



# Aleksandar

from

Oakville Trafalgar

to

Japan

## *"There's Always a Rainbow After the Rain"*

This must be a dream. From the moment I said goodbye to my family, to the instant I said hello to my host family and to even this moment in time I can not say I have experienced a shock of any sort. Rather, these collective experiences have felt surreal most probably because I can not believe I achieved my long term goal of getting to Japan.

My exchange was off to a normal start. After my four day orientation I was headed to my new host family's home. There I came to meet the Ambai family comprised of grandparents, parents, a son and daughter. I adjusted well to the Japanese culture; I learned Katakana and Hiragana in the first three weeks. Similarly, I settled well into the Ambai home. I became close with the son, Kotoro while the daughter, Akina and I went to the same High School (Mizusawa Daiichi). All was well until Akina went off to her exchange to the United States and Kotoro headed to University. Although the atmosphere of my home showed promise I was soon brought to the realization that there were problems. On a Friday, after a long day of school I came home to the news that my counsellor, Satosan is stopping by. I was rather excited because my counsellor is definitely the coolest and funniest adult I have yet to meet. However, this night came to a turn when he began to address me of the complaints my host mother has brought to his attention. This surprised me because not once has the family mentioned an issue with my behaviour but nevertheless the problems were mild. Satosan and I wrote out a contract per say that I would follow and the upcoming Friday he would return to check up on my behaviour. The list went as follows:

1. I swear to talk with my host family in Japanese after my delicious dinner.
2. I never forget my host family's tremendous efforts for me.

3. I swear to try to eat just a little bit of every food in front of me because all the food my host mother cooks for me is love for me.
4. I will never be a traitor of the Ambai family.
5. At home I use my smartphone to communicate with my family or friends less than 30 minutes a day.
6. I use my smartphone to communicate with my friends before 8:00 pm.
7. Wake up at 6:30 am and be punctual.
8. Say what you think of the food.
9. Eat more vegetables.
10. Patience.

I can say without a doubt that I followed the rules that my counsellor and I put together that night throughout the whole duration of the week. I even went beyond that by asking if the family needs any extra help that went outside of my duties of doing the dishes, cleaning my room and sorting my clothes. The host mother replied she does not but I insisted and she told me that on Monday I can help with the rice. That Monday, being a national holiday, I spent it breaking my back cultivating rice for eight straight hours.

Friday, may as well of been the 13th, quickly came and I was eager to meet with my counsellor as I was certain my host mother would boast about my tremendous efforts. As the 13th may suggest nothing went as I thought. The three of us: Satosan, my host mother, and I sat down in my room. In the first hour of discussion I had not heard the mother say a single decent thing about me. Rather it was complaints that were beyond my realm of knowing. If I were to handpick the top three most absurd complaints out of the dozens, this would be the list. Coming at number one, "It is extremely disrespectful to use your phone to translate what you want to say." The silver medal goes to, "You should only communicate to your family back home once a month." Trailing behind is, "You kept the grandparents up at night (night meaning after 8:00 pm) by the clicking of your keyboard." I suppose they hold the world record for greatest hearing considering that the click of my keyboard has to travel through my closed door, a long hallway, and then past their door. God forbid I farted; I would have burst their eardrums.

After a long hour of discrediting the mother's accusations she still managed to find the audacity to say "I don't want to be your host family." Both Satosan and I clued in what was at play here. The problem was not a matter of who she was hosting but rather that she was hosting. It is pitiful that she attempted to get me kicked out by stringing together the most nonsensical accusations just so she does not have to deal with the inconvenience of being a host family in return for her daughter's exchange. Following this night Satosan and I agreed that we would look for a new host family, not because the host mother demanded of it but because I deserve better.

As the title suggests from here on I was riding the rainbow. After packing my bags, Satosan and I spent the greatest weekend of my exchange together. The day could not have begun better as he took me to the most exquisite French cuisine where I enjoyed a delicious lamb steak for lunch. Later on he took me to various museums where I expanded my knowledge on Japanese history and the iconic figureheads that were born in the prefecture where I reside, Iwate. In the evening he dropped me off at the Rotary Youth Leadership Awards where I would spend the night. This event was really enjoyable; we did various activities with leadership roles and concluded the night with a game of dodgeball. I made a couple friends but sadly they live miles away in the neighbouring prefecture, Miyagi. The following day we received first aid training where among other things, I learned CPR. With the closing of RYLA Satosan came to pick me up and he took me to even more museums, an amusing one being about the symbiotic history between the cow and man. What really fascinated me however is the Chūson-ji temple which we later toured. This was an amazing experience, considering I got to see a temple completely coated from top to bottom with gold. But there really was no better way to end the day than by meeting and moving in with my new host family. This was such a monumental change in setting that I felt as though I had entered a new country.

In my new host family, Suzukisan, like the automobile company Suzuki but with the added -san for politeness, I have a father (Eikisan), mother (Keikosan), daughter (Michiko), and son (Kouta). Up to date I have only been living with the mom and dad as the son is at university, while the daughter is a hairdresser in one of the bigger cities down south. My new host family and I get along so well that you may as well drop the host because it truly feels as though we are family. Every night we play three games of Uno and keep score to decide who the winner is for the week. The parents speak decent English but of course want to improve. This goes hand in hand because I eagerly want to learn Japanese and so we have become both each other's teachers and student. Just the other weekend they took me to Sendai where we went shopping and they surprised me with tickets to the aquarium. The highlight of the day



was seeing the dolphin and sea otter show or maybe being able to pet a penguin. My exchange thus far just comes to show that no matter how bad things may seem to get, there will always be something good that arises from it. Like a clever man once said "Don't let one bad apple ruin the whole batch for you."

*Aleksandar*