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CIR's Corner

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Hello everyone! "CIR's Corner" is my monthly article about international exchange and cultures around the world. I will introduce a variety of interesting international topics.

This Month's Topic: Gresham, Oregon Part 3

I visited Ebetsu's sister city, Gresham Oregon, from 11/30 to 12/10. I was a chaperone for a group of junior high school students visiting for a homestay program. Despite being about a 3-hour drive from my hometown Seattle, I had never been to Gresham before this trip. The students and I experienced many things, so I will share the rest of my trip with you this month. If you haven't already, please read parts 1 and 2 in [CIR's Corner #18 \(November 2023\)](#) and [CIR's Corner #20 \(January 2024\)](#)!

Day 6: Tuesday, 12/5

Mr. Matsui continued his Japanese culture classes in the morning. This time we were teaching middle school and elementary school students. The classes were the same as what we did on Monday, so we used our experience from the previous day to improve our crane-folding technique.



Tuesday's school lunch was chicken teriyaki, which is apparently the most popular lunch at DCD. Bite-sized pieces of chicken covered in a salty-sweet sauce were served over brown rice.

Chicken teriyaki isn't eaten so much in Japan, but in America, it rivals sushi as one of the most popular "Japanese" foods. Probably most Americans

believe that chicken teriyaki is authentic Japanese food, but actually, it was created by Japanese and Korean immigrants, in my hometown, Seattle. In 1976, Toshi Kasahara opened Toshi's Teriyaki in Seattle, which became the first chicken teriyaki restaurant in America. At around the same time, John Chung became famous for the bulgogi-style chicken he served in his restaurant. He called it "chicken teriyaki," and taught his recipe and cooking methods to other Korean immigrants. Therefore, Korean-owned chicken teriyaki restaurants spread throughout Seattle and the Pacific Northwest from the 1980s. Even during this trip, I saw quite a few teriyaki restaurants in Gresham and Portland.

Back to the topic of school lunch, every day DCD provides a salad bar for students. Americans generally eat vegetables such as broccoli, cauliflower, and mushrooms in their salads raw, so the Ebetsu students did not like this. "Gross!" they exclaimed as they tasted the raw cauliflower. Seeing their reaction reminded me of my childhood days when I hated raw broccoli, so I can't say I disagree with them.

After lunch, there was a school assembly. The school band opened the assembly by playing a few Christmas songs. In Japan, the school band is an afterschool club. In America, however, the school band is an elective class chosen by students who want to play instruments. Out of the six host students, five were in the school band.



Band class

The Ebetsu students prepared a Japanese cultural performance for the assembly. Before we arrived in Gresham, they practiced dancing to the Japanese folk song, *Soran Bushi*. They were nervous at practice, but they nailed it on the day. Even DCD's students were singing along. After the assembly, DCD students came up to the Ebetsu students and said, "That was great!" and "Cool dance!" Everyone seemed moved by the powerful performance.



The students performed wearing traditional *happi*. *Ebetsu* was written on them.

After school, Principal Kim and TOSA Kayleigh took Mr. Matsui and me to happy hour at Valley Public House. I asked Kayleigh what TOSA means, and she said, "Teacher on Special Assignment." Her position at DCD is similar to an assistant principal. In addition, "Happy hour" is a time when bars and restaurants offer discounts on food and alcoholic drinks. It's usually offered from 4 PM to 7 PM on weekdays, when it's not so busy. I've been to a few bars in Sapporo that have happy hour.

Valley Public House is a beer hall that offers over 70 kinds of beer, wine, cider, and cocktails, most of which are produced locally. There were so many that I had a hard time choosing! Eventually I chose what my craft beer-loving husband would have chosen: a hazy IPA. Hazy IPAs, as the name suggests, are a hazy, cloudy, yellowish beer. IPAs are usually quite bitter, but this hazy IPA had a fruity, pineapple-like taste, so it was easy to drink.

There were two kinds of food at Valley Public House: pizza and Mexican. I chose a burrito, since Mexican food is so hard to find in Japan. The flour tortilla was stuffed with shredded chicken, rice, beans, cheese, guacamole, and salsa, so it felt quite heavy when I picked it up to eat it.



My hazy IPA and burrito

We all had one beer, and then Kim took Mr. Matsui to see our students perform in the DCD Christmas Concert. The jet lag was hitting me hard though, so I asked Kayleigh to take me back to the hotel. By the way, did you know that it's not against the law to drive after drinking in America? The legal BAC (blood alcohol content) is 0.08%, so if you are under that, then it is ok to drive. It varies a lot from person to person, but the average American will exceed the legal limit if they drink two to four beers in one hour. We had only one beer in 90 minutes, so it was safe to drive.

Day 7: Wednesday, 12/6

We didn't have any special plans for the Ebetsu students on Wednesday, so they spent the whole day at DCD. Mr. Matsui and I didn't have any culture classes either, so we checked in on the students in their classes. They seemed to be able to follow their math and science classes, but I heard them say that

the other classes were too hard due to their lack of English ability. They also said that American PE class was particularly hard. Both their minds and bodies got a workout.



Circuit training in PE class

For lunch, I went out to eat Mexican food with the members of the Gresham Ebetsu Sister City Association (GESCA). Barry, the treasurer, and his wife Toni, picked me up at DCD. Barry is a retired police officer and lifelong Gresham resident. Toni is also a Gresham native, and a Japanese American. The two met when they were students at Gresham High School. GESCA President, Tomiko Takeuchi, met us at the restaurant. She is a Japanese American as well, and has a lively personality. She joked that she doesn't speak much Japanese, but she is dedicated to the relationship between Gresham and Ebetsu.



Lunch with GESCA

I returned to DCD in the afternoon, and after school, I participated in a potluck party held by the host families. They all brought tasty dishes, and Kim even brought a whole cake. Everyone talked about their best memories of the homestay. One went to an ice hockey game, a few visited Multnomah Falls, some enjoyed cooking and playing games with their host families, and one student even got to fly in her host family's airplane! We laughed a lot, and even

some tears were shed. It was a short stay, but a wonderful experience for everyone. The students had two nights left with their host families, so I hoped they enjoyed their time to the fullest.



The cake at the potluck

Day 8: Thursday, 12/7

Today we met at DCD in the morning, and spent the entire day on a field trip around Gresham.

First, we visited the Gresham City Hall. Government Relations and Policy Advisor Larry Morgan was kind enough to show us around. Each department had its own office. Compared to Japan, where everyone works in one big room, it was extremely quiet. It was so quiet that I thought the students might get in trouble for talking in the halls.

The building that houses the fire department, police department, and school district office are located next to City Hall, so we went there next. Firefighters showed us various kinds of equipment, and explained the difference between a "fire engine" and a "fire truck." All this time I had been using the terms interchangeably, but actually, a fire engine is the one that carries the hoses and pumps the water, while a fire truck carries the ladders and lifesaving tools. I learned something new.



The tools inside the fire truck

We paid a visit to the superintendent next. His name is James Hiu, and he is from Hawaii. He told us that his father is Chinese and Native Hawaiian, and his mother is Japanese. He warmly welcomed the students by giving them messenger bags filled with presents. It was very fitting for the holiday season.



Students happily opening presents from Superintendent James Hiu

We headed over to the Gresham History Museum, where City Council President Sue Piazza greeted us. She explained that the museum was holding a special Christmas exhibit called “Christmas at the Museum.” There were all sorts of Santa Clauses, Christmas trees, and even a gingerbread house contest. There were categories for pros and amateurs, and we all got to vote for our favorites.



The professional category. The winning house is on the left.

Looking at gingerbread houses made us kind of hungry, so we stopped by The Local Cow for lunch. This restaurant specializes in gourmet hamburgers that use grass-fed beef and locally grown organic produce. I chose the barbeque bacon cheeseburger. The burger was thick and juicy, and the fries were abundant. However, what I really love about bacon cheeseburgers in America is that the bacon is always crispy. Japanese bacon is a floppy disappointment.



The BBQ Bacon Cheeseburger. I couldn't finish the fries.

After we finished our hamburgers, we went back to the City Hall and met with Mayor Travis Stovall. He had a friendly chat with the students, and recommended various things around Gresham. “The Local Cow has fantastic hamburgers!” he raved. When the students told him that they had just eaten lunch there, they made him quite jealous. “I wish I had eaten lunch there!” he said, green with envy.



With Mayor Travis Stovall

Our field trip ended with a visit to the police department. Lieutenant Jeff Miller gave us a tour. We pet a police dog, saw the control room for the drones, and even saw the back of a police car. Lieutenant Miller said that there were over 140 cases of gun violence in Gresham in 2023. However, thanks to the “Safe Gresham” plan, that number was lower than in 2022. Rather than gun violence, theft is the most common crime in Gresham.



They're very excited to be handcuffed.

After our field trip, the students returned to their host families' houses, and Mr. Matsui and I returned to the hotel. President of the Gresham Chamber of Commerce, Brian York, wanted to show us the venue of a Christmas charity dinner he helped organize. The theme was "A Charlie Brown Christmas," so he decorated his table with Snoopy. The purpose of the event was to collect food and other necessities for the homeless and people in need. In America, there are many charity events like this during the holiday season.



Gresham Chamber of Commerce President Brian York

That evening, I had dinner with Tara, the Japanese teacher at Gresham High School. She lived in Japan for three years during the 90s as an Assistant Language Teacher (ALT), and decided to teach Japanese for a living once she returned to America. We sent two high school students from Ebetsu to Gresham High School last month for a homestay program, and they will return this month.

For dinner, I had a turkey and cranberry sauce sandwich, because it reminded me of what we made with Thanksgiving leftovers. During the trip, I was always trying to choose food that is not common in Japan. I was also still pretty full from the cheeseburger at lunch, so the turkey sandwich seemed like the lightest meal on the menu. However, since it's America, it was quite large!



Day 9: Friday, 12/8

It was our last full day in Oregon. We met at DCD for the last time, and the students said goodbye to their new friends and host families. The school bus took us to the hotel, and the students checked in before we headed to Portland for the day.

Our first stop was the Japanese American Museum of Oregon (JAMO). I met my friend Phylcia at the JAMO gift shop last week, but this would be my first time to check out the museum. Rie and Toyoko were our Japanese-speaking guides. Rie was born in Japan, but Toyoko was a *sansei*, or third generation Japanese American. "It's pretty rare for a *sansei* to be able to speak Japanese," Toyoko explained. "I used to speak it with my grandparents."

At JAMO, we learned about the history of Japanese Americans in Oregon. About 150 years ago, Japanese immigrants settled on the West Coast for work, and they created their own thriving community in Portland called "Japan Town." There were Japanese farmers in Gresham who grew crops such as cauliflower and strawberries. However, the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor changed everything. Japanese Americans were forcibly removed from their homes and sent to concentration camps. Most of those sent to the camps were US citizens. Treating Americans like enemies just because they had Japanese heritage was pure racism. It is a sad chapter of US history, but it is important to learn about it so that it is never repeated. The students said that they had never learned about the incarceration of Japanese Americans during WWII in their history classes. At the end of the tour, there was a place to write our thoughts, and the students all wrote, "I learned a lot."



A replica of the concentration camp. Imprisoned Japanese Americans were only provided with a bed and a wood stove, so they made their own furniture with what they found.



For lunch, we went to the food cart pod that my friend Phylcia recommended. The students were happy to choose what they liked. Some chose familiar dishes like fried rice, and others chose more adventurous food, such as Korean and Mexican fusion. I chose something that I had loved as a child:

macaroni and cheese. However, there was so much that I got tired of eating it, so I gave what I couldn't eat to a homeless man, along with all of my spare change.

In the afternoon, we went shopping for souvenirs. The students wanted to visit the Nike Store first. Nike comes from Oregon, so there were some exclusive souvenirs here. I was running out of luggage space, so I bought a peachy pink duffle bag. One of the students bought the same one. After we shopped at the Nike Store, we took a picture in front of the Christmas tree in Pioneer Square.

We visited a souvenir shop called Made in Oregon, and I bought my daughter a stuffed Bigfoot. Bigfoot is a mythical creature that was allegedly spotted in Oregon. We saw many Bigfoot souvenirs, so it seemed like it's the unofficial mascot of Oregon.

Everyone was tired after an afternoon of shopping, so we returned to the hotel and had dinner at the chicken teriyaki restaurant next door. "It tastes different



from Japan's teriyaki, but it's good!" the students said. They talked about their memories of Gresham while eating. They also debated about whether it would be best for them to sleep or not before our early departure.

Day 10: Saturday, 12/9

I decided to sleep for a bit, and I woke up at 2 AM. I came with two suitcases, but I was leaving with three plus my Nike duffle bag. Since Mr. Matsui only had one suitcase, I asked him to take one of mine for me. The five girls met us in the hotel lobby on time, but the one boy overslept. Even though Mr. Matsui had to go wake him, we were still able to leave on time at 3:30 AM.

It was early, but the airport was already very busy. We were able to check in smoothly despite this. However, we did have one problem going through the security check. One of the students put the jam that Jim Card gave her at Tsuru Island into her carry-on bag. A TSA agent removed the jam from her bag, and explained that since it exceeds the 100 ml limit for liquids in carry-ons, she has two options: check the bag, or throw away the jam. Unfortunately, we had no time to go back to the check-in counter, so the student had to say goodbye to both Gresham and her jam.

We arrived safely in Los Angeles, and departed for Japan just after noon. This time I was exhausted, so I slept like a log on the plane.

Day 11: Sunday, 12/10

We went "back to the future," and arrived in Japan the following evening. The students and I ate our first rice balls in a while at Haneda Airport.

When we finally arrived at New Chitose Airport, it was already 9:15 at night. My husband and daughter were waiting for me outside of baggage claim. My daughter was in a terrible mood since it was past her bedtime, but as soon as I gave her the Bigfoot and a large pink stuffed axolotl I bought in Portland, she calmed down. We returned home, and again, I slept like a log.

It was a long nine nights and eleven days, but we all learned a lot on this trip. I was able to experience a different environment from my hometown, and I learned that a lot has changed in America since I last visited. I'm already looking forward to next year's trip! ★

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