

最優秀賞

古賀 杏奈さん さいたま市立大宮国際中等教育学校 2 年

埼玉県

私は、アメリカ人の友人と関わる中で感じた文化や価値観の違いとそれが友人関係に与える影響について考えたことを書きました。日本で生まれ育った私にとって、これまで、文化などの「違い」はとても大きいものでした。しかし、エッセイを書きながら自分の経験や思いを整理するなかで、大事なものは「違い」よりも、それを越えた絆、そして相手を思う気持ちであるということに再認識することができました。これを忘れず、今後も違いを超えた豊かな人間関係を築いていきたいと思えます。

### Beyond the differences

“Thank you for everything,” I said, holding back tears, “I will never forget the amazing days I spent with you.” I stood in front of the security gate in Pittsburgh International Airport. “I’m going to... miss you... so much,” I managed to say between sobs. Clear sky, fresh air and a nice smell of morning coffee. Everything was too perfect to say goodbye to Cathy, my host sister.

It wasn’t our first goodbye. Last year, Cathy came to my house in Japan as a homestay student. Following a wonderful week, she went back home to Pittsburgh, after which our friendship grew.

Filled with emotions, welling up with tears, I waited for her to say something. Compared to me crying my eyes out, she had a much brighter outlook on our parting. “Yeah,” she chirped, “but I can’t wait to see you again! Have a safe flight, Anna!”

A quick hug and she gently urged me to go to the gate.

If I am being honest with myself, and you the reader, I was disappointed. I had always believed that it is only polite to follow the Japanese cultural custom of *nagori oshimu*—saying goodbye reluctantly. I expected her to be just as reluctant. When I was walking into the line of the gate, my head filled with many questions. “Isn’t she sad that I’m leaving? Won’t she miss me even a little? Did I do something wrong?” I turned to see her face, but she was gone.

Even after 3 in-flight movies and a long, restless nap on the airplane, I was still thinking about this ordeal. Perhaps she wasn’t very moved because she no longer cared about me.

But as soon as I touched down, she texted me “I miss you so much already!”

Why now?!

After some research online, I found that many fellow Japanese have been in the same situation. Not only that, but I also read a blog written by an American woman living in Japan introducing her experiences of parting with Japanese friends. What surprised me more was that she felt very awkward when Japanese showed reluctance to leaving. This reminded me of Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory on differences in cultures across countries and how those relate to values and behavior. According to the theory, Japan is a collectivistic country, meaning that people value connections and crave sustained connections with others. This accounts for the *nagori oshimu* custom: it is a display of our wish to remain together. In contrast, countries like America are individualistic and people value independence.

It might be true that cultural differences lead people to have different values. This past year, my host sister didn't text me as much as my other long-distance friends. Despite this, I neither think she doesn't care about me, nor do I believe people in individualistic countries don't care. When telling her that economics would prevent me from being able to visit her as I had planned, her family agreed to let me stay at her house. She then planned the entire trip for me. She took me to many places and let me try anything I wanted. She stuck by my side and introduced me to her amazing friends. Why would she have done this if she didn't care about me?

Regardless of the culture, everyone has their own life to live and their own sense of values to guide them. Having the exact same sense should not be the thing that maintains a friendship. If what you and your friends value the most is different, even if that changes, the memories of the good times you spent together stay. And that's all you need to stay connected.

I'm sure that I will have various people as my friends, and it may not be easy for me or them to keep in touch. When that time comes, I will remember my experiences throughout each friendship.

And in the end, even if Cathy doesn't cry, you can be sure that I will. [665 words]

#### References

- The Awkward Art of Saying Goodbye in Japan (2017, April 7). Retrieved from <https://blog.gaijinpot.com/awkward-art-saying-goodbye-japan/> (2024, August 4)
- Country Comparison tool (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.hofstede-insights.com/country-comparison-tool> (2024, August 4)