Everyone needs something to work towards. If there is no driving force in a

person's life, one will likely indifferently go through the motions, never

experiencing the thrill of accomplishing a goal he or she desires. I know a

lot about wandering aimlessly through life, and I'm all too familiar with the

frustrations a lack of direction can bring. However, two years ago, I was

fortunate enough to discover an opportunity to do something I never knew I

wanted to do so badly: teach English in Japan. Teaching English in Japan is

not an idea I had to warm up to, instead, I was immediately ready to do

whatever it took to make it a reality. Working in Japan became my dream.

Of course, It may seem strange that a 24 year old man would randomly become

instantaneously enamored with a culture, or anything for that matter, but

that's exactly how my fascination with the Japanese culture began. It all

started with my desire to find a new career. For years, I scoured the internet

for anything in which I had true interest. Up to that point, I had been a

music instructor at my family's music shop for six years, and while I enjoy

teaching music, I wanted a little more adventure in my life. This is what made

the idea of teaching in Japan immediately attractive. It was so attractive

that it became the one driving force that has led me to become a much harder

worker than I ever was before. As a result of my interest, I finally returned

to school, which is something I had never intended beforehand. In my high

school years, I never fully applied myself because I failed to see the

benefits. This was mostly due my lack of any aspirations that required a

college-level education. In addition, I participated in extracurricular

activites that I felt were more important and a far better use of my time than

schoolwork. Why would I want to sacrifice instant gratification for something

I felt had little use? At least, that was the question I asked myself during

my teenage years.

Thankfully, my great interest in Japan has vastly changed my opinion on

education. For the first time in my entire life, I can say I am proud of my

schoolwork. Once I made the commitment to learn the Japanese language, I

learned a lot about discipline and found that bettering myself through

education in many subjects can actually be thoroughly rewarding. I have gone

from a student who barely passed high school by only doing the bare minimum to

the 4.0 student I am today. I never would have excelled in school if it had not

been for my love of Japan.

So, why am I so enthralled with Japan, its native people, and its culture?

Well, I hate to answer a question with a question, but why aren't all

Westerners immensely intrigued by Japan? It is so different in almost all

aspects. If one views Japan through a strongly ethnocentric filter, he or she

will doubtlessly find Japan to be a very strange society. One will struggle to

find horse meat served at a restaurant, giant anime banners on the side of

buildings, or seemingly happy McDonalds employees in the United States. On

that note, how about the Japanese people in general? If you are a foreigner in

the U.S., you had better know how to speak English if you don't want people to

feel frustrated by the language barrier you create by your presence. In

contrast, the Japanese people often seem to be very impressed with those who

can speak even a little Japanese. In America, the attitude of many is, "speak

English, you are in America." In Japan, the use of the Japanese language by

foreigners is usually met with an appreciative or surprised response

like,「日本語が上手ですね！」This is one of the many cultural

differences that is really quite pleasant.

The Japanese have definitely have a lot to be proud of when it comes to their

culture. In my opinion, the best aspect about Japanese culture is how it

meshes the old with the new. Beautiful temples and shrines can be found in the

heart of even the largest and most technologically up-to-date cities. I

sometimes wonder if the Japanese realize how incredible it is for a westerner

to see people doing something as simple as wearing a kimono or yukata outside

of the home. Speaking in terms of fashion, only the bravest Americans, would

even consider wearing clothing from the 90's here in the States as they would

definitely become subject to criticism. Japanese traditional culture is

obviously firmly tied to its historical roots, and Japan's history is also

definitely worth discussing, I mean come on, samurai and geisha! What's not to

like? I thought I was torturing my speech classmates this year when I decided

to make two of my three main speeches about the three unifiers of Japan

(Tokugawa Ieyasu, Toyotomi Hideyoshi, and Oda Nobunaga), but I ended up

getting an enormously positive response. While most students sleep through

Western history classes, my classmates said they were very entertained by the

Japanese history lessons I provided in my speeches.

My love of all things Japanese has also affected my family. They may have

never known about important figures in Japanese history like Miyamoto Musashi

or Sasaki Kojiro if it weren't for me. I think they have also come to

appreciate the genius of Akira Kurosawa films as well. While I appreciate

anime, and I most certainly appreciate Japanese gaming (Metal Gear Solid,

anyone?), it's the history of the country that really fuels my love for Japan.

Kyoto, Osaka, and Hiroshima are only a few of the many historically important

cities on my bucket list that I wish to visit.

Any opportunity to improve my level of proficiency in the Japanese language in

Japan would be appreciated to a degree that is inexpressible through words. I

live in an area where there are almost no speakers of the Japanese language,

and there are no Japanese courses offered through my college, so needless to

say, GenkiJACS is the perfect place to spend a summer vacation for a person

like me.

Oh...and did I mention I love sushi more than life itself?