

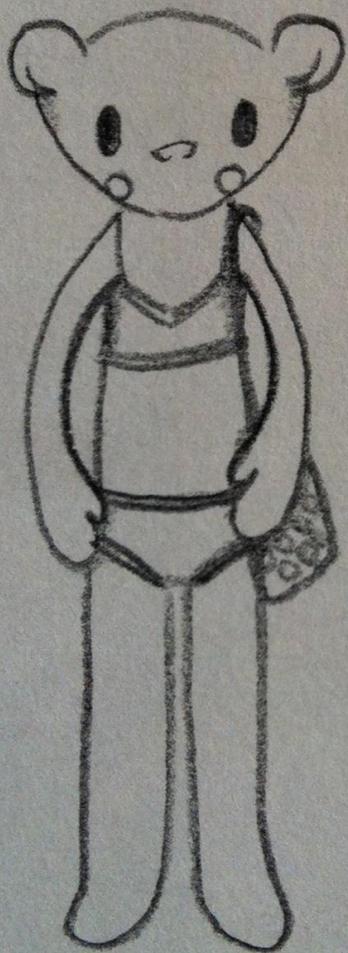
愛に時間  
が無い:

日本で話

No Time  
for Love:

Stories  
from  
Japan

by alissa robot





*Living in Japan for one year teaching English at a Junior High School... what could happen?*

愛に時間が無い：日本で話

**No Time For Love: Stories from Japan**

First PDF Edition, January 2014

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## **Part One: First Term**

### **March 2012: Pre-travel in Portland, Oregon**

*After returning from three months of vagabonding in East Asia, I was in a strange place in life. I had decided to move to Japan to teach English.*

*I started an online TESOL certificate program and applied for teaching positions online. Within a couple weeks of returning I had accepted a position starting in spring. My next mission was to save money and minimize possessions until moving in March.*

I'm working out details about what I'm bringing but it's mostly decided. I just fake packed & will bring my normal big backpack, plus a roly suitcase that's not those giant ones, but pretty big. If it was any bigger I wouldn't be able to lift it at all. It seems like not much but totally everything I need.

I gave my brother a couple boxes to store so I just have things I'm bringing with me or giving away at this point!

## March 19th-April 2012: Changes in Kanto Region, Japan

*In March I moved to Japan. The first five days were spent in a training facility, followed by five days in a hostel, waiting for my apartment move-in date. I began working in April.*

When I got to the station where the training is, the only person around was an older man with one crutch. He offered to help me find where I was headed then offered to help me with my luggage... while limping around with his crutch.

I will be working in Saitama prefecture in a city called *K* (where the training is). It's a convenient small city.

I have two more days of training and we all stay in one building at the training center. Today I'll find out which school in *K* I'll work in. I hope to find a place near there.

We don't have internet access often and have training all day, but the company recommends an apartment near the school. If I want to find a roommate or home stay I need to research myself, so I asked my friends if they know someone living here.

Tonight when we finish training we'll go to *an all you can drink restaurant* for a company party.

I signed the contract for my apartment today. I'm going to work at a middle school. It should be about 15-20 min. by bike. The apartment won't be ready until Friday so I'm staying in a hostel in Tokyo with some other teachers from the training. Everyone is really nice and friendly.

I got to enjoy today a little - there were a couple trees with open *cherry blossoms* already. I was walking along *Sumida River* and it made me think of Portland so much! The river is the same dirty color and similar size, and we have *cherry blossom trees* planted by the river also.

I'm excited to find out about my new town soon... but for now I want to just relax and enjoy my vacation in Tokyo. I feel like I need to be doing something here like finding the work clothes I need. I'm too ambitious sometimes. Today I was looking at a map online about my new place and the distance to the school where I'll work. There's a bridge over a small river, but it looks like a freeway. So now I'm scared about if I can safely ride a bicycle on that bridge! There's not any convenient way to get to the school by train. I'm excited to see it - there's a big park with a lake and some bike paths really close to the apartment! I had imagined going to a place like that on the weekends.

By bicycle it's about 3.7km. I'm used to riding my bike this distance for working in Portland. I like riding a bicycle to work because it's free and good exercise. Also it's not stressful, but instead it makes me feel more confident and relaxed commuting by bicycle. It's a little stressful only if it's a busy street.

Today I saw a *grandpa* walking with a cart full with three chubby cats!

Tomorrow I'll leave Tokyo and go to my apartment. I need to buy *futon* and some other things, and I hope I can get a *mobile phone* this weekend.

I have an address but I want to check on how to format it the right way for letters before I give it to anyone. They didn't offer to show us the apartments first or anything and it was really weird. I think I'm the last one in this hostel. I'm waiting for a company to pick up my luggage and deliver it to the apartment, because it's such a pain to take it on the train, up and down stairs, like I did on the way here. I have to stop by my company on the way and pick up paperwork, probably buy a bed there because it might be the closest place that sells them, then go to the apartment office to get keys... so it was worth it to have things shipped over.

*April*

I really want to get a phone but *it's a pain!*

I was just talking with a shop clerk in *SoftBank* (a popular Japanese phone company). I want to buy a smart phone because I don't have a computer. My visa is for one year so she said *she can't do it*, I can only buy a prepaid phone.

About *K*, at first I was concerned that the people didn't seem friendly. Actually if I ask any question then everyone is super nice. I think maybe they don't know I can speak a little Japanese, so they're scared to try to talk to me using English. So it's similar to Tokyo. It's very convenient here, but where I'm working, it's just a lot of rice fields. I have a *bike* now, so it's easy to get around.

*I have an iPhone!* (^-^)/

I got it from a shop in my town just speaking in Japanese with employees, which was probably difficult for them - one was using his phone to translate some things, which usually didn't make sense in English. But I got an older phone *because it was free*. It was so expensive for the newest version but I don't care about that.

I got a place to live a week ago, got a bike, and finally got a phone today. It's kind of an ordeal to do anything because I'm bad at Japanese. Maybe imagine a three year old trying to take a bus to the city office and register for health care alone. Kinda like that. They're always like, "Oh you don't have your apartment contract with you now? Go get it and come back later then." Stuff like that.

Anyway tomorrow I'm going to Tokyo to meet a friend then going to an awesome park to look at cherry blossoms and eat snacks with a bunch of new friends from my company. And I start working on Monday!

I wish you could be chilling out with me now. I'm drinking a ginger highball from a can and watching Japanese TV in my apartment. Today was my first day working, but we just had a ceremony where we did a lot of bowing. No classes for me today.

I got a Dutch style bike that I ride everywhere and it reminds me of Amsterdam. That's what everyone rides here and they call them "mama-chari" because moms use them to get groceries and use baby seats and baskets. (Mom's Chariot)

I can't believe I haven't emailed you yet. It's because I finally got a phone on Friday. If you have Skype you can call for free when the time zones align for awake time.

I got an iPhone so I can have the internet and GPS. Which reminds me. I've never used the GPS. Yet. Yesterday I went to a peach blossom festival in a park nearby. There were around 2000 peach trees and that many adorable Japanese children.

Did I tell you there's a *Daiso* (*Japanese Dollar Store Chain*) a 15 minute walk from my apartment? There's a big heart shaped lake next to my house and a huge natural area but I haven't been yet. The people at my work seem really nice.

School started on Monday but I don't have classes this week, just the opening ceremony and getting to know the staff. They are really nice and easygoing. Some of them can speak a little English so we can ask each other some simple questions. Today I got to talk with some students. It was cute because the girls were curious but really nervous to say hello.

My school staff had a party tonight and there was so much yummy food! We had fish, soup, *sashimi*, *ebi* fry, *udon*, and fruit. My coworkers are really nice and funny. I didn't understand some funny things they did but I just follow along.

*Peach blossoms* have been open for a while here. It's getting warmer so *cherry blossoms* also opened this week. It's perfect for the first week of school. But it's raining so the petals are already falling.

Tomorrow I'll go to *Omiya* to study *Japanese calligraphy*. My teacher is visiting from America and recommended a teacher here for me. She'll be at the class tomorrow.

My address is kinda long but Japanese addresses are basically retarded. As in you need GPS and to ask three people to help you find something the first time.

Today was rainy all day. But after my calligraphy class I went shopping since there's a lot more in that town. I saw a shop that has tons of panda stuff & thought of you. The funniest thing was in a convenience store I saw a cell phone decoration that's a tiny bottle of MSG in case you need some while you're out! I was surprised, but only a little. There was a panda on the little bottle (the company mascot). Everything here is cute.

Because I'm only the foreigner assistant teacher, it's not a lot of stress for me. I don't have a homeroom or work late like the other teachers. So I feel bad they're busy and offer to help, but there isn't much I can do. Because I can speak a little Japanese, I talked with the staff and they seem curious about me. Next week I'll introduce myself to students in class and the 2nd year teacher has a game she wants to play. I already talk with the students a little and they seem obedient. That's why working in the countryside is good. The 3rd year English teacher said their English ability is low. I can understand they don't have motivation.

It's a small town with lots of rice farms and a huge natural space and heart-shaped lake nearby. I rode my bike to the lake yesterday and lots of people were fishing. It was beautiful but made me tired. A lot of that natural area looks like swampy reed land. At least it's sunny way more often than in Portland!



Today I had only two classes and it was fun. I eat school lunch in the staff room and the lunch lady always offers me some leftover food to take home. Today I got broccoli from the school garden and *udon*. We also get some sort of *snacks or souvenirs every day*.

I think in the countryside some students know they'll work on their farm after middle school or high school. But some students will be passionate to learn. In Korea I had middle school students from the countryside ask me what to study at university or say, "I want to go to Harvard." I was impressed because it doesn't really happen in America. Teachers can encourage students to have a curiosity about another culture, but we can't force them to be motivated to study any subject. Middle school students like to be social, so maybe their motivation is making foreign friends or listening to foreign music.

None of the teachers in my school have been to America. One went to Australia for ten days in college. To me the most obvious benefit for Japanese teachers of English to study abroad is better pronunciation. They have to consciously work to pronounce the sounds V, Th, R, L, etc. I think they focus too much on the grammar. The students benefit more from simple conversation practice or listening to native English music. A lot of the grammar taught here is commonly misused by Americans anyway. And it's easy to understand English with grammar mistakes if the pronunciation is alright.

A couple of the eighth graders on the basketball team are really friendly and like to practice using English with me. They wanted to be sure I learned their names so every time I see them in the halls, they cover their name tags (even though I'm not so great at reading Japanese) and demand, "MY NAME!?" I like to pretend I don't remember or mix their names together to make them angry then say just kidding I remember!

The first year middle school students are my favorite because they aren't trying to be cool. They aren't scared to try or bored with grammar yet. The other students still make me laugh. Today while we sang a Beatles song together, a few boys only sang the last word from each line. And it was really loud!

Ah, my students are cute. I'm just frustrated because I have to register my address, but I can't get to the office when they're open because of work. English makes me laugh every day. Today I saw orange juice called "Plussy" and shampoo called "Nudy" something. I started a calligraphy class in another town last weekend. I made friends with high school twin girls in the class and we sort of did language exchange. I need to find out where but there's a free Japanese class I can go to in my town. I could proly meet interesting people there.

In school I pay to eat the school lunch, but I think it's only about \$2.50 a day. That way I can try different Japanese food every day. I go grocery shopping near the station or little shops here. For breakfast I always make tea and *miso* soup and some protein.

My classes have been fun. The older students are probably bored with studying grammar. We sing a song in English for every class. It's the Beatles for two classes and third year has a song by Queen. (*I Was Born to Love You*) I had never heard it before.

I can have conversations in English with the Japanese English teachers I work with. They speak English better than I speak Japanese of course. (We use Japanese sometimes but I don't want students to know I could understand them if they used Japanese.)

I was surprised at how much the teachers use Japanese during English class to be honest. I think our first year teacher does a good job of using English and translating it for them as needed. The focus is not so conversational after the first year. Just English greetings are done in each class.

I'm lucky because my classes are only 30-35 students. *Junior High Schools* here have a limit of 40 students per class. The largest classes I've taught before were 15 students! So it was really different for me and I have to try to speak loudly.

School lunch was too much like what you told me about camp food. Two fat slices of white bread with some choco spread, a tiny baked mac & cheese, a bowl of sort of minestrone soup (the best part), a bowl of

Japanese style Jello cubes, and cow's milk. We get cow's milk every day. I was surprised that we only get rice four days a week. The other day we eat bread or noodles. The Jello is actually agar agar made from seaweed, so I'm hoping that had some fiber. I was seriously thinking "where's the vegetables today?"

I have fun hanging out with students but... I knew people who teach in Japan often feel isolated and have a hard time making friends they can really talk to. I have a few Japanese friends and American friends from my company but they all live in other towns. I've seen other foreigners here that are probably also teachers... just gotta talk to them. They seem like weirdos even compared with me. Part of it is that I don't go out much other than to buy food because I don't get paid for over a month. I don't ever go to bars normally but I kinda want to check out one after getting paid. It's called "pub sweet hearts." There are a bunch of cute people around my age so I'm happy because I really thought everyone was 60s and older around here. Definitely quirky people who seem cool exist so just the language barrier will be difficult.

I see so many people with tiny dogs in their bike baskets. It's so cute. One looked like a tiny polar bear so I told the owner and she was laughing. I can imagine you riding around with *B* over here. Just so you know what to wear if you come here, now beige and navy are trendy. Gross! Of course shorts over tights is still cool. I just wear black dress pants or a skirt and a blazer over sort of normal shirts every day for work.

Oh yeah, today one of the eighth grade boys said "sex" as I walked down the hall. He thought he was so cool and his friends were laughing. I'm happy it wasn't during class because I totally laughed too. But they couldn't see me. After school I went to art club and the girls made things for me and tried using English. They helped me make snowflake style strawberries out of paper.

I don't feel like I'm good at it, but I enjoy helping the students and being in a Japanese environment. I'm getting settled into my new life here but today I had a funny thought. Everything in my place seems too new. It's lacking in aged or handmade things like a ceramic vase that had been broken and glued back together. I guess it hasn't been long enough to balance out yet.

I hope to make some friends who live close by soon. Everyone at work is great though. Lots of tiny shops (produce shops and tofu shops...) and rice fields and temples everywhere. I love it.

One of the teachers I worked with is pregnant and she left this week and we got a new teacher. She introduced herself to the classes then had them do an English introduction with their name and something they like and dislike about English class. It was mostly "I like song. I don't like test. " Then the loud boy in one class today said "**I like Alissa teacher.**" He's so funny. I have to try not to laugh out loud every time in that class. It wasn't too awkward or anything since the one male English teacher has two special ed. girls following him around and saying they love him all the time. They're adorable. Anywork is fun.

The school is surrounded by rice fields with baby rice plants right now.



## May 2012: May Sickness

*There is a saying in Japanese which translates to "May Sickness." As the school year and most new jobs begin in April, by May the newness has worn off and it starts to feel routine. Early May has several holidays within one week, known as "Golden Week." After this point, the new students and employees tend to have trouble adjusting and call it "May Sickness."*

They secretly put yams in things here so I ate it by accident in school lunch yesterday. Such a weird thing to be allergic to. My face is itchy and my joints hurt.

I found a baby section at a mall in my town and was just laughing my head off. It seems like baby stuff is the same except they have chopsticks here. The funniest thing I was laughing about was a onesie that's basically a shrimp costume! So weird but rad.

I didn't know before but all schools have different names for their special needs students' class. Those students usually attend normal classes but also have some classes where they can get special attention. This is really common in America because lots of kids are diagnosed with attention deficit disorder or have behavioral issues. I think there are only seven students in this class at my school. One of them has Down's syndrome but she's sweet and functions really well. I think they're fun because they are more innocent than typical self-conscious middle school students. I like middle school but if I was the real teacher small classes or university students would be more fun I think.

It's so weird, I live in Japan!

Hopefully I'll travel around Japan on breaks once I get paid. I stayed in a hostel in Tokyo that has other locations and they do month long work trades to stay there. Thinking about doing that to travel cheap. Not that I know what's next after the one year visa/contract, but I love it so far. My goal this year is just improving in Japanese. It is a process but being immersed in the culture is the fastest way.



*This is what baby bamboo looks like*

I like the kids at my school because they make me laugh every day. A lot of the students are already taller than me. We draw Hello Kitty and Pokemon on their worksheets to keep things cute. I go to art club sometimes and they help me make *origami*. We started working on a zine together. And we sing The Beatles in class a lot. I also get to help in one special ed. class a week and it's really fun.

I hear luminous thunder outside so there must be a storm coming. I hate living alone but having a private space is valuable in Asia as you know.

I feel like I get paid to learn Japanese now.

I have to dress a little bit nice here but it's like a costume or uniform. My school is laid back so some people wear basically suits all the time and some people are more casual. The PE teachers wear track suits unless there's an assembly. Depends on what they do and personality. So you can dress your own version of business.

My bike is purple which I kind of hate. His name is Crayon.

Okay time to read comics. In Japanese.

Today was so busy, finally I could register my new address here and get national health care.

I have a Japanese calligraphy class I go to Saturdays so I did that, then I went to this thrift store. It's called Book Off and some stores are mostly comic books. The one I went to is huge and also has clothes and everything else. Like tons of golf clubs and surfboards. Anyway, I just wanted to get the next book for the comic I'm reading. It was about \$1.25 there but new it's \$5. And just walking around laughing at cute kids and old ladies with tiny dogs.

Then I went to this language cafe for sort of an interview. It was a party they have a couple times a month but they also interview people during the party. That way they can see if you're hiding in the corner or the center of attention. It's close to my Saturday class and I was thinking about working there just Saturday afternoons. Kind of far to go after school on weekdays and I don't really want to work Sunday. Good to have one totally free day. So it seems cool but sounded like they wanted me to be available more. They have conversation time in a cafe or small English classes like 8 people I could teach. Sounds fun. Basically I just need to meet people and do social stuff.

It's sunny a lot more than Portland but the rainy season starts next month.

I'm jealous that you went to Disneyland and live near the beach. But I like my town. There are art museums I need to check out!

Today we had a BBQ at my school! The students made *curry rice and yakisoba* with *teppan grills*. It was raining but we used tents and it was fun.

Today I took a picture of one of the student's shoes. My school is a middle school so it's 7th, 8th, and 9th graders. The oldest kids think they're so cool. I'm not sure if they get in trouble for coloring their school shoes, but only two of the boys who think they're badass did. This one's kinda cute though. It has the character for love and they think it's cool to write in English I guess.



I found out a lot of the teachers I work with drive around one hour each way to work. I'm happy I live so close to my school.

It's getting warmer but a little rainy. Last night there was a thunderstorm that woke everyone up at around 2am because it was so loud. I joined a free Japanese class in my town. It's a bunch of older retired men who are basically tutoring us.

It's super fun for a job. I'm learning how to do normal stuff here like pay bills at an ATM in the post office. It's already been about two months so I think the year's gonna go by fast. I'm learning more Japanese every day. I had this thought yesterday that it would be so rad to have a bunch of my friends visit here. Except that it would be difficult because I'd be translating for everyone in my baby-level Japanese. It would be cool if you could experience being here instead of just hearing about it.

One thing you don't need to experience is scary earthquakes. I'm used to them from living in LA but today there was one nearby that actually scared me. It was super jolty and stuff fell over. The big Northridge earthquake near LA a long time ago is the only time I remember being scared during earthquakes before today. Mostly they're just kinda distracting.

My city ALT person keeps telling me to be careful when it gets really windy. There's a lot of rice fields around and I guess people fall into them sometimes. Scary.

I know I'm improving in Japanese, but I still sound like a baby. I'm happy a few of the ladies at work are patient and talk to me in Japanese a lot.

I'm hoping to travel around Japan and possibly visit Taiwan or someplace rad and less expensive next spring. I keep wondering what I'll do in ten months. Just gotta focus that I'm here because I want to learn Japanese. I learn new words every day. And in a context sort of way so I'll remember them.

I have stupid hayfever or something so I got Hello Kitty face masks from *Daiso*.

I also have rashes on my hands and behind my knees, so I looked online and saw something about food additives similar to MSG causing rashes.

Did you get to see the solar eclipse this week? I was talking to a coworker about it and she called it *kinkan* so at first I didn't understand what she meant. (*Kinkan* means *cumquat* in Japanese but is literally *Gold Crown*.)

I got a job teaching English in a middle school in Japan so I could get a work visa and live here for a year. I had been thinking about doing this for too long. It's the fastest way for me to learn Japanese, plus the work is fun and I can save money. I'm enjoying the food as well of course.

I saw giant amounts of cottonwood fluff today near the river I cross to go to school. I bet that's why I have stupid allergies this week. I went to the doctor to get medicine for my infected toenails finally. Yay healthcare! It was like \$25 including medicine.

Last week I went to watch badminton club practice at school. I guess there's only a girls team though. They were practicing some hitting over the net or serving while I watched. They were cute. The students at my school are really funny as I'm getting to learn about them.

The second year boys on the basketball team were also in the gym practicing. A couple of them are really excited every time they see me. They thought I was there to play with them. Before I left I agreed to take a shot because they really wanted me to. I missed so they insisted I try again, and I got a basket. They acted really impressed and said the ALT last year was really bad at basketball.

I saw something strange on the way to the store tonight. There was a guy wearing an orange jacket and holding a red light saber air controller wand walking down the other side of the street. He was walking fast and had something metal that he was hitting every metal post he passed with. So sometimes it was a nice thud (maybe that was wooden stuff?) and sometimes it was a loud annoying ping sound. At first I thought he was some sort of official dude testing something. I'm pretty sure he was just conducting personal research.

It's already hot here. I don't understand how long my food will last before going bad in weather like this. Too used to always refrigerator weather Portland. I also think I need to learn how to cook a whole new way since my kitchen is way smaller than the one in my tiny house was. I think not cooking is the easiest way but I want to learn to make cool Japanese stuff.

Today at recess some girls asked if I had a boyfriend. When I said in America they all went, "Ooooooooh!" and made me laugh so hard. Then they were trying to ask something about getting married but didn't know the English. One girl pointed to her ring finger and said, "Bride?" which was also super funny. How does she know that word? So I said not yet and they were like, that's right, you're eight. (When students ask me how old I am, I just say eight. They usually nod in agreement as if to say, Oh, okay. Then they realize I said EIGHT. And they usually laugh at me. Sometimes they ask when my birthday is.)

*K* has weekly ALT meetings, but I've been only once. It takes 90 minutes to get there and I normally have classes that afternoon. *T* is one station away but we never hang out. I went to *izakaya* Friday with my area coordinator who lives in my town. None of the other *K* people came, but I met a few ALTs who work in the next town. She invited a few Japanese friends and it was fun.

The local dentist who does student exams speaks English and always wants to hang out. I heard his wife is a good cook so I told him I'd love it if she wants to have me over to help her and learn how to make something.

I haven't really figured out working at the *eikaiwa*. I got a call (Japanese conversation) about working on a Sunday next month but I haven't worked there yet.

Mostly I hang out alone and go for walks and bike rides. I like doing free things. I study *calligraphy* on Saturdays a few times a month.

But yeah, no real friends here yet. It's tough because of the language thing. I don't actually have much interest in meeting other foreigners. I want to make Japanese friends in my town. I think there's only one other girl in my building so I wrote her a letter in Japanese but got ignored.

I covered the ugly fake wood table with a silly tablecloth, but I love it now.

At school I usually have time to study for almost an hour every day. I only help in 3-5 classes a day, which is actually more than other schools use the foreign teachers.

## June 2012: Rainy Season

*Although not totally comfortable with living in another country or communicating everyday needs, within the school, things are generally understood and predictable.*

Meetings are boring so I've only been to one ALT meeting. They're optional hang out and laugh about work meetings for the most part. But we can leave work early if we go. Apparently everyone except me goes every week. They also live much closer to the city hall than I do.

Yesterday I found a [zine](#) shop in Tokyo by accident! It's called "free paper" and is mostly free magazines with ads like for traveling or fashion. They have a zine library and a small section of zines for sale also.

I finally went to this super cute cafe I had seen but it was closed every time I went by. I actually got to talk with a guy working there in Japanese for a while so that was fun. He's been to America a couple times and knows a little English. Apparently the English teachers who work in my town go there sometimes but I've never met them. I work in another town and for another company.

Anyway I really liked it there, so a good place to hang out and make friends. A bit expensive, but they make **adorable soy lattes**.



The bills took a sec to figure out, but you pay them at an ATM at the post office or in convenience stores so it's not hard. I needed employees to help the first time. The post office has it's own bank and I go there because my bank has no nearby branches. **Yesterday I tried to register these utility auto pay forms at the post office and the guy laughed at me. He said I had to go to my bank to do it.** But I realize that makes more sense... I think someone assumed I used the post office bank and told me to register the auto pay stuff there.

I saw some awesome grass huts made when the river gets high and pushes these reed grasses around trees. They look really cool like tents or caves. I thought maybe homeless people were living by the river but I'm pretty sure they're made by wind and water.

I'm "working" for an English cafe by going to international parties and hanging out with people who want to practice English. And eating snacks and drinking. Only sometimes on weekends.

I didn't really notice which channels I watch on TV. The last time it was a show where celebrities (actors from the drama "*Hotaru no Hikari*") ate in a fancy restaurant and guessed the prices of the food they ordered.

Everyone here always looks so clean and professional. Sometimes I feel like I have to buy new clothes so I don't look homeless. I'm not used to spending money on clothes!  
It's already hot here!

When I got to see my friend from CA when she was in town I talked a lot! So I know what you mean about not having people who know you around. I never thought of it that way, but people who get you are refreshing. It's nice to skip the small talk.

Work continues to be entertaining. **Today a small snake was found in the men's staff bathroom and a 15 year old boy asked me, "lose virgin?"**

Yesterday one of the teachers found a little snake in the men's restroom. A couple of the guys caught it and put it in a plastic bag. Then they were pretending they were gonna hide it in the school nurse's desk because she wasn't in the teacher's room. It was super funny. But they took it to the opposite side of the baseball field to let it go. I heard they have small poisonous snakes here, but I haven't looked into which ones. Might be good to do before exploring in tall grass near a river.

Today I got to check paragraphs the kids wrote about a building they liked in Kyoto, where they went for their school trip. They saw super old temples and things. It was cool because I learned about the architecture there.

Lately I feel like staying in Japan for another year, maybe another town, but I haven't decided yet. We don't have a tea lady at my school, but the nurse, part time lunch lady, or any teachers bring tea when there's a guest. Yesterday the nurse was busy and had me bring tea. She even coached me on what I should say. It was pretty awesome.

My brilliant plan to wake up early has totally backfired. I suck at waking up early.

What I'm doing isn't really teaching at all. I'm an assistant teacher so I get to model pronunciation and help kids fill out worksheets. I get to make bingo sheets with new vocabulary and cute characters like Hello Kitty. I learn Japanese while they learn English.

In every class we sing a song in English. I don't get to pick the songs, but a lot are by the Beatles. Last month we sang All Together Now in seventh grade classes, which is already hard to listen to without laughing. The Japanese teacher changed "can I take my friend to bed" to "can I take my friend to bay" which made it funnier. At first I thought it was a typo. They aren't gonna know what that means anyway...

Right now we're singing Take Me Home Country Road, which is twangy but alright; the kids basically only sing the chorus then yell "yesterday, yesterday!" at the appropriate time. Eighth graders have We are the Champions, which is cool and has a part that always reminds me of Weezer, and ninth grade has Yesterday Once More by the Carpenters. I had really never listened to them before. **I always get chills or feel like it's somehow magical getting to sing these songs with classes of about 35 Japanese kids. I wonder if the musicians ever imagined that would happen.**

**I am in Japan. It's surreal.  
I'm so glad I finally decided to try living abroad.**

Yesterday I realized I'm getting stressed again. I told myself it's okay to be stressed. After all I've been working a lot and can't understand anything anyone is saying! My brain is overwhelmed at trying to learn Japanese and being surrounded by cute things. I finally had a free day today. I looked at hair dye at the store and it was all different shades of black.

Summer vacation is in five weeks. I have August off and no plans. I need to come up with something almost free to do to keep myself occupied.

Last night there was a typhoon and all the rivers are overflowing. It's hot and sunny today though.



I love to see the kids who are always excited to talk to me. Mostly guys on the basketball team or girls in art club. Even some first years can't communicate in English yet, but get big smiles on their faces when they see me. I feel like this is meaningful work, which is why I enjoy it. I miss making stuff (besides bingo sheets with *mameshiba* on them) though.

I'm now expected to bring tea when I'm available in the staffroom. The principal has a million plants everywhere plus a "*medaka gakkou*" (school of fish) and a ton of orchids in his office. He used to be a science teacher. I look out the window during class sometimes and he's in his galoshes planting something else.

It's crazy how much faster I learn Japanese here. And how much time I waste admiring all the cuteness everywhere. Today I watched centipedes walking which looks so cool!

At my school there are a couple of the creamsicle goldfish. They're mostly white, and one totally has an orange mustache.

For summer vacation I'm thinking about doing the month long hostel work trade on Kyushu island. Today it was pouring all morning - the rain woke me up a couple times. It wasn't bad on the way to work but **a car totally splashed a whole puddle into my face**. I was pouting and laughing about it at the same time. Rain gear is awesome.

Yesterday the Vice Principal said I have the mind of a Japanese woman. I thought that was funny. It's because I brought tea for him and some people he met with (without being asked to).

I just had a bubble tea float. It was a little bizarre. Very over the top. I just wanted bubble tea - I was thinking that earlier today, and I don't think I've seen it in more than one place in Japan. This one was a bunch of ice, English milk tea without sugar, tapioca, and soft serve ice cream. The cup says "You will have valuable times with this beverage. Enjoy to drink and valuable times."



*Everything is cute*

I walked instead of taking a bus today because it's already summer! On the way I went in a pet store with lots and lots of kitty cats and tiny kittens. Aw!

Tonight I'm getting paid (not much) to go to an international party and talk to Japanese people. I feel lucky to live here. But, I'm always busy and stressed out, so I'm not sure if I'll get used to working all the time.

I can do a hostel work trade in an area with hot springs. I'm having a tough time deciding about it and buying plane tickets. I keep changing my mind. I don't have much going on for August if I stay in town. I guess there is a fireworks festival.

I finally checked on the flight and dates, just waiting for the okay from the hostel manager, then I'll get tickets. I still feel indecisive but I'm making myself take the steps to go because it sounds better than staying in my sauna-apartment all month.

I'm planning to apply to a graduate program in architecture and finish zines over summer break. Between hiking, swimming, and *onsen*. Sounds so rad.

There's a lake and rivers here, but not okay to swim in. My school and my town have pools, but I have a secret tattoo on my wrist, so swimming around here isn't a good idea. Covering it got old a long time ago and it just stresses me out. I haven't been into having a tattoo for a long time anyway.

I have way too many zine ideas, like questions the kids ask me. A lot are inappropriate but today a student asked me where Michael Jackson is from. I don't know but he was living in California so I went with that. A lot of the time kids ask me questions in Japanese and I don't completely understand. One boy asked something and I only understood *kimochi (feelings)*. I said, "Hm? Yeah I like kimchi, do you like kimchi?" Turning everything around to be about food is my funny joke.

My skin is having issues with living here, but everything else is good.

I'll decide later if I want to go back to Oregon and to school, but applying makes me feel better than having no idea what to do next spring when my contract ends. That would start in a year. If I don't go to school or continue teaching or vagabonding in Asia, California is probably where I'll end up.

I have an awesome schedule being the foreigner, so I get all the school holidays the students have. I have six weeks off for summer, minus two days of company training. So I'm going to the beach. There are so many places I want to visit in Japan, which is why I wanted this job. I don't have paid days off though, so I'm working out details for a work trade at a hostel for the summer break.

I remember having a conversation with you & L years ago about how people like us should just travel and have time to think and write or make things. Not feeling rushed is so important to me for some reason.

I really like my job here but it's already feeling mundane. Maybe I adjust too quickly and get bored. Those kids make me laugh every day though. For example, today the first year teacher was grading tests and showed me an answer. They were asked to translate "Excuse me" and this boy wrote "*I am a woman.*" in Japanese. I hope he was just trying to be funny because he didn't know the answer.

I wish I had a teleportation machine so we could hang out. **Living here is an amazing experience, but I hate how hard it is to make friends or hang out with people.** I have friends in other areas but everyone works a lot and I feel like my social life is dying. I hang out with Jr. High kids and school staff or talk to people online. I guess I meet rad people whenever I work in the English cafe, but haven't hung out with any of those people yet.

Lately I made myself plan ahead so I do something for my long summer vacation instead of moping all alone in my apartment. I have a potential three day trip planned that I can do any time. I also just booked a plane ticket to a southern island in Japan! It will be a super long vacation because I'm doing a work trade to stay in a hostel there. They have a four week minimum. So I'm gonna have a routine there of waking up slowly, working a few hours, hiking, swimming at the beach, and going to hot springs. I'll do some day trips

on days off and on rainy days I can work on all my half finished zines. I moved here so I could learn Japanese, travel around Japan, and eat Japanese food. So I need to just go for it.

Today a student wrote "mangazine" on his bingo page but as I was correcting his typo I realized what a rad word that is!

I'm staying busy with work and learning Japanese... it's fun, but I miss hanging out with people I can communicate with. Tomorrow I'm probably going to karaoke with other English teachers in my town, so that should help.

## July 2012: The End of the First Term

*Starting to meet other foreigners in my town, traveling in Japan, and getting some confidence in Japanese.*

I didn't have insurance in America for a while, since I was laid off from my job three years ago. The cost of insurance and medical care is much higher in America, and we don't see doctors as often. Here, I have national health care and I've already seen a doctor twice. My school nurse insisted I go because I had a rash on my hands. I get it sometimes but it was much worse and so itchy! It's *atopy* (Atopic Dermatitis). Maybe from humid weather.

One of the reasons I love language is that it becomes easier to understand the culture when I learn how to express something in another language. Japanese is not confrontational and more suggestive, like "Why not go...?" or "Let's go..." being more common than the American way: "Go..." English sounds very demanding in comparison. We don't often say things like, "Let's all try writing the answers." to students but I think it sounds more kind and encouraging than, "Do your work." so I really like that about Japanese culture.

Today and tomorrow my school has no classes because the sports teams are having matches. There aren't many students around and it's quiet. I want to watch the students play but there are no games at this school.

One thing that still makes me laugh is the first year English teacher's name. He's fresh out of college, all the girls like him, and his name is Mr. *Ooishi*. I know it's totally different, but *Ooishi* sounds way too much like *oishii* (delicious) to my brain, so it makes me giggle. I'm pretty sure kids call him *Oishii sensei* too. We have a 13 year old student with Down's syndrome and she totally stalks him which I think is super funny. He's really cool about it which is good.

I'm not sure about staying for another year, but the thought of doing something more normal in America sounds boring. I don't have to choose yet! Learning Japanese from here is way easier than in America.

Maybe you guys have met him, but I randomly met a strange guy living in *K* who's from *SF* and was interested to go to karaoke. He's maybe 150cm and his mom is Japanese. It weirded me out because he just started talking to me in English at the station.



*The Rainbow Bridge between Tokyo and Odaiba*

I'm not too tired today and already finished my classes. Just working on scheduling for summer and speech contest practice.

I got home really late though! There was a different train change not showing on the schedule I checked. After that, I didn't realize I shouldn't change trains again- it was the last train, and I got off! So, I was angry at myself at first and thought I'd need to take a taxi. I realized I could go back to another station and take *U* line from there. So it was okay but took way longer!

I learn a lot of Japanese from living here which is great. Today I had a free period and attended a *Japanese* special education class. I helped students write *the readings* for some new vocabulary they were learning. It was fun.

Because it's my first time living in countryside, it's been interesting to learn how people are here. In Osaka, strangers would just start talking to me in English.

I have the opportunity to work 15 hours a week in a hostel to stay there for free. For me, I have a difficult time to go on vacation and do nothing but relax. So I like working vacations. And this way I can get to know the area well because I'm going for so long.

Okay, gonna bitch for a sec... This week I've already seen at least four little boy boners under PE shorts, and I promise I intentionally try not to see them. I just escaped to an air conditioned shopping area because my apartment is a sauna. This *ojis*an (uncle/older man) said how are you, so I was surprised and tried saying hi. He was saying something I didn't understand and touching himself so I took off. Gah!

One 15 year old at my school is always being disgusting. But it's to all the teachers, not just me. It started with him asking me, "Lose virgin?" then the next day thrusting and asking, "Play sex?" At least he's trying to speak English so I didn't really want to discourage that but... At first I wasn't sure how to react besides laughing at him. I've since decided it's okay to hit him on the head because it's what everyone else does. He's like the puppy that's growing up and can't help humping everything. Maybe every school has one.

It's been good living here, learning Japanese more efficiently, actually having a job so I can save money, getting to see more of Japan...

But for the first time, today I felt like I wanted to go home. And then **I had to think about where home is**, and I just felt like I missed friends in Portland. But this is home for now. It's the longest I've been out of America so maybe that's why. I don't really miss American stuff or Portland's gloomy weather. I just miss hanging out with friends.

Oh my goodness. I'm on a train and totally forgot I was supposed to change trains at the last station. Oops. No wonder I'm always late, I'm a space cadet!

Hmm you too eh? I wonder if we could file for sexual harassment? I didn't even think about that, but then a student said it after witnessing some rude behavior. I think because they're minors, all you can do is put them in your *comic* and make fun of them.

It's a lot better today because we had some rain and there's wind. I don't think a fan would help that much. My place is like typical cheap apartments here- not insulated, no awning over the window, only one window... and I don't understand using the air that well. It automatically turns off after three hours and on the low setting doesn't seem to make a difference. I use it for an hour or two if it's way too hot still at night. Anyway I leave soon for the rest of the summer so I'm not gonna buy a fan just to use for a week or two. I left the window open a little today and the curtains are still closed. The window is on the east side, which I like because the sun wakes me up early. But, it's also hot out by 5-6am.

I found tortilla chips last weekend! So I got an avocado yesterday and that cheered me up a little. It's not easy to find some foods here, but I don't really miss much.

A lot of things here don't have air con like LA does everywhere, plus I ride my bike to work (well everywhere) so I'm being careful to find cool places and drink a lot. I put a bottle of water in the freezer and every night put it frozen in my bed to keep me cool at night. Too hot to even use a sheet! So different from Portland! I could use my down comforter all summer there.

Yeah I knew summer and winter in Japan is tough. But I don't feel sad. Same as in Portland, I don't sleep as well during summer because the sun comes up at around 4am. I rarely sleep more than 4-5 hours straight. Makes me more grumpy and sleepy when it's hot. And usually I don't sleep later than 8 on weekends because it's already too hot. Maybe I'll turn the air on and sleep late for summer vacation if I don't have anywhere to go. I can't seem to go to sleep earlier though. But totally enjoying living here otherwise. For the last class, I watched the 7th graders singing a song in the gym as a competition between the three classes.

Something about working with Korean students at camp was really great, in a different way than working here. It was more challenging and therefore more rewarding. Still enjoying being here very much though!

In school the 8th grade teacher chose a Diana Ross song for the kids to sing this month. It sounds like it should be in a cheesy Disney movie. It puts us to sleep and is so high that maybe half the girls and none of the boys can sing it. One boy just squawks like a bird trying to get his voice to crack and hit those notes, which is obnoxious but funny. Another boy was trying to make it more fun by singing "*banana gyunyu*" (banana milk) which really made me laugh. This kind of thing happens so often I always think I need to do

something with these funny stories. But also so often that I don't remember to write them down or anything.

I miss S and friends there, but living abroad is something I decided I just had to try.

Today between classes, a student yelled, "Alissa!" and when I turned to face him, he showed me a big beetle - almost as big as his hand. It's the kind with the long "nose." It scared me because I've never seen one before. He gave it to another student who put it in his pocket and walked away.

I realized that in the last year I traveled a ton and only paid for two short domestic flights because they were with discount companies and way less. I got to go to Korea for free because of teaching English and everything else was with frequent flyer miles. So please don't decide things aren't possible because of money.

I feel so sleepy today. But also like I need to work really hard and do something here other than teach English. I'm going to organize and paint and plan out my zines and other vacation projects. I hope at the hostel I end up doing zine workshops and English conversation club to meet all the interesting people staying there. I have this idea that you and N and I should have a blog or ebook teaching people how to live for almost free and travel/vagabond all over the world. I don't know how many people didn't even know about hostels or Couchsurfing. That's the best way to experience a place.

The area I go to most Saturdays is so crowded. I'm glad I live in the countryside. I need some alone time! I feel like I've been at camp for four months but with more free time. Being around kids is always entertaining.

Yesterday I had work at the school and language cafe, but I got my period and it was super hot out. I decided to just power through and have a good attitude. I also went to the bank to take care of things plus wrote a report for my company on my phone while I was on the train home. Then I had a long bath and my thought process was, "Should I cut my hair at midnight? Okay!" So funny, I just didn't over-think anything.

Anyway, I guess I have at least eight more months in my contract and go in and out of, "what am I doing next?" But trying to enjoy now. A quality most kids have is not being able to think too far ahead, and I noticed this happened when I moved around a lot last summer. It became where will I sleep tonight if anything. But now that I'm more settled, I'm thinking about the future. Anyway, back to kids, they just do stuff. They don't think too much about why or making it just perfect. And they don't often do things that take more than 20 min. or they get bored. At least 5 year olds. So I like aspiring to create without over-thinking that way. And enjoying now without thinking about later.

I just heard a muzak version of The Neverending Story song in the grocery store and it made me think of you.

How is the baby and everything? Is B (7 years old at that time) starting Jr. high next year? How long have I been gone for? ... I didn't really sleep last night.

I just came to another part of Japan today. When I was arriving on the bus it looked so beautiful with a bay and steep hills filled with lush little trees. There's a ton of hot springs in this area and it was surreal to see steam coming up in a bunch of spots. I also saw a dinosaur themed hotel painted in camouflage and an African safari zoo close by. Should be an interesting visit.

I miss hanging out with you. I can't make up my mind about anything, but especially about boys and what I'm doing next year. I decided to go with it. Who said I have to decide about anything besides which delicious food to eat or going hiking or swimming. It's never gonna be perfect anyway so I gotta stop procrastinating. I'm finally gonna blog about last summer while I'm here. Gonna have a hot spring bath and sleep.



## Term 2

### August 2012: Beppu Arabaito

*Arabaito is part-time job in Japanese. Although I wasn't technically doing a part-time job (it was a work trade) this is what my students and school staff called my summer excursion.*

I like living in the countryside, but... being here in Beppu, in a small town-ish city, it's more convenient for sure. I wanted to experience the real culture of Japan and be forced to speak Japanese to people every day. I also wanted to be in an area close to trains and convenient. So for that reason *K* is great. I'm 15-20 minutes walking from two stations - a JR and a *T* line, so I have options.

I stayed up all night cleaning my apartment and packing the night before I came here, then I shut down the power since I'll be gone for so long. **I hope my apartment doesn't spontaneously combust from the heat while I'm gone.**

Anyway, Beppu is aaaawesooooome! I've been here two nights and haven't adventured out enough yet. Taking my time since I'll be here a while. Life in the hostel is nice, being surrounded by new friends all day. There's an *onsen* inside the hostel and a million more in the area. It's like prehistoric times with steam rising all over the place.

Today I went out to find a place for late lunch because I work until two. I couldn't find the place I was looking for, but found a cute shop with hand made stuff and zines. Then I went down a street with lots of closed shops but found a tiny thrift store. I looked at things outside for a minute and the lady working started talking to me using a little English. I was surprised and asked her how she learned English. She invited me to come into the shop and sit down, and we awkwardly talked for a while, mostly in Japanese. It was awkward because she kept asking these really tough philosophical questions that I wouldn't know how to answer in English. Like what percentage of self satisfaction people have in America vs. Japan, if I even understood that correctly. She would randomly start laughing but I wasn't sure why. Like maybe I sounded weird or said stuff wrong in Japanese. Anyway, she recommended a good place to eat in her neighborhood. It's interesting how some people are really curious to talk to me and most just ignore me because they're scared I'll make them try to speak English or something.

By the way this town is rad and I've barely seen anything yet. Gotta go do stuff. My coworkers are amazing though. I could just hang out in the hostel all day with them. I love hanging out with people from all over and teaching each other how to say 'mosquito' or something in our languages.

I just found a rice vending machine. This one is about ten pounds of rice - they use kilograms of course, for about \$20. I love that it says "rice communication" on the bag, whatever that means.



I wanted to go swimming at the beach here everyday, but today I finally made it to the water for the first time. It's a bay and I can't see a sand area around here. So sad. I might have to take a train or a long bike ride to a swimming spot. It's cool to be at an ocean though. I missed it.

It's a cool town anyway, lots I want to check out and good people at the hostel so I'm happy I'm here for a long time. The work is easy but I get tired and hot. Just making beds and stuff.

I haven't gone to *onsen* outside of the hostel yet. There are so many here. It's difficult to choose which one to try. The ones in this area are mostly very small simple *onsen*, similar to inside the hostel. We even have a *foot bath* here.

I'm cleaning staff 15 hours a week in exchange for staying here. It's good exercise and I'm learning how to clean I guess. At least getting faster at cleaning. When I live alone I don't clean enough so maybe I'll be more motivated to clean my place better. Or something.

The staff at the hostel are really family like and super kind. We cook together and help each other with work if we finish our work early.

Had dinner with the staff family here. The people come and go, but everyone is lovely. Went to a shrine today and got a good word in the Japanese style. Like, "about traveling: anywhere will do." I prayed to be more bold and just go for it while I was there. At shrines they have a huge clunky bell you ring before you pray. Kinda cool. So I was ringing it and praying that I don't wanna be scared to make noise. I liked that shrine, I think I'll go again while I'm here.





Yesterday I went to a white mud bath *onsen*. The pool is outside so you can see the beautiful view. It was great.

Today I went on a long bike ride to a monkey (macaque) park.

It was kinda cool and I got there in time to witness the intense yam snatching time. There's two big clans of monkeys that show up separately to eat at the zoo area after scavenging in the mountains all day. They wait patiently... then the staff runs through there with a wheelbarrow spilling a path of yams. Then the monkeys go for it.

They have cute red buns with little sits bones so they can sit in the trees. I was surprised to learn they're totally not into monogamy. I should have known that before but I was a little disappointed.



I discovered the Japanese family style restaurant drink bar, where for a few bucks extra you can drink machine coffee drinks, tea, juice and soft drinks all you want when you order any food. Plus you can stay a long time and no one minds. It's the ideal hangout for writing but fun to go with friends also. Way cheaper than going to a cute cafe which is something like \$5 a drink, but those have real coffee.

Commuting sucks. I like how now I just go downstairs to work. But riding a bike is cool too. Might suck this winter!

On the bus. **We just passed a place called Cudly Dominion.** What??

It was already too hot by 7:30 this morning. Mostly humid.

Watching some bizarre game like small basketball hockey on the Olympics in the bus. Last week I saw womens soccer where US beat Japan.

By the way, I ate some raw horse in Kumamoto. It was pretty good too. Kinda chewy.

The horse meat was one of those things I had the opportunity to try and it's a lot cheaper in that city than if you get it in Tokyo. I wasn't willing to try chicken feet in Hong Kong though. Doesn't even sound good. I felt super weird about eating horse though. I guess not much different from eating beef but it was a really good flavor. Like more lean healthy and almost sweet taste. I eat raw fish so it's not weird for me, but raw fish is not my favorite Japanese food at all. I had amazing noodles last month called *Tsukemen* for the first time. It's thick fresh ramen in one bowl and the other bowl has delicious broth with a juicy fat slab of soft pork. You can add hard boiled eggs or more meat to the broth if you want. You dunk the noodles into the broth and eat them. So good. I've never seen it in America but I bet it wouldn't be that tasty anyway. I'll send a picture of that. Why didn't I take a picture of the horse? I was too busy eating.

I think of eating weird stuff as part of traveling and experiencing other cultures. Basically if people eat it, usually it's good.



When the loud student called himself handsome before class I pretended I didn't understand what he was talking about. Good looking men are "*ikemen*" in Japanese, so he was saying, "*Ikemen, right?*" and pointing to himself. *Men* also sounds like noodles in Japanese. I pretended I didn't know what kind of noodles that was and said, "I like *tsukemen*!" His friend also says things like, "Nice looking guy." while pointing to himself. I then correct him by saying, "Very tall guy." They're not bad looking, but their egos are a little out of control for 14 year olds.

**When I got your email I was at the top of a castle.** That's gotta be special.

Japan is still fun for me so I'm not miserable and craving Mexican food or something. Like some foreigners who move here. Funny stuff happens every day. At the grocery store today I totally saw a middle aged couple that was a lady with cerebral palsy and a guy in a wheelchair. That's rad.

I don't think I want to stay in Japan during summer on purpose again though. The humidity is too much. The sun comes up at 4-5 am so it's hot by six. It's just a couple months that are too hot I think.



*The famous "sitting tree stump" in Beppu.*

This morning a spider jumped off of a clean shirt when I took it off the hook, then a big bee chased me down a trail when I was hiking to this waterfall. Then tonight I went to try out a bath and they had a big one made of wood that was really cool. When I got home and took my dirty clothes out of a bag, there was a little beetle on them. How did he get there? So I'm kind of irritated by bugs right now. Plus I think lots of mosquitoes ate me on that trail. Mosquito bites here itch for maybe an hour which is nothing compared with the American buggers.



I'm glad I finally went hiking and to this waterfall. I brought my Taiwanese coworker and felt bad it was way farther from the bus stop than the directions I have said. Maybe we walk slow. I wanted to swim a lot here but no good beaches! And it's jellyfish season.

I love getting help from experts instead of struggling to do something myself. But I really have a hard time asking for help! Sometimes I have to let myself be like a helpless child who doesn't know anything when I'm in Japan so it's good for me. I ask my students how to read something or how to say the name of something a lot. They love when I try to learn Japanese. Maybe they love that they can teach me something.

Today has been so weird. I decided to go to a cool library building that's a museum for the architect now. After that I wanted to go to a Hello Kitty museum that was closed the last time I went. When I got to the library GPS told me, it was the new one so totally the wrong place. Then I found out the Hello Kitty museum is only open on weekends. Sigh. Plus this morning I felt like I had cramps and just thought it was weird because it's early and I don't normally get cramps. I totally did get my period early though. I decided I was gonna have a good day anyway. It works when you do that you know. I asked at a station where the cool library art center was and finally went there and they were actually open. It's next to an old castle remains that still has a cool moat. I went there after and Jr. high kids had set up an installation of little clay guys all over the shrine entrance. They were taking them away and I took a few pictures then their teacher came up to me. He explained they're in Jr. high (I could tell) and they did an installation. Then he handed me one of the clay faces. I was surprised and so happy. I thanked him and said I work in a Jr. high too.



Now I'm doing one of my favorite things: having the drink bar at a family restaurant. I'm addicted to these and where I live I don't think there are any. I'm meeting my coworkers to go out for Korean BBQ in a couple hours.

Hope things are working out to go camping soon! My brother told me he's going this week and a coworker is letting them borrow a canoe. How fun! I think the reason people don't go camping in Asia so often is all the crazy bugs. A huge cicada flew into my back earlier. Plus it's too humid. Everyone hides inside with air-con.

It would be cool if someone has a room in a house nearby that I can rent for cheaper than my dumb apartment. Being at the hostel around lots of people reminds me of how I don't like living alone. I like my neighborhood though.



I accidentally found some 5-6th grader art and really like this one. It's like an apartment building with a sail on top stuck on a little fishing boat. I think the kids actually sat on a pier and drew what they saw though. The mountains around here kinda look like that. Today I went on a really long bike ride and rode up a mountain a little ways just exploring. It was so fun and scary to ride back down in like 30 seconds on the steep windy road.

I'm going home next week. Kinda sad because there's a great artist community here and I actually hang out with people. I want to come back already. So much more to see on this huge island.



You could always grow your own rice in an old baby buggy. I love the ghost-scarecrow. I thought this was so Portland-like. I think this town might be the Portland of Japan. I can feel its vortex powers taking over. Tonight I randomly hung out with a few Japanese people. They were drinking outside of their custom bicycle shop and record shop under the train tracks near the hostel. Then an artist drawer I met a couple days ago rode up and hung out too. **He was wearing a Captain Eo Michael Jackson shirt with soccer shorts and socks with sandals.** He's such a dork. The rice baby buggy is actually at his apartment/art space.

I'm eating a lot here but lost 2-3 kilo because my room is on *the fourth floor* and cleaning is good exercise. There are lots of local foods I tried like *yuzu (citron) soft serve ice cream, kabosu (similar to lime) juice, hot spring steamed pudding and eggs, the specialty soup... everything was good.*





*Super cute Totoro bread*

I tried *a sand bath* today - it sounded nice in the rainy weather. Yesterday it was so nice to be in the small (half barrel for one person type) outdoor hot baths while it was raining. Today I feel like staying inside reading... but I leave tomorrow so I wanted to do something else.

I just got home! I mean to the Tokyo airport. It will be a couple hours on the train before I get to my place. I had a really great working holiday and lots of time to think about what to do with my life. It's so awesome in Beppu that I kinda want to move there.

It is weird that this is home. **I feel comfortable in this crazy country.** Sitting next to a tiny grandma on the train. I was a two hour flight away, but it takes over two hours from the airport to my place and where I stayed was about 2-3 hours from the airport there. So it takes almost all day.

I feel like I need to clean out my apartment really bad. If I can only have a backpack of stuff for a month, why do I need all this other stuff?

I was super happy in Beppu. I actually made artist friends there. And it wasn't as hot as my town... I gave in to using the air conditioner because my apartment gets stupid hot. It's like 35 Celsius here which is 95 or something and so humid. I should go hang out somewhere else that has air on. But, I feel inspired to reorganize and simplify. I haven't been home all month and kinda want to stay here.

Today I ended up at a Japanese hippy show in a cafe with people selling handmade stuff.

Yesterday I felt lonely after leaving my new friends in Beppu. Then I was sitting in a massage chair at the mall where it's air conditioned, and a Japanese friend recognized me. We only met once at karaoke. He was with his cousin going to get food for a BBQ. It was with a bunch of the other English teachers. So they brought me and I felt so blessed to hang out with friends here. Tomorrow is another BBQ with the architecture teacher I randomly met before I went out of town.

## September 2012: Sports Festival and Speech Contest

Got buried in some hot sand the other day for fun. I am addicted to hot spring baths even more now. Back at my place I have to take normal baths. Got a bunch of fun bath salts to use. School starts again tomorrow!

Even though work has been busy, I've been making time to organize and paint a lot more. And I'm better at cleaning after cleaning in the hostel.

Today I was having green tea flavored soft serve ice cream in a little tea shop in my town and thinking about Portland. I thought about some things I miss probably for the first time. Of course I missed friends right away, but things like [Stumptown coffee](#) and riding over Hawthorne Bridge. Sigh. But a lot of amazing things here will be missed when I'm back in the US. I ride my bike over a river here every day as well. It's not exciting, but maybe after I leave I'll miss that.

I went to the river to read for a while. It's always windy there so more comfortable than the apartment. There's a secret beach I really want to go to, but there's so many trees and crazy plants all around it and no trail or road there. Maybe I need to get someone to take me on a boat. Or get a Japanese machete.



No worries about writing back when you have time. Last week I was so busy and didn't email anyone. Today is my easy day at work. I only assistant teach three classes before lunch. Last week I was grading during all my free time. Sigh. It's usually funny though. I'm working with a girl who will participate in an English speech contest after school almost every day.

I feel busy since school started. It's already stressing me out. But at least I really like the job.

Today the loud 8th grader who is hilarious said, "**Alissa is best my friend!**" When I said Yay! He said "**No, Alissa is not best my friend!**" Hahaha. This is why I love my job.

I should be more social after work but just want to hang out alone after being worn out.

Today I had three misunderstandings about today's schedule in the first hour. I'm glad it ended there. I think I understand enough Japanese that people don't usually tell me what's going on. The problem is, I'm not usually paying attention or forget what I read about the schedule changes.



*Rice plant teepees. Not sure what these are about.*

I started doing like 10 minutes of yoga after work. Deep breaths are so good for humans. I know I'm stressed because I've had *atopy* - basically hives or intermittent super itchy spots mostly on my legs, since I got back in town. I wonder if it's related to the rice harvesting season. There are tons of rice fields here and they've been burning the piles of rice husks. I started wearing a mask while I ride to school and home which seemed to help. But I've had *atopy* on my hands since May. I've had it during summer before, but not for three months. That's one reason I don't plan on staying in Japan.

Tonight I was mad at myself for buying food that's so time consuming to prepare. My unintentional mantra this year is "*everything is a bother.*"

Today I'm so irritated by my stupid hot apartment. It was 35C today. And humid. Come on it's September. It's prolly gonna just be too cold once it does cool down.

Too bad school lunch here often has fried stuff. I was surprised because Japan is supposedly so healthy, but I heard it's because of the low risk of food poisoning. At least rice will be my friend forever.

It's a lot harder to eat healthy here than I thought it would be. I can't find cilantro so I bought coriander seeds and will grow my own tiny garden!

It's Friday and this week I only taught in 9 classes, maybe one more but I don't know yet. The kids have been practicing a lot. We have a sports festival Sunday so I work. I get to watch them jump rope with ten people and do three legged races and stuff. Then Monday is a day off. I'm thinking about going somewhere that's usually closed on weekends or crowded.

Today the students were supposed to have the sports festival, but it's been raining since midnight. How sad. The sports field is starting to flood. So we have normal classes instead and will try again Tuesday.

It's raining again. I wonder if those poor kids will ever get to have their sports festival.

We actually did the sports festival today. There was a tiny bit of thunder last night and rain this morning. The sun came out a little in the afternoon but it was cool all day.

I was really impressed with the kids today. American kids are too lazy to have a fun sports day and run relay races and stuff. They actually had one game all the teachers and PTA did too. There were three teams and you throw beanbag type things into a laundry basket sort of on a pole about twenty feet up. We had about two minutes. Then they count how many your team got in. We played twice and I was surprised how tired I got. I think I only got one beanbag in. My team won both times though. We won a box of tissue... ?? Maybe the PTA also brought us stuff, but we got a couple snacks and all these funny sports drinks for today. I thought it was funny because the teachers mostly watched and cheered for students. I guess everyone was busy and tired, but we didn't need ten sports drinks.

Last week I saw a weird short rainbow, like just one end of it. That made me happy. When a Japanese person started talking to me (weird and rare) I tried to show him but I don't think he understood or saw it. Then he went outside that direction and proly realized what I was trying to say. I should learn the Japanese word for rainbow. Sheesh I know how to say baking soda but not rainbow. What's my problem.

This month has been busy, but now both the sports festival and speech contest are done. Today I need to pay my utilities at the ATM at the Post office before a typhoon comes. Last night, I noticed my gas had been turned off. A few months ago I filled out the auto payment form and took it to the bank. They said okay, but turns out it wasn't working because there is no branch for my bank in my town. I didn't understand until yesterday afternoon. Now I have to figure out getting it turned back on. I should have asked someone to help me understand my mail sooner.

Yeah, the speech contest was interesting. Our area has all students compete together, so it's mostly third years. There were a second and first year student in our area and both placed in the top five. My student placed 6th. Too bad, but I'm happy no one has to stress about practicing more.

It's cool you're so involved at your school. I go to art club for a little while but usually I go home when it's time. I had the idea to work on zines, but it was more for hanging out with kids so they can ask me funny questions.

Last week the best question was, "Do you like long sausage?" from a second year boy. He's using new vocabulary, but yes, he was trying to be gross. It was outside of class so I just said, "Definitely." because I thought that would be entertaining. At least he's trying to speak in English right?

I have 21 class periods in a normal week; one is a special ed. class. This term I also started tutoring a student who doesn't attend normal classes. Most ALTs in the city where I work have more like 15 classes a week though.

## October 2012: Cold shower

So my funny story is, Saturday night I got in the shower and realized my gas had been shut off. It's the first time something like that has happened. I was so busy since I got back but I should have asked someone to help me sooner. Today I asked the office manager at work to help and it should be back tomorrow. So glad it's hot today so a cold shower was okay.

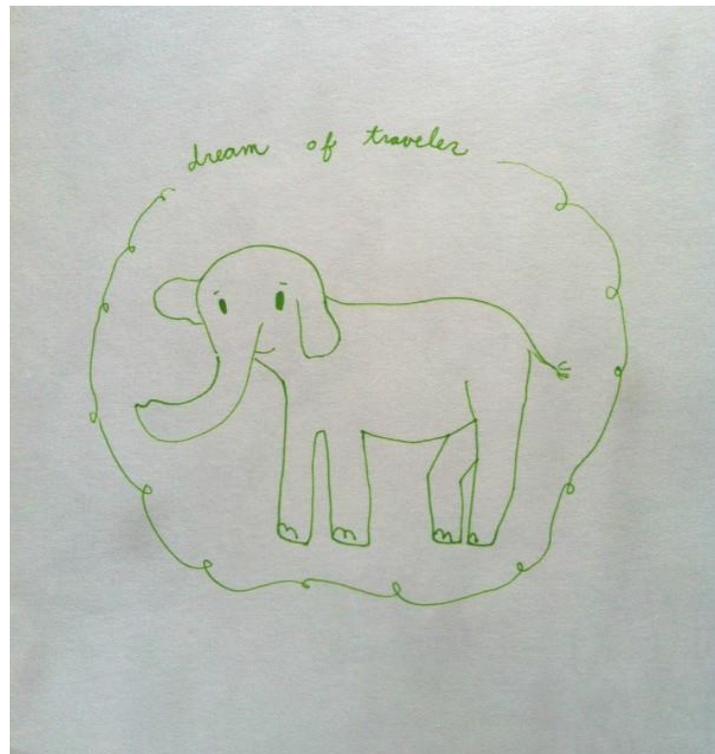
Sometimes I wish you were here to help me when I have problems like the gas being turned off. It's kind of funny, but inconvenient.

I was mad at one of the teachers I work with today again... trying not to let it bother me because it isn't a big deal. She's a long term substitute, maybe for the rest of the time I'm here, but it's her first time teaching normal English. She taught special ed. before. But she's behind in lessons, selfish and not fair to kids sometimes, plus chooses bad songs for the kids to sing. Usually teachers ask the kids to recommend English songs they like. They like Queen and Bon Jovi. Last month she chose ABBA (barf!) and this month is a disco remix of an oldies song. She says I love this song! But no one else does. The vocals are too high so the kids can't even sing them. Plus the new one is too fast I think. I made the lyric sheet like she asked me to and put pictures on it and even asked if it was okay. Then today she hands out a sheet that she had remade in an ugly font with no pictures. I was pissed she had wasted my time. But I didn't know if I should say I'm mad about it... her English is decent but hmmm... I don't want to care. I hate having a bad attitude about it.

I'm supposed to be tutoring someone I met through my calligraphy teacher, but haven't made plans with her yet. I didn't really understand the details... that happens too much here. Learning another language and living in another country is challenging.

Of course, every day I learn more Japanese. It's the reason I wanted to live here.

I saw a picture frame in *Daiso* with an elephant drawing and it says "dream of traveler" yes!



*My version based on memory*

Sometimes I hesitate to ask for help. It feels like a waste of time, but it just means I'll make more mistakes if I'm too prideful to ask for help. I can save time by just asking. There is so much I don't know living here, so I have to be like a child and learn everything again.

Sunday I went to a place very close to my apartment *to carve a stone stamp*. I met a woman through the Japanese classes in my town who used to teach *calligraphy*. She told me about how you can make your own stamp for *shodo* and invited me to try with her. I made one with "ri" from my name. It was so difficult to focus on carving the tiny stone but it was interesting and a good experience. We didn't go inside the museum but I can easily visit there again. Saturday I got to try painting on a large piece of *paper* on the ground. It's fun but difficult. My skill isn't good enough to do that yet, but my teacher wanted to let me try for fun. I don't even know the style of writing it was and I couldn't read most of it.

I saw a three legged cat today. It was cool because she was running around really fast like it wasn't a big deal.

It's finally autumn and the weather is so nice. I heard it gets really cold in winter so I'm not looking forward to riding my bike to work in cold wind and sometimes snow. I can't believe I'm gonna be done with my contract in a little over five months. I'm definitely something like homesick lately.

I love living here but... today I lost my wallet before my calligraphy class and was upset of course. I went to the mall service counter to report it in case someone turned it in and looked for it where I was walking. It was literally ten minutes at the most and someone picked it up but so far no one called. It had my resident card, *suica card* (*train pass*), and cash. I almost never have much money with me but of course this time I did. Some girls in my class went with me later to look and ask again then I went to the police station to report it missing. Just upset about it. I worked at the *conversation school* international party so I got a little money and could take the train home. Plus my teacher offered to lend me money if I needed it and I met my friend at the party so I could have made him not drink and take me home. Then I got on the wrong train (the wrong line!?) somehow when I was going home. I suck at paying attention.

One teacher I work with has me edit the bingo sheets we use in class and I can put characters on them and stuff. But she's always trying to make everything all ugly and use Comic Sans. It kind of makes me want to punch her. Other than that and her awful taste in music I like her.

Tomorrow I cleared my schedule to say I'm going to the ALT meeting so I can leave early to get a new resident card. Later on I need to get a national health care ID card reissued as well. So I'm "going to the meeting" but I won't make it this week.

I feel a little busy because I need to make sure to bring everything needed to the immigration office tomorrow. When I went to register the first time, I didn't bring some things so I had to go back again. The offices and *city hall* are only open while I'm at work so it's not convenient to just go anytime.

**I don't wanna think about applying for jobs ever again.**

Today is really great weather and I'm going to *Kawagoe Matsuri* (*a town festival*). It sounds interesting.





Yesterday before studying *calligraphy* I went to school for a *chorus contest*. It was impressive. In my Junior High school in America, we didn't have mandatory music classes.

**Lately I'm feeling coo-coo.** I found a huge stash of crap old English teachers just left at the school like ten years ago. So I made sure it was okay and threw most of it away. It was at least six bags of trash. A bunch of folders too but in case someone can use them I left them there. Two filing drawers full of old textbooks and elementary school lesson plans and notes. The vice principal said they're lazy! He's cool. Seriously it was like they didn't want to throw anything away all year. A bag of pennies and stamps worth 1-4 cents was the only decent stuff I found. Maybe to give the kids? And some stickers we can use.

Plus lately I feel like running. Which is stupid because I ride my bike and walk tons already. I might on the weekend but I bet I can only run a tiny bit then walk. It's been like 7 years since I went jogging.

At least I'm not bored here. Just having a hard time making any friends who are girls. All the other English teachers in the city I work in are guys. Yesterday I went to a weird festival near where I work at the conversation cafe sometimes. I met up with one of the teachers there who is Australian and three Japanese guys who are students there. At least I have been hanging out with people a little. Maybe I didn't tell you, this summer I also met some guys from Africa who live in my city. But I guess we just hung out once for a BBQ. So weird living here sometimes.

Today there was stupid strong cold wind blowing against me on the way to work. But, I could totally see Mt. Fuji. It's a little farther away than Mt. Hood is from Portland. I was exhausted after getting to work. It's gonna get colder of course... cry! It's still cool that I don't have to drive or pay for a car. I get enough exercise to eat as much as I want. I like Japanese junk food too much...

Lately I'm having more fun at work. Like more comfortable and not worried so much about what I should be doing. Just hanging out with kids and talking to them because in class they memorize useless stuff and don't get conversation practice. Today after lunch I played basketball with some 7th grade boys. Then **later one of the 8th graders told me his friend "killed many people"** haha. Weirdos. The girls are more normal/mature of course. One of the 9th graders is obsessed with guns and has a catalog he always looks at but they're illegal here. Today him and his friend tried to explain that you can buy blank bullets here though. Whatever. Most of them love it when I talk to them.

I don't need kids because I have 333 students who all want my attention. At least it's only for 40 hours a week. Today I translated a 7th grader's towel for him - it said "love & peace." Then he was telling another boy what it meant and that boy said, "I love Alissa" in Japanese before he could even finish. Then the first boy said me too, then another boy in the class randomly said me too. I couldn't stop laughing and then they even told the teacher what happened and he laughed too. The kids are so funny. It's so flattering to have 13 year olds in love with me.

I'm a little nervous for what will happen around Valentine's day. Here girls are supposed to give boys they like chocolate for Valentines. March 14th is "White Day" and boys give the girls chocolate if they like her back. Hmm... I don't think I should give any students chocolate. Maybe I should get a ton of kids Valentines from America to give everyone and teach them how we do it. Or old school handmade, yay! Anyway, we're expected to give chocolate to all our coworkers either way. It should be fun to experience their style Valentine's day.

As much as I love all the hilarious things and being exhausted every day after work, I super miss just hanging out in a cafe and talking with friends. I've made some friends but basically all guys. I miss having girl friends.

I will have to be very careful to not freeze here in winter. Homes aren't insulated and don't have central heat. Most houses have heater blanket tables (*kotatsu*). Mine doesn't and they're expensive. I plan to get an electric carpet soon. Sounds awesome and cheaper. Plus I'll put a hot water bottle in my bed.

**Last week the one punk 3<sup>rd</sup> year student who barely talks and only grunts at teachers actually talked to me!** It was my goal to get him to even say *konnichiwa* or *Os!* to me this year. He was with his friends and I asked if they were going home I think. He said, "*Hey Arisu.*" So I corrected him then he said, "*Seriously? Arisa?*" His friend teased him for not knowing my name. I like the kids who think they're badass but they're such good kids compared with what I've heard about previous students and even other schools in my city.

We played a Halloween game so the kids could draw jack-o-lantern faces.



I went to the ramen shop near my house for dinner finally. It's just a couple running it and their house is upstairs I guess. Tiny place. People always ask me the same questions: where I'm from, how long I've been here, maybe where I live, what my job is, how I get there, and how long I'm staying for. So those are the first things I learned to understand and answer.

I might need some snow pants for on the way to work. Stinkin' cold already.

I wish I had candy... I lost weight a little (about 5 pounds) during summer but gained it all back already. The school lunch is so big. Japan is known for having small portions, but every time I go to a restaurant the amount of food is so much. Maybe because I live in the countryside. At least there's not really any Halloween candy around here.

## November 2012: Already Cold

I'm dreading winter. If I can make it to mid. January the rest will go fast. I feel like having this job 12 years ago would have been easier than now. It always takes me too long to decide to do something. Gotta enjoy my time here.

It's lunchtime. Grumbly tummy. Japanese style hamburgers are good, but totally different. Smaller and no bun. They put some kind of sauce on it. I want to go to the fast food place for a normal burger now... haha. I never eat fast food. Always looks gross.

Gotta eat a bigger breakfast. I hate that I have no appetite that early though. Plus I feel rushed and don't want to spend so much time making breakfast. I'm always so hungry after riding my bike to work.

Last night my friend invited me to a party that was a bunch of the other English teachers in my city. He's a funny Japanese guy who speaks English and hangs out with foreigners a lot. There were a few other Japanese guys too. I invited a Japanese girl who works for my company but lives in the same city as me, plus the guy from Zambia who lives here. I knew they would all get along. We had *okonomiyaki* which is like Japanese pizza then went to a Japanese style bar. I was up late but always wake up early because I'm used to it. There was a little earthquake this morning.



It's so crazy the friend from Zambia tutors English somewhere near my house Friday nights but said he wanted to give me the job if I want it. Then an Australian guy he works with said the college where they work is looking for foreign teachers and you don't need a masters degree. So if I wanted to stay here next year, I could work at a college. Crazy.

Today I stopped by a small kids festival that you would have loved. They had hot dogs on a stick and chocolate bananas, tons of people were making shrinky dinks, and they had a funny ring toss yard sale kind of game. A bunch of toys and stuffed animals were on a blanket and kids bought tickets to try to win a toy by throwing a ring around it. I thought it was a good idea.

So sleepy. My social engagements have somehow increased exponentially this month. It's better than always hanging out alone but I'll probably spend more money because I'm going out more. I want to do things and enjoy living here. At least until winter hits.

Today I woke up way too early to go to Nikko with friends in a car. There's lots of old temples but the autumn leaves are the coolest part. We went to a waterfall later but it was basically dark by the time we got there. Oh well.



I played basketball after lunch with some students again. It's fun, I think I'll do that more often.

The best English today:  
A wonderful ring cake was ready.  
It is more delicious  
when eating in the family.  
Please spend wonderful time.

Sometimes I eat seconds for school lunch, especially if it's curry. But I always feel stuffed if I do. Usually I don't even eat everything and I'm already stuffed.

I'm always hungry because it's cold and I ride my bike to work. Lately I'm too lazy to get groceries in the dark after work so I ate almost everything in my fridge. I have a little grapefruit juice and some spinach. At my school after lunch everyone brushes their teeth. They play a weird 80s song in English (from Sweden?) for tooth brushing time. It's not about teeth at all. Living here is so strange sometimes.

Did I tell you when my students ask me how old I am I always tell them I'm eight?

Everyone and their grandma has had mobile phones in Japan for at least ten years so maybe it's cheaper for that reason. But yeah I know most US companies have a charge for how much 3G internet you use. If lots of places had wi-fi here I wouldn't need unlimited internet. But it was like \$20/month for internet at my apartment, not even wi-fi. I thought it would be more helpful to just have it on my phone everywhere for when I get lost. It has been really useful. And I wanted to be able to do free Skype calls. That was important. I almost sent you an ad for new cars here. Most of the cars are cubes. The vans look like ice cubes I think. You can buy a new car for \$7000! (Suzuki and other cheap brands) But there are so many taxes and fees to have cars here. Plus toll highways.

It's starting to get cold here but the daytime is perfect hoodie weather. I can see Mt. Fuji on my way to school almost every morning now and it looks so cool silhouetted against the sunset on my way home. My life is not boring, but I have a bit of a schedule. Everyday my students say super funny stuff and I love how they are motivated to try communicating with me using English. It's the best professional not normal job ever.

I had no plans all weekend - relax time. I ended up cleaning and organizing lots then running into a friend and hanging out. Then feeling cold and sleepy and mostly unfocused. Hanging out in my favorite cafe finally. It's crowded and they put me in a cold back room with a blanket. Oh well awesome food and drink as usual.

Damn that *kabocha purin* (pumpkin pudding/flan) is so good but not at all like American pumpkin flavor. It tastes like French toast. I kinda want a Jamba juice.

I love autumn! It's already a damp type of freezing here unless the sun is out. I hope it's more temperate there or you have a good *kotatsu*. I collected leaves at my school and flattened them in a book. Then I cut them into heart shapes and gave them to all the teachers. Most had no comment but some were saying they were cute and asking how I made them.

I'm beginning to think my grandparents have the right idea. I want to just eat out exclusively. Except snacks. My grandpa's late night cheese and crackers sound great right now.

They have people driving around announcing stuff on loudspeakers here sometimes. So annoying because it's loud and sounds like Charlie Brown's teacher. What's the point. The times I can understand it's picking up used appliances or bikes and stuff people don't want.

My 7th graders are singing I Just Called to Say I Love You this month. I mostly just think about how cheesy and Wesley Willis sounding the keyboard sounds, but I also think about High Fidelity a lot. "Wait, is she in a coma?" I guess it's good practice for if I ever feel like making everyone laugh at karaoke.

So cool you're really seeing the country. Including the middle and all the farm type places. I'm into working in a farm town but only because where I live is super convenient. If I was living where I work, on the other side of the river, there's just a couple convenience stores. Lots of rice fields and persimmon trees. I feel isolated enough here thank you.

It's supposed to be near freezing in the next week already. I got a hot water bottle and an electric blanket. I wish I had someone to snuggle under a *kotatsu* with. The daytime is still beautiful. Plus I can see Mt. Fuji almost every day.

**I always remember I'm living something I dreamed of doing. It's still surreal every day.** I get paid to hang out with hilarious farmers kids.

Today I asked one boy, "What time is it?" His answer? "China." bwahahaha. This kind of thing happens every day. Another kid answers, "It's Tuesday" no matter what we ask. Still another kid is two chapters ahead and can have simple conversations. **I think everything will be boring when I come back.**

Last week some of my students were finishing a math project before class. It was a graph where they drew a dog and chose a name for their dog. I told one girl I like "*chibaken*" (*the name of a prefecture*) by mistake, then said "*shibaken*" (*popular type of Japanese dog*) but she thought it was funny and wrote *Chibaken* (*written with the name of the prefecture and the character for dog*) on her paper for her dog's name.

Today riding to work in the morning made my eyeballs feel cold which is so strange.

I get along well with the English teachers here although one is always busy and stressed and another one is really stubborn about doing things her own way (not stereotypically Japanese) and has awful taste in music. Plus likes comic sans too much. I try not to let it bother me. The newest teacher is obsessed with AKB, but I make fun of him about it and we get along great. He's really open to ideas which is a good quality for teachers to have.

I love being just an assistant and that I never bring work home. Today I only have two classes, so I went to a two period long cooking class with my favorite 2<sup>nd</sup> year class. I went with one of the students back to his class, not sure why he wanted me to come, but then I hid in the hall and waited for him to come back. I scared him so good he actually fell down! I love how I can act like a kid at work and it's totally acceptable.

It's already too cold for me here. I got some snow pants to wear while I ride to work but there are still mosquitoes and flies. Japan is crazy. We don't have heaters at school so starting next month we're allowed to use kerosene "*stoves*" in the classrooms so kids don't freeze.

I love that I get paid to learn Japanese and how to teach English grammar. I basically hang out with kids and play basketball and study Japanese all day. Best job ever. Last night I went for a walk and dealt with the feelings I have in reaction to my time here being over in about four months. It's bittersweet. I decided to potentially apply for jobs where I spent summer as my plan B. I loved it and wouldn't mind living there. I gave myself time to decide but I already know I want to at least visit America in April and see how things work out. There are times I love living here and times I can't wait to go back. But I expected that.

**If we knew what was going to happen, it would be boring.**

**This morning as soon as I arrived at school I realized I forgot my glasses.** Hah! I never wear them while getting ready and totally forgot. My vision isn't so bad but things started to get blurry after a class or two. I got the okay to go home and get them during my free period. Much better.

Today was probably the first day I didn't feel like coming to work. I feel bad for the kids because they're freezing all day and can't use heaters yet. It's maybe 10C degrees in the classrooms. The BOE is asking us to make Christmas handouts that no one will have time or want to use. I'm just not gonna make one. What can they do? I'm so grumpy when I'm cold. It's already freezing here at night a few times a week. Might be snowy before the term ends. I'm from LA. How did I end up here? It's bittersweet that it will be over before I know it.

I am so tempted to go somewhere warm for winter break. I mostly decided to travel in Japan because that's why I moved here. I wish I could teleport.

Yesterday it was 1 degree Celsius when I went to school in the morning. That's almost freezing. I wear basically snow pants and am still cold. My students wear skirts and no leggings! How... and no heat in the classrooms. So sad. They can use space heaters starting next week. I want to go to Hawaii already. I'm stressed lately because I have to move and change everything again in spring. I just started to feel comfortable here.

I kind of want to experience Christmas the way Japanese people do. Normal work day but maybe get KFC and a Christmas cake. Sounds so simple compared with the ordeal it is in America and Europe. I just found out we have *cho kawaii* (*super cute*) clip art books at my school. Started using them for any handouts I'm allowed to design. I got a really bad cute overload from checking them out. Do you draw lots of stuff for handouts? That sounds fun but I don't feel like I have enough free time for doing bad drawings.

This new HR guy came and did an observation for a whole class yesterday. Then we talked during lunchtime. The students were so curious about him. I bet they had never seen a black person before. One of the students said, "**Oooh, perfect face!**" to him. And a teacher asked me what country he's from. Uh... probably America? Hahaha. I was laughing so hard on the inside because the class he observed sang Stevie Wonder and had an Obama worksheet. (I love how some kids call him *Obama-chan*.) He started to ask how I feel about *B* but before I said anything the lunch lady interrupted and he realized he had to get going. Seems nice though. Have you had one of those observations yet? I thought it would be the five minute type but they told me about this one in advance. Maybe just because my vice principal is cool.

## Term 3

### December 2012: Alone in Kyoto

*I went on another solo trip, this time by slow train. I visited Osaka again and spent Christmas working in a restaurant bar, couch surfed with a lovely new couple in the suburbs, took a couple day trips, then spent the New Year holiday in Kyoto. I realized too late that it would have been fun to visit the places that were filmed in Lost in Translation. It was too cold and crowded to do anything comfortably there.*

Last night my town had this bizarre festival where people put lanterns on super tall bamboo sticks then fought each other to break the other lanterns. I mostly stood around talking with friends and drinking hot sake from tiny paper cups and freezing. It was literally almost freezing. And lots of people stood outside for this for hours. After that we went to a bar for stupid karaoke and my (Japanese) friend was so wasted he fell onto the table while singing Bohemian Rhapsody but kept singing. I wish I could say I've made friends who aren't just into partying. The few cool people I've met don't live as close or go out as often. A lot of the other English teachers and their Japanese friends drink too much for me. Cool when they're not drunk though.

A few of my students are... naughty. One 14 year old boy likes telling me things like, "**He has big sausage.**" about a friend. So my response is to just speak in casual normal speed English which they won't really understand, and say something like, "Oh really, that's good to know. That's why you like him, isn't it?" Then they laugh and pretend they understood or just look slightly nervous. Gotta entertain myself somehow. Actually the constant English is super entertaining. I also am prone to get cute overload if I go to any stores.

Ah living here. Maybe I will never be able to feel at home in America again. My job (at least the school) is so chill which makes it rad. My company on the other hand... Oh by the way we have more training now that your contract is almost over. What a waste of time.

**I'm still entertained when Japanese people say they've never been to America and then talk about how they went to Hawaii. Hawaii should be it's own magical planet.**

Working here is really good but who knows how it would be at other schools. I like the place I went for summer but maybe can't deal with winter or summer in Japan. I hate when it's dark all the time and being cold. I'm always grumpy lately.

Supposed to be in the 20s this weekend. Also sad to be leaving in about four months. I have to look for another job and change everything.

**I just saw hot dog flavor potato chips.**

**What?**

Yesterday I went in a pet store for a minute to cheer myself up. Welsh Corgi puppies are so cute. I saw a tiny kitten sitting but basically sleeping. She would start tilting over and then wake up a little before falling over. Cutest thing ever.

And I ate a burger from Burger King...? Maybe the last time I went to one was on a stop for camp in high school. It wasn't good at all.

I had a headache all day today and feel sore from walking so much yesterday. But my students can always cheer me up. I said hi to some boys who were supposed to be cleaning and they said funny stuff like I love you and you're cute. Then one said, "I want to be a doctor." (it was on the test they just took) So I said really? Then another one said, "I want to be a teacher." I said, "Really? Good." The next one says, "**I want to be... Alissa's boyfriend.**" bwahahahaha. That kid is hilarious.

There was another big earthquake off the coast tonight. Not nearly as big as last year so hopefully no problem. Just felt like I was on a boat for a minute but everything is fine.

A teacher asked me to join a special ed. class Monday when the kids will write calligraphy. Yay.

Today I went to the *Taito Sai Matsuri* (festival) at *Hikawa* shrine near my friend's house. We went early which was nice because it wasn't crowded.

The horse meat is actually something a lot of Asians/Russians do. So weird right? The Japanese version is sashimi, like sushi. You eat it with soy sauce and it was good, but chewy. Maybe it's like elk or deer, but I've never tried. Nothing to write a book over but I'll probably not tell any vegetarians about it. I thought I'd never eat duck because I had pet ducks, but I tried in Korea last year. It's the kind of thing I wouldn't intentionally get for myself, but I'm okay with trying new things. I'm pretty sure I'd draw the line before bunnies, cats, and dogs though. I rarely cook meat for myself at home and might even be vegetarian if it wasn't so inconvenient.

I try not to let it get to me but I'm already hating this cold weather. The wind feels like snow being thrown at your face. But the view of Mt. Fuji is rad.

This week I did a lot of drawing and photocopying and cutting and pasting. At work.

I guess I hang out with people, but sometimes it's just because they're also a foreigner. Not because we have anything much in common. (One of my friends here is a 62 year old Taiwanese Japanese dentist.)

I tried to take a picture of Mt. Fuji because the train passed it fairly close, but it didn't work out so well. Anyway, just left early this morning and it's a long train ride. About halfway now. **I want to stop everywhere and explore.** So many cool places to see. I'm going to stop in Nagoya in a few hours to see a famous shrine and eat some local special ramen. Then to Osaka.

This morning I was excited to leave but thought it would be more fun to be traveling with someone.

I was gonna Skype but you weren't online so... I'm gonna check out this castle now.



Last night I stopped by this 100 yen/dollar store I haven't been in for over a year. Now I'm in Osaka and I visited here last year and stayed in the same area. A song was playing and I loved it. The store is less than half the size it was before. So strange. I wanted to stay to listen to the music though. The next song was good too and I thought it was the same group. I had to ask the hipster guy working who it was. Then he takes out his phone to check because he was playing a Pandora type playlist through his phone to the store speakers. So surreal.

That's life in general I guess. Everything is surreal to me. I'm staying in a guesthouse for free for working a few hours in the owners' bar. Washing dishes and talking to people. **So what am I doing for Christmas? Working in a bar.**

I totally speak better Japanese. I use it all the time here.

Turns out I'm still bad at food service. Not that I was allowed to make food or drinks but I don't know about the Japanese type customer service. So I washed dishes at the bar and got recruited to edit some things in English. It's good to finally be using Couchsurfing. I just came to another house today and the couple are super cute and cool. They are also new to Couchsurfing and she cooked dinner for me and wouldn't even let me help. They better let me do something for them or I'll feel bad. I think they're just stoked they can practice English with me because they want to learn, but in my opinion are way better than average Japanese people. Anyway I'm happy they offered to host me.

Happy Christmas! How was it?

I just walked like all day, visited a couple Japanese gardens, temples and shrines, took a nap, and worked in a bar. I didn't even go on a date or eat KFC and Christmas cake. Which is what people do here.

Nara is one big petting zoo. Actually they only have lots and lots of deer.



So far I'm not impressed with Kyoto. It's cold and crowded and everything is closed. Trying to have a good attitude anyway. I should look up where the girl went in *Lost in Translation*. I think you need advance reservations for that garden.

I had a really good Couchsurfing experience in a suburb of Osaka before I came here. Cute couple and he got all excited to make me a mix CD even though I don't have a CD player or computer now. They didn't have CDs though so they want to mail one. She cooked for me and it was relaxing because I didn't feel like I had lots of things I had to see. But here I'm in a "guesthouse" but the only guest and it's just one room. It's strange. I wanted to hang out with people. It's so cold in Kyoto. Supposed to snow in a couple days. Maybe I'll get outta here early. Today was warm in the sun if I was wearing my jacket. At least sunny. Anyway everything is closed for the new year and it isn't much fun.

## January 2013: Pure Whrite

*I saw a pair of white kids socks with "Pure Whrite" written on them and couldn't stop laughing. With the longest term finished, I knew the next few months would fly by. I hadn't totally decided what I would do next. I just wanted to get through winter alive.*

I read your email while at a little temple nearby for the bell ringing and it made me laugh. It was one of the only cool things so far in Kyoto. Is there a temple near your place? You should have gone! I know it's super awkward trying to have any traditional holiday alone. Tomorrow I'm going to go for about three temples then call it done. I'm now thinking about coming back Thursday. It's a long time on the train and I need to do laundry and recover. It's a long story. Mostly the weather has been shitty as you could expect plus everything is closed.



*Biwako/Lake Biwa*

Today was actually nice. I hope it's a good sign that this year will be better. I went for my first shrine visit of the year and then over to *Hikone* castle and *Biwako*. I really wanted to go to see *naruto* (*huge whirlpools*) because it's scary and awesome but also totally far away and not near a train station. Did you see the crazy whirlpools when you lived over there?

The awesome couple I stayed with in Osaka went to junior high together then met again through Facebook recently and ended up getting engaged a month later. It's super disgusting cute.

It's so crowded in Kyoto it's not even fun. I just feel stressed out, so I decided to leave a day early (tomorrow). I did everything I wanted to already and it's like ten hours on the train to get back. I just want to be at home to clean and rest before work starts. Today maybe I have a cold or allergies so I just want to leave.



*This kitty was trying to stay warm in a tiny shrine*

I'm about three hours from home now. I got outta there early about an hour before the snow started. Checked the weather at home and it is supposed to be in the 20s for the next week. Gotta love that when I ride a bike to work.

I got back in town today and had a pile of Christmas cards and one Japanese new year card.

The old house I stayed in last week didn't have a shower, so the guy built one in the backyard I guess? It's not a yard, just a tiny space for the washing machine and shower closet. But it's so cold out, so it needs a space heater.

I went to a doctor today and he confirmed it's proly house dust allergies and gave me medicine. I wanted to make sure it's nothing contagious. That place I stayed in was full of dusty antiques. I'm much better this afternoon but will still dust my house and clean up more tonight.

After this weekend back to work. I'm done in 12 weeks! Can you believe it? So fast. This morning there was ice on the inside of my window from condensation. Huh? It's too cold.

Today is the first day back at school but no classes. Preparing stuff for teachers and figuring out my schedule. I guess there's maybe work Saturday but Monday and Tuesday off. I'm comfortable and used to living in Japan now but I'm looking forward to living somewhere warm and near the ocean.

Yesterday the second year teacher had me type song lyrics in English AND Japanese for her classes. I asked her for help reading all the Chinese characters I don't know three times, then had her check two times and still had made mistakes. She knows I'm not that good at Japanese...

Then today she brings in a sheet that her husband made with both English and Japanese. Thanks for wasting my time again. Then she asks me to retype the English the way her husband did it but with Comic Sans, because she didn't like the font he used. She loves to make everything more complicated. She also doesn't get that you can copy and paste lyrics from online, then select all and change the font. At least now I know how to use Word in Japanese.

One of the companies in Japan that I applied to wants me to send them an essay and is moving me forward towards hiring... but I really want to go to California. Where I have no job opportunities now. I'm scared of ending up living with my parents again. With no car.

I went from being super relaxed at the beginning of the week to being stressed at everything I need to prepare for.

I'm in my last term of school and will be done in March. It went so fast. It's too cold here. Otherwise it's great. I like the living abroad a lot. I'm glad I finally did it.

Valentines day here is different. Girls give boys chocolate. For coworkers or whatever. And boyfriends. There is lots of fancy stuff for people to make handmade chocolates which looks cool. Then March 14th, boys give girls White chocolate if they like her. (I hate white chocolate) I'm sending *H* chocolate because it's funny and will make him feel squishy. There's a brand of fancy truffle chocolates called *Melty Kiss* which is super funny. Otherwise I got him kids stuff like Hello Kitty and blueberry *Apollo's* (my favorite). Today I bought strawberry caramel corn. Japan has weird yummy snacks. It's a good thing I always walk and ride my bike everywhere or I'd proly gain weight here. The food is so fun.

I had school today actually, but my vice principal is so cool. He knows I have my calligraphy class, plus there were no English classes today. He called my company and told them I don't need to come in but I didn't have to use my paid time off for it.

I know most people do drive to work, but living close enough to ride a bike is so nice. Saves so much money and less stressful. It's really cold in the morning, but I'm getting exercise and not in traffic like everyone else. And I can see Mt. Fuji sometimes which makes me happy.

I get all excited because it's sunny out, then go outside and it's freezing.

I think I have this reputation of being an unemotional robot, even when my inner emotions are happily skipping around or busy at work. I just conceal them unintentionally then get asked to be more *genki* (*energetic*). Which I think has been good for me. I'm becoming more comfortable with things like being loud.

I don't really wish I was more *genki*, but all the Japanese people really expected someone more Stereotypically American. Sometimes I am, when I get around the squirrely 7<sup>th</sup> graders mostly. I can't help but scare the crap out of kids when they lean back on their chairs. I sneak up behind them and tilt them a tiny bit more so they jump. heh heh. It's totally awesome when their friends are watching. And when they pass notes I pretend I read it and act super shocked.

Yesterday one of the boys read a kids book after class. All his friends (and me) sat around listening as he showed us the pictures. (It was about a boy who wanted to become a *Kamen Rider*.) I hope he becomes a kindergarten teacher. It was awesome.

Dang here's why I really love my job: Laughing at things kids write and showing their teachers so we can giggle about it together. Today while grading I saw "John is the **mediumest** of the three." and loved it. It was totally true. Except saying anything is the most average is hilarious. I hope I talk like that when I go back to America just to make friends laugh. I actually have a list of my favorite made up words. Like **airpoet** and **grandfarter**. Love it.

I miss burritos and Caesar salads. And I want to make a million smoothies and drinks with a juicer. And sit in the sun all day. Right now vegetables are stupid expensive here. Sometimes everything is already sold so I haven't been able to eat as many vegetables.

I'm not sick of Japanese food. Unless you count *cabbage tuna* as Japanese food.

I want to make potato print valentines and give a stupid handmade graduation card to all 130 something of my students who are graduating. But I don't have enough energy right now. I think if I start soon I can finish in time. I hate that I think about making stuff all day and then don't make time for it.

I was thinking that right now, I'm sad that my job is ending. Like what you said, my specific situation which is good right now. If I stay here the next school could suck. Also the thought of working a full time contract for another year sounds rough. I'm feeling extended already. I'm so awful at handling a typical full time job because I start to feel like I can't breathe.

I'm confident that I will change my mind later but I'm enjoying the experience. I think for a while I started feeling the influence of Japanese culture: fulfill your duties and be loyal to your company, etc. I'm so happy I live in Japan. Why doesn't everyone try living in another country? It's great and super entertaining.

This morning was super foggy and cool looking and on the way home the sky was so pretty. Stinkin' cold wind though. Just makes me wanna cuss all the way home.

It helps so much to have other foreign friends who understand what this is like. One of my friends is from Zambia and married a Japanese woman from my town. We laughed about how **at first we both just wanted to make Japanese friends and weren't interested in the other foreigners**. But it's nice to speak your native language sometimes.

The kids seem disappointed that I won't be here next year. And the staff is great, but I know at least two people are leaving. Things change.

I'm entertained by how the school staff here encourages me to get married and have babies when they hear I'm dating someone. They're always like, did you meet his parents? When are you getting married? Hurry and have a baby, it's great! My response is always "...*Sss mada.*" (*er, not yet.*) Just dating.

Last week the 7<sup>th</sup> graders had dictionary practice. I wrote a big word on the board and they quickly looked it up. They had to share dictionaries so boys and girls took turns. I chose the words "vacuum" (as in empty void) and "biotechnology" for the girls, and "oversleep" and "responsibility" for boys.

Today the crazy teacher gave a test. While the kids were working on it, she quietly admitted to me that she hadn't taught them everything on the test yet. WTF! Those poor kids. At least she stopped doing the "phrase input" and "lsd" practice every class so she has time to actually cover the lesson.

Yesterday some kids were talking before the afternoon homeroom meeting and one said something to me while I was headed for the teachers' room. I didn't understand so just triumphantly replied "MONJA!" and kept walking and they busted up. Sometimes my wacky side creeps out to play. I like this new replying with Japanese food though. It's way more random than my fake misunderstanding replies.

Yesterday was silly. I also moved one student's chair outside of the classroom and closed the door because he wasn't at his desk when the chime started. He sits next to the back door. (Only one student saw me and kept it a secret.) He came up to the teacher and said "me *ise*?" (me *chair*?) trying to use English. That was awesome. Then the teacher thought it was funny when he found out I'm the one who hid his chair.

Today the principal said "Bye" as I left and I replied with "See you." It's fun to be that casual with him. His English is usually one-word-awesome. Like simply "Marry." as a command.

Grumble, that teacher totally knows what LSD means. I asked her why it's an "lsd" worksheet and she said, "I don't remember but Listening, Speaking, and Dictation or something." The kids hated it anyway. I hated how while the kids were writing the sentence for 30 seconds, she wanted them to also be reading it aloud, but she was the only one loudly saying it and air writing. Plus in her *Engrish* - "pi-ri-o-DO!" (period at the end of the sentence). Something I can laugh about now that it's hopefully over.

I noticed a grammatical error on a second year test the other day. In the test book that goes with the text. It's basic *do vs. does* stuff from first year but the company messed up. I showed another teacher and he said I should call the company. Do you use the *S* books as well? The English is so awkward sometimes and borderline wrong. Like teaching "He is taller than I." instead of "me." Is that British English? It sounds wrong to me.

Yeah "He is taller than **I am.**" sounds so much more normal. Someone prolly forgot the BE *verb*.

## February 2013: Should I stay?

*I had made a decision to return to the USA, with the possibility that I could change my mind if I didn't find work there within a few months. I had my backup plan and started to apply to similar positions in California.*

I am a little concerned because my company said maybe I have to be at the school's closing ceremony on March 26th. They told me this a few hours after I booked the flight.

Today I seriously feel like staying in Japan. Yesterday I Skyped with my parents and started feeling like I might get stuck living with them (which no one wants) because I can't find a job. That freaked me out so I finally sent in the English test and essay for a company in Kyushu I had applied to so I have a backup. I guess I'm going back either way to file taxes and visit. If it seems awful or I have no job prospects, staying here might be a better option than wasting away all my savings because I can't get a job in the US.

Today when I stole a seventh grader's notebook to draw in, I saw "**Which penis yours?**" and had to stop myself from laughing. Then I realized he wasn't being funny, he just left out a space. Which almost made it funnier.

I found out my school wants me to give a speech for the students at the closing ceremony. Also there is probably a party that night.

On my walk tonight, I started chatting with a lady who has a friendly cat who follows her everywhere. She invited me to stop by this place if I'm lonely and I didn't really understand what it was. Looks like a little bar or something but she said something about no alcohol... I dunno. Then I ended up at the store and was starving but only had some change. I got *ra-yu (chili oil)* popcorn and a delicious strawberry can sour and got buzzed on the way home. I feel awesome now.

Snow doesn't get cancelled here. It says oh yeah? More inconvenient then!

Oh my goodness I laugh so hard when I grade worksheets. One student is obsessed with guns and survival games and wrote: I'm good at sniping. I had to look that up to see if it was a real word. It's in the urban dictionary so I guess it's okay.

Your students fighting is a good story but not a happy one. It scares me when the boys are playing around and look like they're killing someone or at least repeatedly punching him in the privates. I have to stop myself from trying to protect the kids. Because they're friends too and I have to remember boys beat the crap out of their friends for fun. It's how they bond or something like that. But sometimes I have to say something because I hate it. Too close to bullying with some of the kids.

I'm totally fine but every once in a while, ahem, prolly once a month, I get more wishy washy than usual and need to just go for a really long walk and chill out. Walking meditation or something. I know I want to go to California. The whole cost of living and moving to another country again is just a lot to process. Living with my parents isn't even an option. It's not even plan Z. I'd come back here before I live with them.

Here everyone uses cash for everything. I love it.

It snowed all morning here, but it looked like a melty slurpy once it hit the ground. Not quite frozen and much safer for biking in. The kids were excited because they got to say "It's snowy!" when I asked "How is the weather today?" One of my students wrote "I have to break banana." on a worksheet recently. I wonder what it means.

Cry. I just got the postcard I sent to *L* yesterday at my house today because after living in Japan for almost a year I still didn't know how to address postcards here! I still don't understand why they would preprint their address as the return address on a postcard I'm sending or where I'm supposed to mail it to. I officially hate *L* more now. I should ask them a bunch of questions about closing utility accounts and deposits and my light that only works when it feels like it.

So glad it's Friday. An hour to go until the three day weekend. Gonna try for a haircut and then figuring out some bs about moving out of my apartment.

When I left today some kids said see you, I said have a good weekend, then one boy said, "I'll call you back later."

I said Okay! Call me later!

(Memorizing things they don't understand.)

This week I wrote the graduation letter for the booklet all the staff and graduating students write something for. Writing it in English and Japanese was difficult. Maybe I'm not interested in being a translator anymore. I had one English teacher correct the Japanese version then the office manager proofread what I wrote in pencil and found a mistake. Safe. Does your school do a booklet or something? I heard about the ninth graders finishing early but the teacher is including me more lately and it's great. Sentence bingo! Much more practical! But I am already sad I won't get to see them every day soon. My graduation letter is SAPPY!

This week the 8<sup>th</sup> grade teacher had her health check and was out one day. She asked me to teach the special ed. class alone. I was fine with it so I said sure, but I can't remember if we're allowed to do that. (It went better than when she's there actually because the kids don't like her.)

She also forgot to make and bring copies of bingo sheets to two classes this week and left me alone with the class to go make them. She had me hand out test answer sheets and the graded tests while she was gone today, but failed to tell me one girl hadn't taken the test yet and was doing the make up that day. I had no idea and gave her the answer sheet. When I didn't have a graded test for that girl I asked about it then asked the teacher if she was taking another version of the test (no). I told the teacher that student probably shouldn't have an answer sheet. But the other kids all had one, and could keep it. So it's a bad idea to return tests already. Also a waste of paper by printing answer keys for each student to keep. I'm done thinking about work outside of work. I should be drawing right!?

I got Hello Kitty chocolate for school staff for Valentines day.

I think I'll have a Valentine party by myself. I'll make hot chocolate and eat snacks and write notes for my graduating students. There are about 130 of them. I have an idea to give them each something I made or collected instead of bringing them home or recycling them. Like those origami diamonds and stuff. I want to write back some friends too. It would be cooler if there was a fireplace in my apartment.

My hair looks the same but longer. It's always tied back because the wind blows people over here it's so strong.



My town looks like it should have cowboys. The mountains are cool. Actually this is a golf course in the back and to the left is a river bank so there's grass land in front. Super windy lately. Like it's gonna freeze your face off and push you over. Makes me grumpy. The funny thing is, there's palm trees here that are cool with the snow I guess.

Yesterday I painted after work. I'm going to make a small letter to give each graduating student. I only had two classes yesterday and three today, but I still feel busy all day with grading and paperwork.



Monday my *shodo* school had a big new year party. It's the same school I started studying with in Portland and there are several teachers here in Saitama prefecture. My teacher here and two other students from my class went with me but there were maybe 80 people there. I met the head teacher before when he came to teach a special class in Portland. It was fancy so at first I was kind of uncomfortable, but it was interesting to be with so many people who practice *shodo*.

The 8th grade boys cornered me and were kind of nervous. They said, "Ummm... tomorrow... is Valentine day...so..." (In Japan girls give boys chocolate for Valentines day). They were basically wanting me to bring them chocolate. I said "no way!" and ran away.

My first Japanese Valentine's day was funny. One of the eighth graders put his arm around my shoulder for a sec while he was walking past with some friends. Hah. He's not really interested in English but so sweet. He's the one who wants to be a teacher.

I have so many zine ideas but so much of my energy is wasted on bullshit like renewing my work visa, giving things away so I can move soon, and looking for my next job. I like being able to go to overly ridiculous fancy buffets for work parties and stuff. Mostly I like being able to afford food and traveling. Living in Japan is fun. People all work a lot so they can afford the fancy stuff sometimes. I saw tools made out of chocolate for Valentines day. Real size tool shaped chocolate I mean. The chocolates were all so fancy. Lots of people make their own fancy chocolate.

Monday we had a big fancy party for my calligraphy school at a hotel space. A buffet lunch and musicians and stuff. I guess people who practice calligraphy are usually more high class but I didn't know. I just wore a hoodie and felt underdressed and awkward at first but it was fine. I think in general this part of Japan (Tokyo area) is similar to New York, so people like name brands and fancy expensive stuff. I'm so not used to that. I live in the countryside though so people around here are way more relaxed farmers and stuff.

I took the day off Tuesday to go to Tokyo Disneyland with my friend. I don't really like Disney, but we did a drawing class and laughed our heads off on the rides.

Disneyland was really fun. Because we went on a weekday in the winter, it wasn't that crowded. There were still a lot of people, and of course we had to wait in line, but it went fast because we were just talking. It was snowing all day but not staying on the ground. I haven't been in LA for about ten years, so it was nostalgic to see things like Captain EO again.

Yesterday I had a Skype interview for a job in Kyushu and they want to offer me a job when they get their contracts. Next week I'll go to Atami. Now I can focus on applying for jobs in California. I think having the experience of living abroad is really good. Now I know I can handle it.

I'm going to Atami Tuesday for the company contract presentation interview thing and am glad I cleared up that I'm getting paid for it and not using paid leave. But. They asked me not to tell my school that's why I'm gone that day. I wonder if they're having the school pay even though I'm not there, and I'm doing company stuff that the company should pay me for. I hate secretive lying stuff like that. So much. Anyway, I'm not planning to take the job if it's offered to me, but it sounds nice to do something different outside of school. I like road trips. Too bad I won't get to do anything there, like go to *onsen*. I guess interview experience is always good.

I had a busy day. Went out of town three hours each way by train to do a ten minute presentation interview for my company. Bet they regret asking me now. I totally got nervous during it and forgot most of what I planned to say. Oh well. They tried to get contracts there before and failed so said it's okay and thanks for trying. I felt exhausted and bad for messing it up. It was pretty anyway - you can see the ocean from the train and it was a clear day. Sigh. One more potential job to cross off the list.

This is the last week I have 9th grade classes because they'll have graduation practice and graduate in a couple weeks. Sad. It's exciting to be finishing soon, but scary because I have no idea what happens next.

I saw a car the other day that had a sticker on the back that just said, "that's." I started laughing, but it made me think of you. I have no idea what it's referring to. So much English goodness here.

I had the idea for kids to do a zine about themselves in English, rather than each student make a page or two for a collaborative zine. I thought the chances of it happening would be improved if a lot of copying wasn't part of it. I wish I had suggested it months ago as something the kids were working on to show their progress. I was just too busy and timid to suggest it.

This week I got hit with doing a special tutoring class any chance I have for the student who doesn't go to normal classes. Even though she's graduating, I guess she isn't going to all the meetings and will continue studying with me for a couple weeks. It's funny because I hadn't met with her all term until Monday. I guess we're so nice that people feel like they can always ask us to help. And we're the type to not complain about feeling overwhelmed with work. How did they know? I'd rather do this than 10 classes a week at an elementary school! Though the elementary teachers sometimes go to six schools and have about 25+ classes/wk from what I hear.

My flight is in less than a month! I feel pretty overwhelmed. I'll have my vacation time to pack and clean. Or sleep all day and try to recover a little. Moving is stressful.

I'm irritated by the eighth grade teacher right now. Today she had me come to class even though she was just handing out tests and taking a couple minutes to talk to each student. I did nothing. She's very good at overcomplicating everything then complaining that she's always so busy.

I'm sad that I have my last 9<sup>th</sup> grade class after lunch. That teacher is so sweet and had me make a short comment to the classes and asked them to clap for me at the end of the last class. How embarrassing.

## March 2013: Bittersweet

*Thinking about leaving made me sad, but I tried to stay positive by thinking about all the things I was looking forward to. (Being warm and barefoot all the time, eating Mexican food, being able to understand people a lot more often...)*

School? Why bother? Working for a school is fun though. I like school lunch and recess. Nothing has changed.

Hehehe. One of my elementary school calligraphy classmates is wearing a sweatshirt that says "directly" on it with a picture of a motorcycle. It also says "fineness" and "courage." One time a girl here had a shirt that said "foamy" in cursive. I explained what it meant and she felt kind of embarrassed because she had no idea. They just think foreign words are cool.

Living here is entertaining.

I want to try to do things I enjoy before I leave too. I'm glad I went to Disneyland, while it was snowing... Laughed my head off though. The first ride we went on was the stupid "racecars" that are painfully slow and automatically stop if you're within a car length of the car in front. I drove on the right side of the car though, with the pedal on the left. So weird.

At my school one room has a Stitch calendar. It made me think of you. It says "A kiss a day keeps sweethearts that way." I wonder if anyone here understands it.

I hate that our one window is entirely frosted. I want to look outside! It makes it feel like a prison or something depressing.

It's 8pm on a Sunday here and I had dinner and am finally drawing all these seed pods I've collected because they look like tree houses or futuristic apartment buildings to me. I took a break to take the trash out downstairs, and as I was putting it into the shed, the cute boy came out with his trash. Sometimes I see him in the morning when we're leaving for work. We always just say good morning. He seems nice though, more friendly than the other people in the building.

Today I looked at clothes with lots of funny English on them but then I turned into a zombie from visual overstimulation.

Finished the 9<sup>th</sup> grade classes for this year last week. One class (the English teacher's homeroom) made little books with notes written for their teachers. They gave me one as well on Friday. It was so sweet! Some wrote in English and some in Japanese. But they used only easy *kanji* so I can understand.

I'm still tutoring one student who doesn't go to normal classes. They will all graduate on Friday next week though.

Yesterday a student asked me "What is fuck?" and I had to just tell him it's a bad word and *no good*. Today the seventh graders had a worksheet where they wrote sentences to answer "What did you do yesterday?" One of the smartest kids wrote "What did you do last night? I did fuck." Then the boy sitting next to him copied it. Sigh. (*I talked to the teacher about this and the next day I got a very formal apology from the student who was teaching this to his friends. The teacher wanted me to explain to him that it's totally inappropriate to use at school although we can hear it in American movies and songs.*) Funny and sad at the same time. Like the ceremony we had today.

It wasn't the graduation, but like a fun party for the third year students where all the other students did entertaining things for them. The art club made a rad huge banner painted with glitter puffy paint on fabric. The technology club made another huge banner with words and pictures lit up with blinking lights. They sang songs and had funny skits and a slideshow. I'm always so impressed by how much effort they put

into everything here. Maybe just compared with lazy Americans. It's motivating but at the same time I'm exhausted.

I wanted to learn to make *miso* while living here but didn't get the chance. The time is going so fast! I'll be going to California in only three weeks!

I was actually in a ceremony that I didn't realize was going to happen all afternoon. Basically the students showered the graduating students with awesome and then everyone cried.

One of my coworkers showed me a picture on her camera of a framed painting in her house. It's something I wrote in Japanese calligraphy and gave all my coworkers. Her husband liked it and framed it. All I could say is wow.

Kids here are so tame right? For the most part. Depends on the area, but like you said, the drama at your school was over-reacted to. And the kid bringing a fake gun to my school is one of the worst things that happened this year but it was more funny than dangerous. Yesterday he was asking what “愛に時間が無い” is in English. When I told him “No time for love,” he said it sounds so cool in English.

It's so tempting to buy a lot of fancy beautiful stuff here. I'm crazy about how everything here is so elegantly designed and fancy! But I have to hold back.

Yesterday was a ceremony for third year students. I was impressed by how much effort everyone made and it was great. They each got to take home a blueberry plant. Everyone was sad at the end. This time of year is always bittersweet.

I'm kinda depressed to be leaving so soon. I'm gonna miss my students.

No. Nothing. No one has contacted me for an interview. All the jobs I've applied to suck. Like no hours or low pay. Or both. Oh well. I have to keep trying. I'm freaking out about moving back to Cali. Starting over somewhere new is starting to feel scary.

Yeah, sad, busy, excited, nervous... Lots of feelings at the same time.

**Yesterday one of my 14 year old students put his arm around my shoulder again. I told another boy, "He's my new boyfriend."** Another boy wants to be in the NBA. I told him to get taller. I said if you come to California, call me!

I totally understand needing a community. It's been really stressful for me to only talk to people through email and Skype a little. I mean, I speak some Japanese, but it isn't the same as being able to really talk with people. I think that's important for girls to deal with stress and the reason the majority of the people who stick around are male.

The cherry trees are already blooming! It's a crazy time of everything changing.

This year has been a great experience so it's bittersweet that it's all ending. I'm ready (or almost ready?) to move on to the next chapter though. After I sleep for a couple days and file taxes.

I forgot to tell you, last week I was hanging out with a few first year students after school and one girl did something interesting. She took my hand and pushed on my palm towards my wrist a little, and a little bump came up. Then she said, “Oh! you're going to have a daughter someday.” Or something... in Japanese so I wasn't totally sure. I just said eh? Because I've never heard of that before. Have you? She showed me she has two bumps which means she'll have a boy and a girl. I don't really get it. Then she looked at my palm and said I won't get divorced. She's kinda a strange kid... but it reminded me of your physic Chinese student.

I know! I have 5 more work days! Crazy! I hope I don't lose it and cry a ton at graduation Friday. I teared up a little at the ceremony last week. The girls were crying already for that! It's gonna be cry-fest at my school I'm afraid. Yesterday the third year students had a little ceremony just for staff. They gave us flowers and notes and sang for us. I have the song stuck in my head now. I sat next to the first year English teacher and he was holding back the tears.

Haha, so yesterday everyone at work was talking about blood type personality and trying to guess what everyone else was. The second year English teacher is AB and takes it very seriously. Even she couldn't always guess correctly though. I don't think it's valid at all, but it's totally entertaining.

The other day one of the 7th graders was being obnoxious as usual, so I pushed his desk a foot or two (he sits near an outside wall) towards the open veranda. He said (in Japanese) "Teacher look! Alissa's bullying me again!" I love teasing them like that if they are away from their desks. I stood at another boy's desk that day while he was talking to his friend instead of singing like he was supposed to. So he started walking around the room pretending to be me. They make me laugh every day. The 9th graders will graduate tomorrow. Kind of sad. I bet a bunch of us will be crying.

Yesterday was a strange day.

One of my coworkers, who is an assistant for the boy in a wheelchair, invited me to hang out. We talk sometimes and she has been slowly trying to use English because she wants to learn. Recently we were talking (in Japanese) and a student was surprised and asked if she was speaking English with me. She immediately said, "This is a pen." Which was absolutely random and pretty funny. She said she was taking me to her favorite place. She talked about global warming and war with China and earthquakes the whole way there... which she never mentions at school. We parked and went into a restaurant that was basically a cafeteria, seriously full of only women and a few kids. We met her friend there and talked for a while and ate. Then they started in on the evangelism. If that's what it's called. In the first place, I'm kinda busy and leaving the country in a couple weeks. So I was thinking maybe an hour to get coffee or something. Secondly, my Japanese vocabulary is really limited. After an hour or two I run out of things I'm able to say and just feel like my head will explode. So they were telling me all these miracle type stories and I couldn't just leave... but I almost did. It just gave me a migraine. It was way too religious, but a type of Buddhism. I took a class on Buddhism and did a temple stay in Korea, so I know enough to recognize it was wacky. Later I looked it up (Fuji Taisekiji Kenshokai) and it is in fact considered wacky by normal Buddhists because they don't believe Buddha was more than a prophet type. (So similar to the divisions in western faith... don't you think?) Anyway, I was so not interested in their game and should have made it clear I wasn't from the start. I'm too nice sometimes. Instead of being 'Japanese polite' it would have been a good time to pull out the 'western blunt' no effing way. What a waste of a nice day.

I only have two more work days and one day for the closing ceremony. I'll be back so soon!

Yesterday was graduation. I didn't cry but I think almost everyone else did. I do get teary eyed when I hear "*Kotoba Ni Dekinai*" - great song. I was too busy feeling formal awkward and getting a nosebleed during the ceremony.

Before the ceremony started, I saw that a teacher was with two of the "bad" kids who don't usually show up to school. I peeked in the room and one was being told to change into his pants that don't look like gangster saggy pants. He was being chased around the room whining "*No waaaay!*" and acting like a baby. Normally this kid almost never speaks. So I flatly said (in Japanese) "*Are you a baby?*" The teacher and the other student tried not to laugh out loud and the student threw his socks in my direction and said something whiny that I didn't understand. But he did remember he's a fifteen year old and he should act more mature. Later I heard that teacher telling the other teachers about it and them all laughing. Sigh. I'm gonna miss this job.

Of course I want to visit Japan again. I enjoyed traveling here during holidays. There is so much I still haven't seen and it would be fun to travel here with you sometime. I like almost everywhere I've traveled to.

It's tough to choose between visiting places I like and places I've never been. I also have friends I like visiting in other countries. So I feel like I could travel forever. At the same time, I love to have a home where friends and family live and I know how things work.

The 9th graders graduated Friday and things are winding down. I have two classes tomorrow, then a national holiday and three days paid leave. Then the last day is just a closing ceremony. Two work days left.

Today was my last classes so I have paid leave then just the closing ceremony next week. Spring came early here and it's all flowery awesome. Well it was. We seem to be having an extremely early typhoon now... so maybe spring will be canceled. I'm kinda overwhelmed because I'm leaving in a little over a week.

Yesterday I went to an art class during a free period for fun. The kids were like, seriously? So they are doing stippling or pointalism or whatever it's called. They took portraits and will do a self portrait in dots next school year. Now they're practicing on a worksheet shading a sphere and cylinder that way. The teacher handed me one with a pen. After a minute my eyes were exhausted and I said *It's difficult isn't it!* But I'm almost done now and proud of myself for doing something that takes patience. And that my art degree never had me do.

A few of the third year students actually cut their uniform jackets short to look hip (or stupid?) and showed up to school like that. What weirdos. They're little punks, but actually not too bad. The leader one has an older brother in a little motorcycle gang that rides around town all night. I saw him riding on the back of his brother's bike once.

I get too attached to the kids. My last class was today. Paid leave then closing ceremony next week. That flew by. Enjoy the time with the kids for the rest of the week... Sniff.

I'm excited for the change coming but sad to say bye to all my students and coworkers. I think I'll be back in Japan at least visiting a lot, but *H* is interested in living here again later on if we want to. I keep meeting people who bring up San Diego and it makes me laugh. They have no idea I'm going there.

Are you trying to be super *genki* for your speech? I asked the principal about the farewell speech yesterday. I love our mostly Japanese with English thrown in conversations. He said, "two minutes." English and Japanese.



Collected some temple and shrine stamps around my neighborhood last weekend. It's like a scavenger hunt. Wish I had more time to explore but it's crazy packing time! Kind of like crazy monster time? (A reference from my favorite zine by Souther Salazar, *The Monster Who Ate Stars*) But not fun.

I get back Wednesday. Aaaaaah!

Thursday I finally went to the dentist for a cleaning. He speaks English and does dental checks for students at my school so his office is only about one mile from my house. We had met a couple times before because he likes to practice English with the ALTs. He showed me I had a big cavity next to a filling and suggested a crown. Because I'm leaving soon, he took an impression and filled the cavity that day. I'll go back on Monday for the crown. It's lucky I went in time. Because I have national insurance here and no insurance in America, it saves sooo much money. Also, I asked about how much it costs because health care costs in America are so different. He just shook his head and said he isn't charging me anything! After insurance my cost was around ¥3000 (\$30) which is much less than with insurance in America though. I'll send him something nice from America when I get back.

I hate packing. I might just get rid of everything. I wish Japan had free boxes. I'm thinking my life will be easier for a minute if I get *Kuro Neko* (a popular delivery company) to take at least my big suitcase to the airport. I'm planning to give things to friends this weekend and take things to school on Tuesday. **Too many things to do right at the last minute is too stressful!**

Today I had to renew my health care card. Oops. Because I'm going to get the real crown on Monday. Seriously I love national health care. Even if I was paying for the crown, getting it here saved HUNDREDS. like \$700+ in US with no insurance.

I'm just caught up in this "everything is exciting and changing right now" phase. It's either that way or super routine boring, isn't it?

My super cute friends got married (in paperwork only) last fall and got a place together, just got back from their honeymoon, and in a week or so will have the Japanese style wedding ceremony. I love that they do things in whatever order they want to here.

Today was my last calligraphy class. Everyone wrote sweet notes for me on a couple pieces of the paper that we use. Kids had one and grown ups had one. One of my favorite kids wrote the Japanese version of "See you later!" He knows I'll come back to play. He's the one who said "I thought you were ten." With a big smile on his face after I said I was eight at our Christmas party. He's always so happy and smiling. Then the teacher wanted to have a toast (*kanpai*) with a few people who stay late like me. She had beers and juice and sweets. It made me laugh so hard. She gave me calligraphy brushes and tons of paper too. She plans to continue teaching me with Skype!

Then I met my friend for dinner. She's a tiny Japanese woman I met online. She's from the city I work in and was married to a British guy so her English is good. She brought me a present too. My plan to not bring anything back isn't working. At least it's all cool Japanese useful stuff. I feel behind in my packing and organizing but am too tired. I can do that all day tomorrow.

Making myself pack and clean by tomorrow when I have another dentist appointment. Tuesday is the last ceremony for school and a party, then Wednesday the utilities companies are coming and the apartment people to check me out. Then the airport. Somehow before all that, I need to go to city hall and cancel health insurance, sell my bike, and cancel my phone plan.

My head is exploding. And everyone is so nice and giving me notes and presents.

Just got a package on a Sunday. Japan is hilarious. The PTA at school gave staff a present which is choosing anything we want from a special gift catalog. I thought Japanese tea would be a nice thing to share in America. But now I think I'll give it to the school instead. We drink tea with lunch every day and they bring it for visitors. So I know it will get used and I didn't pay anything to get to drink tea and coffee at work every day. One more thing I don't need to pack! My bike basket is gonna be overflowing with stuff I'm taking to school the last day. Gotta write my speech and letters for teachers too.

I love not needing a car. So sad to be leaving in three days. I knew this would happen though. A lot of people end up staying for years so gotta get out while I can.

I keep thinking about the good things about moving but am still sad. It's warm, Mexican food, I can buy a house, not live in a stupid apartment with one frosted window... But the job situation still looks so bad. Three more days of Japan. I keep telling everyone and myself I'll come back soon. I'm in Mister Donut having a *sakura* (*cherry blossom*) flavored donut and coffee. They love seasonal flavors here! Working on my speech and letters.

Did I tell you in a 7th grade class at the beginning when everyone stands up and does greetings, **a boy took his friend's comic and held it up so the teacher could see a fantasy sexy picture.** I saw it and laughed out loud then he was surprised I saw it too. Those kids are so funny.

So close to being done with packing here and just feel sad to leave. It's gonna be a huge change so I'm really trying to focus on the things I miss about living in CA. Right now I'm cold so it sounds nice. Gonna miss a lot of things here too. It's my fault for moving so much. I only miss being lazy and friends in Portland. I miss Tabor and coffee with friends. Here is just not laid back like the west coast. But I learned how to work harder.

Today I am in the midst of getting the dental crown. Waiting for more adjusting from the dentist. Learning words like *konde* (*bite*) and *ugaishite* (*gargle*). I just hate this limited time rushed feeling.

Earlier I got something at the bookstore and later looked at the bag. It says *Fukuya* in English letters. It means Lucky House - the name of the bookstore. It looks too much like "fuck yeah" though.

Speech *done!* I was super nervous while reading the Japanese part. Some second year girls came up to me after the ceremony and one said she started crying a little when I said I would never forget them. I asked if they could understand the Japanese and they approved. Whew! And the funny boy on the basketball team said, "Don't forget my name, I'll be in the NBA in the future." I said I'd watch his games and be proud. Little by little things are getting done.

So sad I'm leaving tomorrow. A lot of students and staff wrote me notes and gave me presents. I think I'm okay with luggage, about the same amount I brought.

A few more things to figure out before leaving, but just wanna enjoy the work party tonight and try not to cry too much. Wow... everyone is being way too nice to me today. But I'm still stressed out. I feel like I've been running for hours.

I just took my bike to the shop where I got it. Just gave it back and he didn't offer any money. One year rental for \$70. Now it feels so real to be leaving.

Today I moved out of my apartment and paid my last bills. I'm on the way to Narita now. Lately I feel a little sad about leaving but I decided to enjoy the last party with my coworkers. I even went out for a little while after that with a smaller group. The principal was already drunk, but he said, "*I'm just sleepy.*" so many times. Then he fell asleep in the small bar.

I'm in the airport waiting in line now! The last few days were crazy. I think my heart rate was really fast when I was mostly asleep last night. I feel like I've been running a marathon. Almost done. I have a feeling I'll sleep on the plane.

My luggage is so heavy even after I gave so much stuff away. Can't wait to check it.

## March 2013: Starting Over Again San Diego, California

*I returned to California to visit my parents, file taxes, and be available to interview for work. I got an interview request (within a few days of returning) for a school I had contacted online about six weeks prior. I was able to do a phone interview then visit the school exactly a week after returning from Japan. It seemed like a good fit and I moved to San Diego to start the following Monday. I think I was very lucky that this school needed someone to start right away and the timing was good. It took a while to get used to American culture and the new job, but it is working out well as of now.*

Already culture shocked and grossed out by American culture. When I got back my eyes got real big because the streets are so wide here.

My parents are talking about how I need a car if I live in California, but I don't really want to drive. It's been two years since I had a car. I said an old Honda Civic or something would be nice, then they said you need a big car that's safe or something stupid like that. I hate big cars. My mom asked me if I wanted to practice driving and I said NO.

I slept about 17 hours but woke up a couple times. Again it's about midnight but I'm awake. I worked on scanning a couple files for applying for teaching work. My mum gave me her old laptop but didn't delete anything. In iTunes she had Gorillaz, Bob Marley, MC Hammer, 2Pac, and Michael Jackson. My dad said the pool cleaner found two duck eggs in the pool today.

My mom made me tacos. I can't stay here for long because my parents are both overweight. When I talked to my brother I told him the SIX kinds of ice cream in their freezer. I got lots of vegetables I've been craving today. I couldn't get kale or romaine in Japan.

After getting a phone number I'm just working on taxes and talking to people about jobs. My mom wants me to go to church with them like three times this weekend. (I'm not going.) There's a guy she's been wanting me to meet for years.

The art teacher from my Japanese school emailed me a collage picture. It's from the party we had after the last day of school - the night before I left. It made me laugh that he Photo shopped in the two teachers who didn't come.

I'm a jet lag zombie.

Yes. Everything is huge. Even my parents >.<) I was so wide eyed at the huge roads and CUPS. Like a liter or more when you get a cup of water or anything from a restaurant. But everything besides water is way too sweet. A huge change from typical zooml cups. I miss Japan already!

I'm still applying for more jobs (working on that now). And sleeping at strange times. And not interested in driving. But things will eventually get better. And I'm working on filing taxes online for the first time.

Everything sort of attacks at once I think. The last week was crazy and I still feel busy as hell but half zombie. At least I haven't spent ANY money since I got back. Haven't had the need to take cash out at all. Crashing with my parents is good for that reason. My mum gave me her old laptop and they want to buy me a used car, once I admit I probably need one.

My sleeping is still totally retarded. I think it's mostly that I'm stressed out and want extra sleep. I keep staying up late - sort of normal for me. But then even after 8 hours of sleep I can't stay awake by about 3pm and need a three hour nap.

Today I Skyped with my grandparents and it was hilarious. They really are not comfortable using computers. My grandpa always says things like, "Find a nice rich Asian guy...and get married." And then I say "Okay." or "I'm working on it."

*April*

*After being in America for a while, observing my adjustment back to my own culture, not much has changed. I still hang my clothes to dry instead of using a dryer (which I also did during the summers in Portland) I still think American portions are too big. I still think conditions for riding a bicycle are not so safe or convenient in Southern California. Pot holes and car alarms. No bike parking.*

*August*

*Today I'm realizing just how reverse culture shocked I am. I think the jump to working here a week and a half after my last day working in Japan forced me to avoid thinking about it at all. I am so used to the Japanese culture of working long hours, even though as a foreigner I wasn't expected to (and normally didn't) work late in Japan. I worked in a culture of primarily quiet and respectful people who value minding your own business. I was just fine as an introvert, doing my own thing without question, in an open office with the other staff. Maybe because there wasn't a lot of talking or I didn't understand a lot of that talking, I felt like the free periods I had for planning were enough quiet time. I also lived alone in a very quiet neighborhood, in a small town, and had almost no friends in the country. I had a lot of alone time. Now I have room mates who are not nearly as quiet as my old neighbors. I live in a noisy neighborhood in a good sized city. I work downtown in an area full of homeless people, noisy buses and sirens, and bad smells. All this stresses me out. So when I come home, all I want to do is hide in my room where I can recharge. I feel like my heart is still in Japan or Portland. Some of both. I don't know anyone here, I haven't done anything here, and I don't like it. My only refuge is the Japanese school near my house where I help Americans study Japanese on weekends.*



*The day of my flight to Japan, I thought it would be funny to get a wealthy single woman type picture of myself. I had a bunch of cash in Yen (not that much honestly) to get started in Japan and was with my photographer friend who has a cute little dog. So dorky but this seems fitting for my profile picture. (Photo by [Carmen O'Brien](#))*

[alissa j.](#) (aka alissa robot) is currently living in California and misses Japan every day. All she wants to do is study Japanese and make [art](#). She is happy to encourage native English speakers with a Bachelor's degree to work in Japan (or elsewhere) teaching English. Living abroad is a fantastic opportunity you will never forget.

The title of this story is in response to the Japanese culture of working long hours and being somewhat interested in a relationship, but feeling like you don't have any time to meet people or spend on a relationship outside of work responsibilities. Thanks for reading! I hope it made you laugh.