a fan. Considering that I can write most kanji fairly decently, and *kaze* is one that I have already learned, writing it with the brush made it much harder and let me develop a greater appreciation for fine pieces of calligraphy.

Finishing the fans marked the end of our time at Yokkaichi High School and we jumped back in the van and headed back to the YIC to get ready for the coffee break the next week. All we really did was look at the power points on the screen and diagnose a few problems with the presentations, but there were fairly few, so we were able to get back home a little earlier than expected.

On the way back home, my host mother told me that Sakura was going to her calligraphy class that night and that she would like me to come along, and I agreed of course. I had a few minutes back home to just unwind but at around 6:15, it was time to leave and we walked to the calligraphy teachers house through the small vegetable fields that surround the house. Once we got there, we got started right away, and unhappy with my performance earlier I continued to practice *kaze*. After two hours and a whole stack of practice paper, it was time to write my character on another fan, after trying to fit it on a tracing several times before. I left the two and a half hour lesson with two fans and a large stack of thin practice paper with *kaze* written on them, along with a better understanding of Japanese calligraphy.

Once we got home, it was very relaxed. We had our gyoza which my host mother's mother made earlier, sat up talking for a little, and then went to bed, ending the day nicely.

Day 6: 7-26-17

Agenda: Disaster Prevention Education Center, Akatsuki School, *wagashi* making

After arriving at the YIC at the usual time, we boarded our van like usual and headed off to the Disaster Prevention Education Center which also happens to be a functioning fire station. We were greeted by the director of the program and he gave us a very thorough presentation about different safety features and risks associated with fire and earthquakes. He also related these topics to natural disasters in Japan such as earthquake, fire, and tsunami. At the end of his visual presentation, there was a little quiz which we had to take, but being from California, it wasn't too much of a challenge, just the fact that it was in Japanese.

Once the presentation and quiz had concluded, we headed downstairs to the interactive portion of the center. In this area, there are a few simulator like things. The more underwhelming of the two was the fire extinguisher simulator where we used the knowledge about, "*pin, pon, pan*", from the presentation to successfully extinguish a virtual tempura fire. After this little game, we move went to the main attraction which simulates escaping a burning building. There was a regular door that led to a maze of locked doors that was filled with an artificial smoke. Going though this little simulation, we had to cover our mouths with some piece of clothing and escape. Although it may have been cheating, I decided to use the flashlight on my phone to get us

through the dark, smoky maze because it was quite unsettling and incredibly dark.

After the Disaster Prevention Education Center experience, we headed to Akatsuki Junior and Senior High School. Akatsuki is an education establishment that has six grade levels, and it is reflected on all of their folders and materials as the “Akatsuki 6”. We were greeted by the members of the cooking club and were taken up to their cooking classroom where they had all of the required materials prepared. The menu for the day was freshly pounded *mochi* and *kenchinjiru* soup which is a simple vegetable soup that was carrots, onions, burdock, *konnyaku*, straw mushrooms, mustard greens, and tofu. Once we had done all of the prep for the soup and had that going in a large pot, we moved onto making the *mochi*. They had the rice steamed before we got there, so all we had to do was pound it into the sticky paste. The large pounding mortar was all set and two male teachers gave us a demonstration and then handed it off to us to finish up. This was a really fun experience as I have always wanted to make *mochi* by hand. The pieces of *mochi* were then tossed in three different coatings; *kinako*, *daikon* and soy sauce, and some sort of green seaweed flake that I didn't catch the name of.

Once we had finished cooking and eating our lunch, we moved upstairs to a very nice, large tatami room where we, with the same kids, played some Japanese card games. Again, I don't remember the name of the game, but a line of a poem was read in Japanese and then we had

to find the card on the floor that had the symbol for the first sound of the first word. Whoever had the most cards at the end wins. After that little game, we watched the professionals play a different game where they had a set of cards with lines of poems on them and then when one was musically called off they had to remember where the card was and hit it out of the area before their opponent could. After the cards, we went to their art room where we again got to practice out calligraphy. Again, I decided to stick with *kaze*. It was nice to practice it a few more times and then put it on yet another fan (that's four now by the way.)

Once we had finished our businesses at Akatsuki, we left the mountain that the school sits on and went to a local shop that has been around for 180 years that has been making *wagashi*, Japanese sweets, from scratch since they opened. First they told us about what *wagashi* is and how it is made. They showed us the different types of beans and flours that they use along with the old moulds that they can use to form some the larger pieces. One of the owners of the shop then showed us how to make some *wagashi* ourselves. The first type we made was a full cherry blossom, which was really quite fun to make. The second type we got to make was a single petal of a cherry blossom, which I couldn't exactly see, but it was interesting nevertheless. They were then gracious enough to let us have a sample of the sweets in the case. I decided to have the *mizu yokan*, a bean paste and agar jelly that is set inside a fresh bamboo piece and wrapped up in bamboo leaves. We enjoyed these sweets with a cold wheat/barley tea that they graciously provided.

We headed back to the YIC and were picked up by our host families. On the way back, I was talking to my host mother about what we had done that day, and when she found out that I liked *wagashi*, she insisted on taking me to another local sweet shop where we got some for later that evening. Once we got home, it was more relaxed than most days, but still quite busy. Tonight we were going to have *takoyaki* so all of that needed to be set up. My host mother had finally convinced me to go to the *onsen* with them later that evening, so that was also being planned. We ate the *takoyaki* with some more of Sakura's friends and one of my host mother's friends. Once dinner concluded there was some downtime which I used to research *onsen* and get my things together. We then got in the car and headed up the mountain to go to the baths. Set at the top of a mountain overlooking all of of Yokkaichi, you enter into a very tasteful lobby which you just pass through to get on the little monorail car that takes you down to the baths. On the way down, you pass through a lush cedar forest that has small baths dotted along a fenced pathway and admire the lights of Yokkaichi Port as you slowly approach the bath building. The baths were very relaxing. There was an inside and outside bath, the latter of which overlooked the same magnificent view that we saw on the way down. Once the bath was concluded, I sat with my little host brother, Yuta, in the waiting area while we waited for the rest of our group to finish up their bath. Then we drove home and ate out *wagashi* with the rest of the family, then we all went to bed, feeling all relaxed and clean after our bath.

Day 7: 7-27-17

Agenda: Kyoto-- *Torokko Train, Arashiyama, Kinnkakuji*

Today is a day I was really looking forward to -- Kyoto. For this day trip, we had to get to the YIC a bit earlier, so the morning was a bit more rushed, but still went very smoothly. For these day trips, they rented a special van -- the a brand new Toyota Vellfire. And I have to admit it was a very nice car with plush seats that reclined and fancy mood lights on the ceiling that changed color. Today, we got to go with Ohno-san, Yoshimizu-san, and Wanibe-san. Our first stop was towards the edge of Kyoto and it was a rail station on the *Torokko* line which takes you on an old train through scenic valleys with lush forests and flowing rivers. We boarded the train easily with our reserved tickets and proceeded on our journey. The ride was very nice except for a screaming baby, but the scenery was truly amazing. The amount of water and green was mind blowing for such a small area. We continued on this train past our desired stop, so we had to do some course correction resulting in a little time browsing for souvenirs in the station.

After Yoshimizu sent us new directions, we headed out and met him in the bamboo forest area of Kyoto. We then walked back through the forest to a very nice shopping street where we bought way too many things. While we were there I bought two bottles of plum juice, plum jam, plum hot sauce, customized chopsticks, and some traditional Kyoto sweets. After our shopping spree, we headed off to lunch where I

enjoyed a *katsudon* with soba and miso soup. After our lunch ended with coffee as usual, we got back in our Vellfire and began driving to *Kinnkakuji*.

Once parked at *Kinnkakuji*, we entered the complex that housed the structure. Besides being very crowded, it was a very memorable experience seeing one of the most renowned structures in Japan. The area that *Kinnkakuji* sits in is more than just the one pavilion, it has many smaller shrines and temples along with an extensive system of gardens, carefully tended by the large grounds crew which we could see working. I believe at this point we were a bit behind schedule, so we somewhat rushed out of there and back to the car to be back on time for our host families to pick us up.

If I remember correctly, this was one of the only true slow nights with this host family. After the days excursions, it was nice to just relax for a little and have some alone time, which I took full advantage of.

Day 8: 7-28-17

Agenda: Host Family Day -- Osaka

This was our first host family days, and I really didn't know what to expect. We woke up fairly early to get in the car and head out to downtown Yokkaichi right next to our hotel where we stayed our first night. We then waited for a family friend who lives in Osaka to pick us up from the parking lot. Once he arrived, we all piled into the Alford, the classier brother to the Vellfire, and hit the road. But not for long because we needed to get drinks and snacks for the ride from a Family Mart. Once that was settled, we really hit the road. When we were driving, we decided on going to Osaka Castle as our first stop that day.

As we got closer to Osaka, the traffic got much worse, but we ended up getting off quickly and finishing the journey to the castle on normal roads. We began walking towards the castle and you can suddenly see its massive walls looming out from under the canopy from the park that surrounds it. We climb the large set of stairs that gets you up to the level of the first wall where there are several vendors selling *takoyaki* and soft cream along with the various picture opportunities. After having both *takoyaki* and soft cream, we entered the castle, which now is purely a museum. The inside has been reconfigured in way that displays various objects that are related to the castle and the battles it was involved in. If I remember correctly, the castle is eight floors, each with its own theme or time period associated

with it. We looked at each floor finishing on the top and looking out over Osaka and all of its modern buildings. At this point, everyone was overheating and wanted to get out of the castle, so we quickly left and headed back to the car to head off to lunch. For lunch, they decided to take me to an Aeon mall where we had something similar to *okonomiyaki*. After that, it seemed like everyone was tired and kind of done for the day, so we just looked around the mall until it was time to go home, at which point, our friend took us to the train station and headed on his way.

As usual, the train was right on time and we boarded without an issue. The ride was slightly longer than expected, but the train seats were very comfortable, and we were talking the whole time so it went quite quickly. By the time we got back to Yokkaichi it was probably around 9:45, but we were getting hungry. We went to the supermarket to get a quick bite and I opted for some frozen ramen and from what I'm told is a local shop who produces it. We ate our food when we got back to the house, got ready for bed, and went to sleep to be ready for what they had planned for me tomorrow, which at this point was a mystery.

Day 9: 7-29-17

Agenda: Host Family Day -- barbeque and Kuwana Fireworks

Today was the first day that I got a chance to sleep in, and even then I didn't take full advantage of it, waking up around 9:00. No one really told me what was going on today, so I was just relaxing in my room because it seemed like nothing was going on and no one had said anything to me, but then people start showing up and I have to quickly get dressed and get out of my room. It was a barbeque with some of my host father's work friends and families. There was a lot of really good quality seafood and steak, so I made myself useful and began to clean squid. They wanted to see what I could do, so I ended up making them some calamari, and everyone really liked it not really having it before. Then after that they wanted me to cook some of their steaks, so I did one with a simple herb and garlic butter and the other on the open grill with some olive oil, salt, and pepper. Everyone really enjoyed it. For the majority of the barbeque I was cooking.

As the food started to go away, I sat down and we started talking about plans for later in the day. They wanted to buy me a *yukata*, so we headed out to buy one from a little clothing store near the house. However, they didn't have any shoes that fit me, so we ended up going to Aeon and buying a pair of flip flops that looked Japanese enough to wear with the *yukata*. By that time we got back from shopping, it was getting close to the time we needed to leave at, so my host

grandmother helped me put the yukata on and then Kaori, Kentaro, Yuta, and I were off for Kuwana.

When we arrived in Kuwana, we went to a friend of the the Imai's that lives just a few blocks away from where the festival was. We spend some time at her house for a little while where we played some table tennis and I discovered the wonder of *mikan* jelly. After about half an hour, it began to get dark, so we walked down to the river to watch the fireworks. There were already thousands of people all lined up along the river watching the fireworks shoot off from barges in the river. All around us there were little vendors selling *yakitori*, *karaage*, *yakisoba*, and *kakigori*. The fireworks went on for several hours, all of which were very beautiful. Japanese fireworks displays are very different to American ones in respect to the intensity, quantity and duration -- are are greatly increased. As the festival wrapped up, I got some *karaage* and we went fishing for some goldfish. I didn't fully understand that the scoop was made of paper, so I broke mine almost instantly, but I did get a good fish in the process which is now swimming in one of the Imai's fish tanks.

We walk to back to the friends house and say our goodbyes, then jump in the car and begin the drive home. What originally was a 25 minute drive there mutated into a two hour trip back home due to all of the traffic. We got home after everyone fell asleep in the car, and all I could do was slip off my *yukata* and go to sleep.

Part 2

7/30/17 -- 8/8/17



- ❖ Coffee Break
- ❖ Ise
- ❖ Asunaro Railroad
- ❖ *Uchiwa* factory
- ❖ *Shoyu* and *miso* factory
- ❖ Nagoya
- ❖ Legoland
- ❖ Iga
- ❖ Seki Juku
- ❖ Shopping in Nagoya
- ❖ Yoro Falls
- ❖ Grand Yokkaichi Festival

Day 10: 7-30-17

Agenda: Coffee Break, Yokkaichi Ceremony, new host family

Today was the business day. It was still rewarding, but it was much slower paced than previous days. We began by meeting and checking our presentations one more time before people showed up for the coffee break. As people began to arrive, we retired to the conference room where we waited to be called out to take our seats at the front of the room where the coffee break was held. We then had an introduction done by Yoshimizu-san and Wanibe-san and then the coffee break began. We did our presentations and answered questions. Since we were ahead of schedule at this point, we were talking to the guests longer than expected, which led to a sort of lull and lack of energy, but we met some very interesting people that I never would have thought would have come to the coffee break such as some people who live in England with relatives in Yokkaichi and an teacher that was from Long Beach years ago.

After we finished the coffee break, we had a chance to regroup again and have a drink and a nice bento lunch before we got in the van and headed over to the Cultural Center for the Yokkaichi 100th Anniversary Ceremony. Honestly, this was a long, dry ceremony, but we were warned about that beforehand. Despite this, it was still interesting in the way that we got to see who is politically important in the region.

For the most part, it was just names being read off in between long, political speeches while waiting for our que to bow.

After the ceremony, we got in the van and traveled to the Aeon in Yokkaichi to go and purchase *yukata* for the festival during the upcoming weekend. It was decided that I would not wear *yukata* and instead wear *jinbei*, a more loose, two piece outfit with short sleeves on both garments. We selected out clothing and had a chance to look around the mall for a few minutes, but after that, we needed to get back to be picked up by our new host families.

When we got back, our families were waiting and all we needed to do was bring down our luggage. I got in the car with my new family, the Mori family, and we headed to pick up my host father from a car dealership. We then went to the supermarket to get stuff for dinner and breakfast the next few days. That evening, my host mother prepared *harumaki* or spring rolls, which were nice and light despite the fact that they were fried. Accompanying this was a cabbage salad and some cups of a pickled seaweed which wasn't exactly to my liking due to its bitter nature. After dinner, me and my host mother talked for quite a long time and then I hit the wall and she recommended that I go to sleep. So I showered, went into my room, which was the *washitsu* and unrolled my *futon* and slept comfortably until the next morning.

Day 11: 7-31-17

Agenda: Ise Jingu, Oharai Town

This morning was the only real change in routine for the whole trip. After having a simple breakfast of cereal and yoghurt, we left the house and went to the train station instead of the YIC. At the station everyone was already waiting for me, so as soon as I got out we headed into the station to board the train that would take us to Ise. The train was a mid range one, but was still very comfortable and clean, especially for the short trip that it took to get to our destination. Once the 45 minute train ride had elapsed, we exited the station and got into taxis that took us to Ise Shrine. We began approaching the main *torii* that marks the entrance to the shrine and Wanibe-san demonstrates how to bow before passing below the gate. Once inside Ise, we walked along the bridge that crosses the holy river, which we proceeded to walk to, first stopping to cleanse our hands in the traditional style, which Wanibe-san once again demonstrated how to do. At the river, we admired the clarity and the fish within it, took a few pictures, then continued to walk to the main shrine. At the main shrine, Wanibe-san taught us the process for praying, which we mimicked, and then we were instantly off again following at a clip behind Wanibe on our way out of the shrine complex.

Once outside of the shrine, we took a right turn and began to enter Oharai Town. The first stop we made was lunch where we were

treated to a large wooden bowl of *tekone zushi*. I enjoyed it, but it wasn't a huge hit with the rest of the group. After lunch, we moved onto shopping, which was a nice change of pace. I was able to buy a nice wood carving for my family and a souvenir for my host family. We were then taken to a *kakigori* shop that is very popular where we were given *matcha* ice with *mochi* and *anko*. Again, I was very fond of it, but it wasn't a huge hit with the rest of the Trio. We then visited a toy shop which was very busy, so we didn't spend too much time there, but they were able to point out a few traditional Japanese toys.

By the time we had finished shopping, we still had some time left, so we took a brief stop at a Snoopy cafe where we had hot chocolate with Snoopy marshmallows. Then it was time for the train. And boy was this a train. We were treated to the *Shimakaze* line which is a luxury line. We had a room for our group with a table in the middle where we could enjoy our Coolish that we bought at the station. Since we were feeling classy, I pulled out my iPad and put on *Jiro Dreams of Sushi* since it seemed to fit the occasion and our guides had not seen it.

We returned to Yokkaichi where my host mother picked me up and took me back to the house. I unloaded my stuff, then she wanted to take me out, so herself, Karen, my host sister, and myself went to a bookstore and electronics store to browse before returning home for dinner. That night we had gyoza, salad, boiled octopus, and some cucumber and rice. A nice, simple meal to end a day full of food.

Day 12: 8-1-17

Agenda: Asunaro Railway, Hinaga fans, shoyu and miso factory, Yokkaichi Archives

Today was a very interesting day in the sense that we got to learn a lot about the history behind Yokkaichi and it's some of its industries. We began the day again meeting at Yokkaichi Station and boarding the Asunaro line. The thing that makes the Asunaro line special and an attraction on its own is that it is one of the few railways in Japan that runs on a narrow gauge track. The narrow gauge did make the train much more slender and much more rocky than I expected. The train was used as the mean of transportation for our morning tour where we examined aspects of the Tokaido road in Yokkaichi. First, we rode all the way to the end of the Asunaro line and inspected a train in a repair yard to see what makes these trains special and see the narrow track width in person. Then we jumped back on the train using our day passes and proceed up a few stops to get off and see where the actual Tokaido road useds to run through. Our guides for that day were provided by an organization in the city and they showed us a temple that was on the route as well as one of the only cedars left on the route in Yokkaichi.

We then proceed to the fan factory where we were shown how traditional *uchiwa* are made as well as the different types and their significance. After we concluded at the fan factory, we walked on to a soy sauce and miso factory where we were walked through the process.

This day was an especially hot one and the humid conditions inside the factory did not help matters. Nevertheless, fighting through the heat and the strong smell, we looked in the massive wooden vats used to ferment the soy sauce and observed the miso making equipment while learning about the process of seeding the mold and learning how much effort it takes to produce it without machinery.

We then stopped for lunch at a hamburger steak restaurant where we were glad to be out of the heat. After the lunch break, we got in our van which Ohno-san had brought for us and went off to visit the Yokkaichi Kusu Archives, which is a house that is several decades old that houses various artifacts and shows what yokkaichi was like more than 100 years ago, at least for the wealthy town leader that lived there. We explored the residences many rooms and gardens along with the adjacent museum that featured more of the sensitive articles that can't be left in the main house. It was quite an experience, especially for someone who likes older Japanese buildings.

After we concluded at the archives, we returned to the YIC and waited to be picked up by our host families. Today was almost unbearably hot, so I was completely exhausted. As soon as I got in the car I began to crash and by the time we got back to the house, all I wanted to do was lay down. We had dinner later that evening, a meal similar to the night before, and then I was off to bed quite early to try and recoup for tomorrow's trip to Nagoya.

Day 13: 8-2-17

Agenda: Nagoya -- SCMAGLEV and Railway Park, Legoland

Today began as another early day so that we could get the train needed to get us to Nagoya. Our main guide this day was Wanibe-san who lives in Nagoya, so he was a very competent guide, especially in all of the stations that we passed through. First, we took one train to Nagoya, then we took a subway to the part of Nagoya that we wanted to be in. Thankfully today, the railway museum and Legoland are right next to each other at the same stop so we didn't have to do any crazy transfers. After leaving the subway, we quickly walked over to the railway museum which was just across an elevated sidewalk that came out of the station.

We entered the Railway park and immediately began our expedited tour. We spent a few moments in the first main exhibition room with the nicer pieces of the collection designed just for display, and then moved into the main showroom with many of the different evolutions of the *shinkansen*. We were able to go into a few of these trains, but due to time constraints built into the schedule, we didn't have the opportunity to spend too much time here. After we had looked at what we had time to see, Wanibe-san was off at a clip again and we rushed after to lunch at FurnitureDome across the way.

Despite the setting, the lunch was good and everyone enjoyed their selection. We then began walking to Legoland, but on the way we

went past a football stadium that Wanibe-san goes to and he saw one of his friends who is the coach for the team that plays there. So we had a brief unscheduled meet and greet. Then it was then time to head off to Legoland. They did a very good job on Legoland; it was very clean and easy to navigate. Thankfully, the park wasn't very busy, so we were able to do whatever we wanted virtually without any wait. We began by going on the observation tower ride to get our bearings and decide what we wanted to go on. We decided our first ride would be the medieval themed rollercoaster. We then followed that up with a stroll through the area with all of the miniature lego builds which depicted the major cities in Japan such as Tokyo, Nagoya, Osaka, and Kyoto's *kinkakuji*. Our second and last ride was a submarine ride where we just got to sit back and observe some fish as we went around which was very relaxing.

After we decided to leave legoland, there was a consensus that we wanted ice cream, so we scoured the area around legoland trying to find an appropriate shop. Eventually we found one and took a little break with our matcha-vanilla swirl ice cream cones. After this brief respite, we headed back to the subway which took us back to the main station in Nagoya where we were treated to a massive stationary store where I bought way too many notebooks. Then, it was back on the train to Yokkaichi. Once home, I was again very tired, but never the less, we had fun having *okonomiyaki* for dinner before having our swiss roll cake and me constantly falling asleep.

Day 14: 8-3-17

Agenda: Iga and Seki Juku

This day was bound to be good as we left the YIC with our favorite vehicle -- the Vellfire. We arrived earlier than usual today to account for the moderately long drive to Iga and the light traffic we encountered along the way. This car ride was one of the most beautiful ones we saw on the trip. Since Iga was the home of the ninja, it is hidden away inside of a valley surrounded by mountains that are covered with lush cedar forests and other foliage. The clouds and the sun at that time in the morning made the sky glisten. It was truly magnificent.

As we descended into the town, we begin to see images and characters of the ninja, so we know we're getting close. We finally parked in a lot that is for Ueno castle, the large fortress that dominates the landscape in that area. We walked down the steep path to the ninja museum across the street where we were shown to a room in which we were given ninja costumes to wear that day. I opted for the classic black, which if I had known that we were wearing them outside of the museum, I would have chosen differently. The costume consisted of seven pieces, the body, the pants, the sleeve ties, the leg ties, and a headband. Needless to say, it was a bit warm under all of that black polyester. Once we were geared up, we were shown around the museum which had a few things about the ninja, but mainly focused on the big, culturally important objects in the region and their relation to

the ninja that used to live there. This was a brief tour, that ended in us taking pictures outside of the museum in our costumes then proceeding across the street to go see Ueno Castle.

At this point, we had picked up a new guide that showed us the castle and the “fun trail” that was around it. We took this steep walk up to the castle border where we saw the remains of the outlying buildings such as the firewood area and other storage space. Although smaller than Osaka castle which I saw earlier this trip, I preferred this castle because it seemed more realistic to what a castle would have been like. Unlike Osaka Castle, the building hadn't been reconfigured to fit a museum, instead all of the display cases were placed organically inside. These cases contained a wide variety of artifacts, mostly focusing on military memorabilia, but never the less still a very good collection of antique armour and uniforms. One of the best parts was the top floor which had a large set of paintings on the ceiling which we were told are worth more than the entire castle its self. Another fact that we learned while walking around the exterior of the castle was that the walls of Ueno Castle are the second highest in Japan next to Osaka Castle. Once we had finished with the castle, we got back on the trail and moved to the ninja village where we first experienced a demonstration of hidden features of a ninja house to let them escape or be undetected during a raid. After that presentation, we got to go into a little museum which had a very good collection of ninja weapons, tools, clothing, and other daily items which had been modified to serve a more specific purpose -- killing or evading. This part soon ended and we were moved on to the

ninja show which was fun, yet painfully obvious that it was a ploy to get you to buy their merchandise. Either way, it was an enjoyable half an hour that did somewhat accurately depict what ninja combat may have been like. With the end of the show, our time with the ninja had concluded, so we walked back down to the museum to change back into our regular clothes and go off to lunch.

After our lunch at the Tomato and Onion, a sort of family restaurant that had a very wide selection of food, we got back in the Vellfire and went off to Seki Juku, one of the stops on the Tokaido road that is still greatly unchanged. Seki is a very quiet little town that has many inns for travelers on the *tokaido* road, but now it is more of a destination for people to come and visit. The atmosphere was very nice, but the streets were almost deserted which did create an eerie feel especially with the looming clouds threatening to rain. We met a new guide here who lives in the area and she showed us a few very interesting things. The first thing that she showed us was a large temple in the middle of the city that was built for the emperor and still is one of the emperor's temples. Sadly it was all blocked off so we couldn't exactly see inside of it well, but it was very gold in that large chamber. Continuing down the street, we went to a little museum that was an old inn on the road. It is now owned by the municipal government, so it is very well taken care of. It was very moving to be there for some reason. I felt a compelling urge to live in a place similar to that, with that gracefully simple style that is Japanese architecture from around the 1800's. It hurt to leave this place, but we had to get back to Yokkaichi,

but first we stopped and bought some *wagashi* for our guides and host families.

Back on the road, we were heading back to Yokkaichi and the whole time I was staring out the window admiring the scenery. Once back in Yokkaichi, my host mother picked me up and we went back to the house where we spoke for a little bit, I watched her make dinner which tonight was *ebi furai* and salad. Then after sampling the *wagashi* from Seki, I went to bed. This later part of the trip, I was feeling very tired...

Day 15: 8-4-17

Agenda: Host Family Day -- Nagoya

My second host family was much laid back then my first one, presumably due to the age of their children, but don't take this as a complaint, because at this point in the trip I really appreciated the more laid back time after our busy days. I got to sleep in a little bit more today, then I just sat around for a little bit resting up. At some point, I was told what our plans were for the day, and we headed out to Nagoya to go see a big Buddha.

Driving into Nagoya, it was easy to see the Buddha. It is truly massive it must sit at least 30 feet tall, and that's on top of a large pedestal. We didn't go to see just the big Buddha though. There was a whole temple complex around it which we looked at too. One of highlights was the fact that one of the temples most sacred statues, the sleeping buddha, was open today so that the monks could clean it, so we had the opportunity to enter a room that is only open twice a year. Talk about good timing right?

After my host mother and I poked about the temples a little more we went back to the car where Karen and Kein were waiting to get away from the swarms of bugs within the temple gardens. We then went to a large arcade shopping center where we saw another temple, and did some window shopping along with having a few things to eat such as a boba drink and a few pieces of *karaage*.

After browsing the arcade for a little bit longer, we decided to head back to the car and return to Yokkaichi. On the way home, we stopped at the store so that I could buy the ingredients needed to make tacos again. This time, my host mother was kind enough to show me where I could buy tortillas this time, so I didn't have to make them, which was very nice not to have to do. We got back home and i started getting dinner all ready and we ate when my host father got home from work, since this host family day was on a friday. After our dinner, we enjoyed some more ice cream and then, as per usual, I crashed and went to bed.

Day 16: 8-5-17

Agenda: Host Family Day -- Hiking, Costco, Kuwana

Today began with everyone sharing a simple breakfast together, once again western style. After finishing breakfast, we got in the car and began heading off to an undisclosed area to apparently go for a hike. We were driving for quite a while, and I'm still not too sure where we were in relation to Yokkaichi, but the area was once again very green and beautiful. I don't even think my host family knew what they had taken us to, as Karen was wearing heels for a hike, that was about 3 kilometers, all uphill, and very wet which made the path incredibly slippery. We began climbing up the path to the waterfalls, all along the river that the waterfall creates. It wasn't a huge river, but the actual falls, the *Yoro* falls were truly magnificent. Once we reached the top, we took a few pictures and looked at the little shrines that are scattered around the pond at the bottom of the falls.

We began our track back to the car, which for some reason took us higher up the mountain and then down a precariously old foot path, that with the rain that had begun to fall a few moments earlier, became very dangerous. We finally exited the path, walked back past all of the same little shops, and back to our car to head to our next destination. For some reason, once I found out that they had Costco in Japan, I wanted to go, so we did. After a fairly substantial drive from the falls, we arrived at Costco, and it looked identical to the ones here. Even the

inside was configured the same and so was the pizza which we ate for lunch. After browsing a bit and getting some food for the house, we headed back to Yokkaichi to unload and take a little break.

Once we had a little time to relax, we began to get moving again so that we could go to Kuwana for another festival. This time instead of being fireworks, it was centered around noise, and was said to be the noisiest festival in Japan. We walked around for a little, had a drink and some fried things in a small bar, and went back out to the festival to see all of the festival floats. These floats were adorned with large drums and other noise making implements such as gongs, all of which were manned, for the most part, by children. As it had gotten dark while we were in the restaurant, the candles on the floats had been lit and it make the whole float look, and sound, even more ominous than it did before. After browsing the many street vendors and having a *tamago senbei*, we walked back to the car, and headed home, finally arriving around 9:30. We then had another small, light meal at home as the kids didn't come with us, and then we were off to bed to rest up for the next day's activities.

Day 17: 8-6-17

Agenda: Grand Yokkaichi Festival

Today, surprising began later than usual as we didn't need to be there until around one in the afternoon, so we we spend the morning doing a little bit of shopping at a local store that has a variety of Japanese objects, especially products relating to sake because I needed to get some last souvenirs. While we were here, I got a few gifts for my family and friends in the form of little bags and a set of sake cups. It was a very interesting store run by a an older woman. It had a very nice wooden interior that reflected traditional architecture. They had some very interesting products that I have never seen before such as sake rice already treated with *koji* along with various types of sake based products, one of which, was sake ice cream.

After shopping, we returned to the house where I got my stuff together and my host mother took me to the YIC to get dressed for the Grand Yokkaichi Festival, which is the largest festival in Yokkaichi. Before we headed out, we got dressed up in our festival garb which he had purchased the week before. They asked me to wear a gray-blue *jinbe* which, although a bit itchy, was much cooler than the several layers the women had to wear for their *yukata*. The teacher who was there to help us get our clothes on used us a demonstration to a class at the center that offered free yukata to foreigners in Yokkaichi so that they could experience the festival in traditional clothing.

We finally went down stairs where we met briefly with the Environmental Summit kids, who we quickly left because they were being taken around on a tour similar to ones that we had on the first week, which didn't seem appealing to do again. So we left and began to browse the various stalls that make a festival a festival, purchasing first little characters made out of a chewy pancake batter, then *karaage*, finishing off with a calpico from a vending machine. A little while later when we neared the central square, after visiting Yanaya again, we got some fried cheese sticks in *shoyu*, barbecue, salt flavor, then walked over to look at the festival floats that were passing through the square. Since we are special guests, we were given the opportunity to sit in the VIP tent, in which we sat behind the mayor and leaders of the prefectural government.

While in the booth, several floats came along, but we ran short on time, so we had to leave before *Onyudo* had a chance to enter, but we did get a chance to see him later this day. We began walking down a less occupied street where we met up with Yoshimizu-san who then escorted us back to the YIC for our host families to pick us up.

Once I was reunited with my host family, we walked down the large arcade that was crowded with festival goers on our way to the restaurant where we were going to have dinner. The highlight of this meal was definitely the chicken wings which were simply done with salt and white pepper. We also had some very good pork cooked in kimchi, and my first Japanese curry. After dinner, we walked back to the station,

but first went into the supermarket that is close by where I bought some food to bring back to the states which included some curry base and caramel. I also got some food to eat over the next few days, some of which was soda flavored *warabimochi* and some *mikan* jelly.

We boarded the train, and after a few minutes, we were on our way back to the area of Yokkaichi where they live. We walked to the house through the quiet, humid, evening at which point it began to drizzle which foreshadowed the events of the next day. When we got back, Kein went out to the convenience store down the street to get some ice cream for us, and he brought me back a soda flavored Coolish. We sat up and watched the news for a little bit getting some information about the typhoon that was coming in that evening before heading off to bed.

Day 18: 8-7-17

Agenda: Soap factory tour, return home report with mayor, typhoon

Today began with the clouds looming above us threatening to begin pouring down at any moment. We arrived at the YIC without any issues, but once we got there we could tell today was going to be different than either of us had anticipated. Before we left, we met in the conference room, which for this late in the trip was a bit strange. Here they sat us down and told us what the typhoon meant. So, since the typhoon was expected to hit in the afternoon, all of our afternoon and evening activities were canceled. For the day before we left this means no port tower visit, no bridge tour, and the most saddening part, no *sayonara* party.

After some sadness in the conference room, we were off to our first stop which was the soap factory. We were sat down in a conference room there and were told about the soap making process, which was expertly translated by Tanaka-san. After the introduction in the conference room, we moved out onto the factory floor where we saw all processes from mixing the soap, to pouring it into molds, and then cutting it into chunks. We then moved upstairs to observe the drying rooms followed by a demonstration of how the bars are wrapped and packed. Once we had been shown the whole process, we went back to the room down stairs and were given a large bag of samples by the factory manager, and he explained in detail about what each of the six

products did, and how to use them. Just for reference, we were given some laundry detergent, bleach powder, a body soap bar, a facial soap bar, and some other miscellaneous products.

We said our goodbyes, and got into the van as it started raining. Our next destination was lunch, which was in the restaurant where the sayonara party was supposed to be held in. Yoshimizu-san wanted us to see it, so despite the pain it caused to go there knowing what was supposed to happen there, we enjoyed our meal and the company of each other as the establishment was fairly empty due to the typhoon. After lunch we headed back to City Hall for a brief meeting with the mayor which only lasted five minutes. It was a nice talk, and we quite liked the typhoon outfits all of the city hall employees had on.

We quickly left city hall, but we still had a several minutes before we needed to head back to our host families. So we decided to go to the Aeon one last time to go the hundred yen store. As it turns out, this is also the place where my host mother works as an english teacher. On the same floor as the hundred yen store. We bought our few last things that we wanted, then Yoshimizu-san, beginning to worry about the typhoon, so we rushed back into the parking structure to get in the van. Due to the typhoon, we were taken back as a group by the YIC staff, so our host families didn't have to leave. As we were going along, it was raining harder than anything I had ever seen before and the water level in the river was visibly rising, transforming from a peaceful meandering stream, to an overflowing river gushing out towards sea.

I arrived safely back at the house to find only my Karen and Kein there. Shortly after I got back, my host father returned, and then around 5:30 my host mother arrived. Since there is little to do in the house, we all sort of just did our own things. I watched some TV while packing my case to prepare for tomorrow's departure. Around seven o'clock, we sat down for dinner, which was a kimchi *nabe* with beef, vegetables, and ramen noodles. It was very good, but it was still summer, so we were all sitting around the table sweating eating the hot and spicy dish. After dinner we spoke a little as usual, had some of our Costco goodies and continued to do our own thing. So, I finished packing and tidied up the room a little bit as it had gotten a little shifted around with all of the packing. We said our good nights, and went to bed for the night. However like the other days, the story doesn't end here. Because of the typhoon, there were weather alerts that would be going off on our phones. So, between about eleven at night and 5 in the morning, six of these alarms went off, which didn't allow anyone to sleep easily. Thankfully for us, these alerts weren't for our area, so we were able to sleep safely at least if not soundly.

Day 19: 8-8-17

Agenda: Send off and return home

Today was a day filled with a joyful sadness because it was time to leave all of the friends we had made over the past three weeks. I woke up and finished my packing, collecting the remainder of my articles. We then all piled into the family car and headed down to the YIC, where we were somewhat confused about where to go. No one was waiting outside, so we decided to park, but then we were directed to another building by Tanaka-san who had come out of a different building to collect me. In the municipal building opposite to the YIC and city hall, we were greeted by all of the host families from the trip along with all of the guides that we had from city hall and the YIC. We had a few minutes to say our goodbyes and take our last pictures with our host families. Our host families each gave us a small gift after we had given them the a bouquet that the YIC had graciously provided for us.

After taking one last, large group picture, we headed out the front doors where the city bus that we arrived on was waiting to take us back to the airport. Since our visit to the port tower was canceled due to the typhoon, we did a quick drive by to see it, but other than that detour, there was little delay in our trip to the airport. Once we arrived, we got out with all of our luggage and went to get it checked. After we dealt with all of our baggage overages, we were off to have one last lunch with Yoshimizu-san, Ohno-san, and Tanaka-san. We went upstairs to

the restaurants where we settled on a nice chinese style restaurant where we enjoyed ramen, spring rolls, and some soup dumplings. Once lunch concluded, we went to a nearby Starbucks and had some coffee with our friends for the last time. At this point, we were somewhat behind schedule, so we rushed down to security and got in the que. As we were being processed, all three of our guided were stood behind the barricade watching us. We cleared security, waved back to them and watched them walk away, concluding our formal trip in Yokkaichi.