

IFYE Representative Thrilled With Japan Culture

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HARRISBURG (Dauphin Co.)
 — Her eyes sparkle, a large grin encompasses her face, and her voice portrays excitement. Sharing her five and one-half months adventures in Japan, Margee Wolff practically takes her listeners on the excursion all over again.

Those excursions began last June when Margee left for Japan representing Dauphin County in the International Four-H Youth Exchange (IFYE). The program was set up to help Margee learn what she had set as goals for herself. Hosting her was the Labo International Exchange Foundation. The primary mission of Labo is education. It is similar to the American 4-H program using volunteers called tutors and members belonging to a neighborhood

Labo club called a Labo Party. The emphasis at Labo is on teaching foreign languages to children, English being the most popular.

As part of her experience, Margee attended Labo Camp. Her role was to help with the various programs such as games, outdoor hikes, and other special events.

Since Margee was able to somewhat tailor-make her own learning experiences, she built her stay around her personal goal of learning business management styles and how employees are treated. These opportunities included teaching English at a high school for one week, working at a newspaper for two weeks and two weeks at advertising agencies. One of the most exciting experiences was with a cultural agency. The objectives of this agency in-

clude helping people to learn about and understand the Japanese and American cultures.

In addition to learning about businesses, Margee also wanted to gain a deeper appreciation for the Japanese culture. In order to do this, she spent 3½ weeks traveling.

She visited shrines, temples, and castles. On the advice of one of her host mothers, she purchased a temple book. When she visited the various temples and shrines, the priests stamped a page with that particular temple's mark and autographed the book. Margee proudly shared that she was able to completely fill her book with stamps from 48 temples and shrines.

"I found out later how valuable that is to the Japanese! In America, it's worth a fortune to Japanese immigrants!"

Her tours took her mostly through the southern part of the country. The agriculture industry is comprised of a few dairy farms and many rice farms, all in the northern portion of the country.

Cultural Differences

"My very favorite activity was the festivals - they are very traditional Japanese!" The community gathers together several times throughout the year - similar to our county fairs for a variety of activities. Men from various sections of the community take turns carrying the portable shrine called a mikoshi in parades. Children are also equipped with tiny shrines and the women do special dances on platforms. All this is to entertain the gods.

To help Margee feel more at home, one of her host families decided to have their own little party for Halloween. Since that is foreign to their culture, they learned as much about the American custom as they could, then they invited friends and neighbors for a Halloween party. "They even had a pumpkin to decorate!" The only costume was Margee in a kimono, but it was a real sharing of traditions.

One of the biggest cultural differences is the concept of religion. It is believed that 80 percent of the population is Shinto and 70 percent Buddhist, many incorporate both beliefs in their lives, with only 2 percent belonging to the Christian faith. Shinto belief, the traditional Japanese religion, has no bible or written rules, their beliefs are based on nature. Weddings are performed in the Shinto religion.

Buddist faith was brought to Japan from China. Japanese people use this form of religion for their funerals. In larger homes there are Buddhist altars, which are a tribute to the ancestors and the dead. Pictures of dead relatives are placed on the altar as well as food on special holidays.

"I have learned to appreciate how much our society and culture is based on Christian values and beliefs!" Wolff said.

The Japanese culture commands a greater respect for the elderly than is typically found in America. Wolff said, "There is beginning to be more of a generation gap since the younger population is becoming more like the Americans and the older population is still traditional Japanese."

Educational System

When asked what's the biggest difference in the educational system, Margee laughs "everyone wears slippers!" The schools all require uniforms as well. "Children are not encouraged to be indi-



Margee Wolff proudly displays all the stamps from her temple book- a priceless treasure.

viduals - they're taught to conform to the group!"

She added, "There does seem to be a greater respect for authority." Children are very quiet, even shy, during classes, they do become talkative during breaks, but know that they have to be attentive in the classroom.

In addition, the school year is also longer. Not only do the children attend classes in the summer, but they also go to school 5½ days a week.

Education is highly stressed for everyone. Even though the Japanese culture demands that women stop their careers once married, it is still important for girls to get a good education.

Emphasis is also directed toward sports. Students pick one sport in gym class and play that all through school. They don't learn a variety of activities, instead they focus on perfecting one sport.

On the positive side of the educational differences are no school dropouts, 99 percent literacy rate, no drug problems as of yet, and teen pregnancy is no a big problem.

"It's not that it doesn't happen but abortion is very acceptable," Wolff said.

Japanese Business

Since Margee's goal was to experience Japanese business she did spend considerable time in various business settings. "One of the biggest differences is that none of the offices have dividers between co-workers. The belief is that if there are walls, employees will not work as a team."

The team concept is very important. Work groups are the norm with the manager in the same room. The higher a person is in seniority the closer they sit to the manager.

There are not a lot of women in business. It is believed to be unacceptable for women to work after they are married, so even if there are employed women, they are very rarely in high systems. This concept is slowly changing.

One option for women is to work for Labo. That is seen as acceptable and is helping women to

contribute their knowledge as well as gain success, however, it is not very profitable.

Food

Of course every society has their own traditional foods. In addition to western fast foods such as Wendy's, McDonald's, Pizza Hut, and Kentucky Fried Chicken, there are special dining pleasures for Japanese food. At Japanese restaurants there are displays of food featured in windows that are on the menu so customers know exactly what they are ordering.

"Japanese food is very different - very pretty - it is delicately placed on the plate." Women take great pride in their cooking skills.

Wolff said, "In order to be accepted I had to learn to use chopsticks. The Japanese watched very carefully to see if I was able to eat with chopsticks." Margee found the wooden chopsticks to be the easiest to use.

Japanese diet consists of a lot of plain rice, fish with the heads on, and sushi - "I really learned to like it." Although willing to try anything, there was one food - nattoo, which is fermented beans, that Margee claims "I just couldn't stomach that!"

A unique tidbit is that there is very little milk in the Japanese diet. It was introduced after World War II, and since then, people have started growing taller.

Japan and Beyond

"When I first thought about going to Japan, it seemed really scary - now I can't believe I ever doubted going."

Wolff's future plans include pursuing a career in either public relations or a communications job as well as furthering her education. Long range goals involve returning to Japan to live and work for a couple years.

She said, "My trip to Japan was more of a career move rather than just a trip."

All are invited to hear Wolff share her experiences on Monday, February 25, at 7:30 p.m. at the Dauphin County Agriculture and Natural Resource Center, Peter's Mountain Road, Dauphin, PA 17018.

York Farm Woman Gets National Award

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When she "stumbled" into a meeting more than 15 years ago, Ethel Gross could not have imagined how the encounter would change her life.

"I just happened to open the door and stumbled into the American Agri-Women meeting," recalls the northern York County farm woman. She was attending the 1975 Farm Women's Forum in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, when Ethel came upon the meeting of the fledgling AAW.

"I thought it was a terrific idea, of farm women from across the country getting together to do things for their collective good," she says.

American Agri-Women has since spread to encompass members and affiliates in a non-profit, non-partisan, national coalition of farm, ranch and agri-business organizations.

In November, Ethel Gross was named a recipient of AAW's LEAVEN award, the organization's only official award, and bestowed on only a small number of honorees since the groups' founding. The plaque's engraved tribute reads: "A kind and gentle woman, her encouragement and

support have nurtured members to strive for new goals in agriculture."

LEAVEN is an acronym for six attributes recognized in the awards recipients - Loyalty, Enthusiasm, Anticipatory, Valiant, Effectiveness, and Nurturing. A description of the award likens the recipients to the leavening in bread, where "only a small amount permeates and elevates all it comes in contact with."

Though she protests that others are more deserving, Ethel's name was submitted for the award by members of Penn's Agri-Women, Pennsylvania's affiliate of AAW. She helped organize PAW, serving as president for five years, and assisted with both the 1980 and 1988 national AAW conventions hosted in Pennsylvania by the state affiliate. Ethel has served on various national committees, including her present appointments to the nominating and timber issues committees.

Ethel has attended all but one AAW convention and especially treasures the friendships she has made with women from across the country.

"The conventions are enjoyable because they always have plenty of good speakers, basically agri-

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In appreciation for her work with Agri-Women, Ethel Gross received an award.