

Complete Happiness
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Japan: Taiko Drums for Peace Program
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The car was filled with chatter and loud music. Every time I inhaled a breath of air it was filled with the smell of a campfire. It was pitch dark outside and I laid my head on my cousin's shoulder. It had been a wonderful late summer night with my family under the stars. I closed my eyes and immediately saw in my mind's eye a group of kids in the dark of night singing, eating, and dancing. A wide smile instantly appeared on my face. These were the faces of the kids who were my besties for the summer in Japan.

We overcame struggles together, cried together and laughed together. They were my rock for our month in Japan. Through my travels to Japan this summer, I learned numerous new things, but the words I will remember and carry with me for the rest of my life are “you are part of my happiness.” This summer I learned that individuals cannot create my complete happiness; I have to build my confidence and do that on my own. I had to learn this by stepping out of my comfort zone for 30 straight days.

I have a vivid memory from early in the summer. I lay on the hard bamboo floor. Sweat poured out of my body and tears streamed down my cheeks. How was I going to make it through the rest of this program? I couldn't play the taiko drums very good and I was frustrated that everyone else in the group seemed to pick it up as soon as the bachi (big drum sticks) landed in their hands. I was filled with self-pity at that moment.

Then I heard a small voice; it was Alveann, a wonderful group member from New York City. She gently patted my back and swatted my hair from my face. Then she reached out her hand and helped me up, she flashed her kind reassuring smile and led me out the door with her. We walked to the drumming studio and picked our bachi from beneath our drums and played. She directed me as best she could and swiped away the sadness I was feeling.

The first time we performed our newly learned Taiko drumming routine my skin curled up and my face became flushed. I sang turning to the left, then to the right in and screamed “SORREY” Japanese for “Let's Go”. When we were done performing, thunderous clapping from the drumming masters and audience would fill my ears and my smile would grow. We performed frequently throughout the weeks and every time I became less nervous and more in tune with our

Taiko drumming. When my head hit the pillow each night I knew when I woke up, there would be another challenge or another new face I would meet the next morning.

Everything and everyone on my SDC program to Japan brought me happiness. They were all a part of my growing overall happiness, but I was most happy when leaving my comfort zone. At first, it was difficult but then I would face my uneasiness with a smile just like drumming. I learned to introduce myself in Japanese and shake it off when I pronounced a word incorrectly. I learned that real friendship can grow from dissimilar individuals. I learned that listening is more important than speaking sometimes and that patience is key. I learned from my SDC group, I learned from the wonderful Japanese hosts, and mostly I learned a lot from myself. My happiness grew this summer, and I hope to keep growing it.

