

July 2009

Grace and Peace to you from JAPAN!

I look back on last summer, visiting with all of you, and sharing about God's work with so many people. It makes me nostalgic for the prairies of North Dakota and the driving, especially while I attempt to survive only my second summer in Kumamoto. But I can also look forward to next summer! I am already mentally preparing for next summer and my home assignment in the summer of 2010. But in the mean time, I will try to explain what has been happening in Kumamoto in the past six months.

February Speech Contest. Two of our students, Nana-- a senior in high school and Risa-- a freshmen, entered the Prefectural Speech Contest. They each memorized a piece of about three minutes long. About 80 other students entered the contest. Nana got first place! And Risa got 4th place! We were so proud of them! Nana is now a college freshmen in Fukuoka at a Methodist college. Risa is a second year English course student and is working hard. We give God thanks for students who are motivated to study, learn and speak English.

March Cairns, Australia. I had the privilege of chaperoning our first year English course students to Cairns, Australia. This was the largest group I had ever chaperoned and it was the first time I to go with a group who I had not been teaching during the school year. But I had nothing to worry about as Sarah and Jonathan (their native teachers) had prepared them very well for the trip. We were able to experience a cyclone, the rainforest, the Bush (not George W.), and the Great Barrier Reef. It was an amazing trip. I am teaching those students this year—a privilege and a challenge to harness all the motivation that they returned with after their home-stays. Pictures: Risa learning a boomerang, hiking in the rainforest, bikinis on the Great Barrier Reef.

March Lutheran Teens Camp For the first time, I attended the Lutheran JELC national camp. The word for spring in Japanese is "haru." So they take the haru of spring and first two syllables of kamupu (camp) to call it: harukan (hurricane)! And, yes, it was a hurricane full of energy rolling through! It is nothing like the activities going on in New Orleans in the US this summer; there were only 80 students and about 20 staff. But the energy and the spiritual growth was just as big. This year's topic was "church." The students, some of who are the only teenager in their own church, were reminded of the importance of coming together as the world Church as well as our local churches and the support that we give and receive from them. The challenge of growing up Christian in Japan blew my mind. I watched as these kids came together and gained strength from one another which needs to last the whole year round until they meet one another again next spring. During the summer vacation, the groups separate and have regional camps. I will be attending the Kyushu camp which will be in Aso the first week in August. But, because the summer vacation is so busy for high school students, there are currently only 7 students registered... ☹ Pictures: group of teens with Matthew Gardner, watching sunrise—it was cold!, my small group girls—it was difficult to counsel them when I, myself, was dealing with so much emotion.

April Coming and Going. Our students have been coming and going to different exchange trips constantly recently. It is amazing to watch these students as they prepare for the experience of a lifetime and then to work them when they return. Megumi (left) returned from Immanuel College, Adelaide, Australia, in March. Kie (right) went to the same school in April. They both are very interested in Christian studies. Megumi is looking at taking the test for a Christian university in Japan. Kie is attending Bible studies with her host family and camps during her vacation times! Praise God! This picture was taken in Sarah's last days which leads to:

April Changing of the Guard. March being the end of the school year and April being the beginning, we had a large change of short term missionaries at Luther Gakuin. Sarah Loan (pink) and Matthew Gardner (blue shirt) headed back to the US after finishing their 2 1/2 year term. They both impacted lives greatly and are missed at Luther on a daily basis. They are both very busy picking up their lives and adjusting to life in the US. Jenifer Brown (green shirt on left) and Carolyn Stypka (green shirt on right) started where Sarah and Matthew left off. They are doing amazingly well and I am excited for the next year and a half as they keep working with students and staff alike. Jenifer is headed back to the US during summer vacation to get married! Congratulations! And Carolyn will be headed to an organic farm to relieve the stress of Luther for a week or so! Pictures: Matthew at the kindergarten—he was amazing! Sarah and our principal, Saka-sensei.

April Easter This year was the warmest Easter I have ever experienced (about 72 degrees!), warm even for Kumamoto. However, it was memorable for more than just the heat. I have been working with the children's Sunday school at Kengun and so celebrated the Easter Sunday sunrise with them at the local park. The numbers were few (12 children and 5 adults), but an amazing celebratory service in the midst of a non-Christian neighborhood, breakfast in the middle of the park and then returning to the church for the normal morning service will be remembered for years to come.

May Families Come Together. For about 10 days in May, my mother, father, grandmother Edythe and her husband John came to Kumamoto! It was mom and dad's third trip here, but Grandma and John's first trip to Asia. It was tough to have 6 people in this small apartment, but the challenge was worth it. We visited many places with a "Flat Stanley" and then, towards the end of their trip, we got together with Kazu's family. Kazu's grandmother was not able to come to our wedding four years ago and so it was a very emotional time for grandparents to meet. Kazu's grandmother still tears up when she talks about the evening. It was wonderful to have the families together—even if they can't verbally communicate. They somehow make things work... Religion, race, or language are no barrier for these two families who come together so infrequently. Picture: (back from left) Jeanne—mom, Katie, Terry—dad, Kazuhiro—sister's boyfriend, Akemi—Kazu's sister, Fusako—Kazu's mom, Kazu. (front from left) John, Grandma Edythe, Kazu's grandmother, Takahito—Kazu's father.

May Sports Day. Every year the Sports Day is still slightly different and exciting! Many of the things are the same every time, like running races and the opening ceremonies full of pride, pomp and circumstance. But some things change every year, like the way the boys make their pyramids for "kumitaiso" or the adventure course that the students and teachers have to run through—this year it involved finding a piece of candy in a pan of flower—with a wet face!!

June HS Festival. The “kokosotai” or “High school cultural and sports festival” is like having State A and B Basketball, State A and B Track, State A and B Hockey, State A and B Football, State Music Festival, State Theater Festival, State A and B Swimming and everything else for the state level all on the same weekend!!! It is absolutely insane! This year I attended the music and theater sessions at the prefectural theater. To finish the first day, a group of 25 girls danced the traditional dance of their area, the Yamaga lantern festival. It is a beautiful dance—with actual lights in their lanterns on their heads. In old times they actually had flames, but now it is a pen light. The whole day, the quality of art, the motivation and dedication of the students, gave me renewed confidence in the youth of Japan.

June Cooking. We continue to have a bi-monthly cooking club at Kengun church of upper elementary and junior high school students. This is led by Matthew Hofer, a J3 at Kyushu Gakuin (the old boys school). He is an amazing cook and baker! In June they made pineapple up-side down cake. It was amazing!! They continue to have a good time, learn a little English and make very delicious foods!

June Soroptomist Discussion. Students from Luther Gakuin participated in a unique kind of English contest, a discussion contest, sponsored by the Soroptomists of Kumamoto. Some of the judges were other foreign missionaries. This year’s theme was “Water.” It sounded boring at the beginning, but the students really got into it. Yoko won the prefectural contest and will be going on to the regional contest at the beginning of August.

June Samuel Night On the same day as the discussion contest, we started the summer Samuel Night. It is a time for elementary and junior high school students to come to church, enjoy a fun environment, learn about a specific Bible study in depth, and stay over-night at the church. It is kind of like a lock-in, and yet Japanese style. This summer’s theme was Daniel in the Lion’s Den. They were really good about being the hungry lions, but it was difficult to become tame lions after getting so riled up! ☺

July Eclipse For the second time in my life, I experienced almost a full eclipse! In Kumamoto, we were at 93%, but you couldn’t quite tell because it was also cloudy. However, the science club made over 100 “glasses” for everyone to look at the sun with. The first time I was five and I remember hiding under my bed when it got so dark! This time I was much more prepared, but I found some things under my desk that I didn’t know where there.... Ha!

Thank you so much for your support and prayers. I look forward to sharing with you in person next summer—I am sure I will have a lot more pictures to share as well. We covet your prayers for

- the Japanese Lutheran Church as they celebrate the 100th anniversary of the only Lutheran Seminary in Japan.
- the Japan Missionary association (JELA) as it also celebrates 100 years in September.
- Japanese youth as they look in various places for meaning in their lives.
- Young Japanese Christians as they look for support in their faith.
- Luther High school third year students as they prepare for college entrance exams and then college life.
- New short term missionaries as they begin language training and orientation in Tokyo.

Peace & Prayers,

Katie