



Hello, everyone! This is Jeff. As I look upon the newly-turned colors on the trees around Agano city, I'm reminded of how glad I am to have been able to see the fall scenery in my hometown this last month. That's right, for the whole month of October I returned to America with my wife. I had the privilege of seeing my oldest brother's wedding, as well as meeting my other brother's 11-month old son for the first time. We were treated to my mother's excellent cooking, made Jack-O-Lanterns, drank apple cider, had bonfires, and had our fill of Michigan's fall pleasures. Mysteriously, I seem to have gained a few pounds during my stay, as well (no regrets). Having had my fix of America for the year, I'm happy to say that I'm back and ready to give my all for this new term of my English class.



Culture shock?!



For this issue, I'd like to talk about culture shock. For those of you who don't know, culture shock is the feeling of anxiety or stress that comes from moving to a place with a different culture, values and norms than what you're familiar with. I'm frequently asked if I ever felt culture shock upon coming to Japan, to which I can only answer that I didn't get it very badly. When I arrived in Japan 4 years ago, my first stop was Tokyo, and after experiencing the city for several days I honestly felt that if the language on the signs switched from Japanese to English, that this could just as easily be any one of America's big cities (Personally, I feel that Niigata is more Japanese than Tokyo. In the same vein, suburban and rural America feel more American than the major metropolitan centers). There are some points of difference that are easy to notice, such as having to change your shoes upon entering a school building, but I wouldn't say that ever rose to the level of 'shock.' Rather, what I felt more strongly this year than ever was **reverse** culture shock. While home in America, I would watch TV and think, "...uh, who's this actor? And what's this new TV show all about, I've never heard of it before..." My cousins had grown up, gotten married, some had kids of their own, and even those kids had grown up and entered school. The menus at my favorite restaurants had changed, the layouts of the local supermarkets had changed, nearby houses had been repainted; my elementary, middle and high schools had either built on new additions or renovated. I at times felt as though my hometown of Plainwell wasn't Plainwell, anymore.



In the midst of all this change, however, there were several things that hadn't changed. My parents, brothers and their families came to meet me at the airport when I arrived (with a surprise appearance from my aunt, uncle, and cousins). They saw me off when I left. My friends from elementary, middle and high school all got together and played games late into the night while laughing until our faces hurt. My dog, Blake, let me know exactly when he wanted to go for a walk, occasionally by bringing his leash right to my feet.



Regardless of how much changes or stays the same, Plainwell will always be my hometown, and will always hold a special place in my heart. I would encourage all of you never to forget where you came from, or the people who are the most important to you. Until next time,
- Jeff

