

INTRODUCTION

Japan used to conquer the Philippines a long time ago. The Japanese were once one of the reasons of sufferings of our ancestors. Though the relationship between these two Asian countries started this way, the history never became a barrier to build up friendship between these two large archipelagos.

The Tochigi YMCA – Holy Rosary College Foundation relationship had been started since 1985. This partnership benefitted for both the Japanese and Tala people for so many years now. And gradually in early 2000s, the Navotas has been part of this friendship.

This partnership didn't just give the people to explore new places and to taste different foods, it also gave them hope that there's more to life they live and improve their individual horizons especially those who had been part of it.

As part of YMCA family, this opportunity gave me a deep and wide understanding about life and awakened me to the role I take part on this planet. This 30th year of a good partnership will still be in progress and I am grateful to be part of it.

- Angelo G. Rañeses

“The 11 Days of *Kawaii* Journey”

“To be in Japan is exciting; to be with people in Japan is learning,” this is the thought that had been imparted with me after the 11 days of exploring, sight-seeing, mingling, etc. Let me tell you how I came to this realization.

We never felt like we’re just visitors to the houses where we home-stayed. They treat us like a part of their own family. Specially at Kuya Maen and Ate Chiharu’s house where we stayed for 4 different days. Kuya Maen is an old camper and an HRCF graduate. “I know exactly how you feel; I used to be in your shoes. As the time I knew there were 2 students from my Alma Mater who will come here in Japan for YMCA camp, I told Tomoko that you guys may stay here so you would feel comfortable even if you’re not in your own houses,” he told us. He had been really good friend for the two of us and we’re just like *magkumpare*. Also Masaya, his 4-year old son, is just like my brother. We played wrestling and some other cool stuffs.

One afternoon, Kuya Maen took us on a Catholic church in Utsunomiya and had lunch on a sushi restaurant.

As well as our home-stay at Atsuyo and Sir Adrian’s apartment had been wonderful. They gave us comfortable space during our stay even they just pay for the house they rent. And Sir Texas and Ate Espi’s house is also comfortable. There, we played video games with Satoshi. Ate Espi cooked Filipino foods for us during our stay in their house.

We met Mr. Yushibumi who had been in Tala for several years ago. He has a problem with hearing but he is a person with full of sense. It is really refreshing talking to him. Knowing the story how the Tala people gave him hope and treated him despite of his defect is really touching. He really loves Tala people. It brought me to the idea that these Japanese people love Tala, I, myself, one of these Tala people, should love my place too.

Anyways, the Welcome Party had been very, very, very successful! Our good friends Guccho and Dessan prepared everything for the whole program. We played group games. Everyone seemed very happy. And also the foods were all good. Ate Chiharu cooked a very delicious pansit that the people in the party really love.

We also attended different English classes. We attended 3 of Mr. Texas’ English classes where the age of the students is ranging from 19-65 years old. I love these classes specially the game ‘Price Quiz’.

Yuka toured us at Utsunomiya University. There, we went to English and Speech classes, their huge library, and Reading Laboratory where we experienced earthquake. We had lunch at their school cafeteria.

At Donkame, we saw how the leftovers coming from restaurants, houses and schools are being processed into chemical-free fertilizers.

We also went to Clean Park Mobarra, Utsunomiya City recycling factory. We observed how they dump trash. In the afternoon of the same day, we went at Eco House Takanezawa where we made our own chopsticks.

My favorite part is when we went where Kuya Maen is working, at Kassenba Elementary School. We met the other school employees. We attended 2 grade 1 English classes and 2 grade 6 English classes. We played games with them like we are part of the class. Then we had lunch with grade 5 students. After lunch, we played *touch* with other students. I really love small kids that's why this is my most favorite among the places we went through.

At Tokyo, we met Mako and Kaaya. They toured us at Tokyo Skytree and we had lunch together. At the sky garden, we exchanged stories and cool stuffs.

The Bazaar at YMCA Idery people's home is one of the most meaningful things during our stay at Japan. The bazaar is for the fund-raising for the unfortunate people in Nepal. We served Japanese halo-halo for the visitors. Joseph and I had a special performance for the people in the event. We sang 6 songs.

In the late afternoon of the same day, a *Sayonara* party is held for us since that's the last day we have with our good friends. Dessan and Guccho prepared like a whole lot of stuffs for the whole program. Then they gave us little presence. In the evening, we had our last dinner together with Tomoko, Yuka, Tatsutoshi, Kuya Maen, Ate Chiharu and Masaya.

To sum these all up, we really had fun and learnings with those people we met. Even those people that I haven't mentioned had been a really big part of this *kawaii* journey.