



KEITO ANDO

TOMODACHI shaped who I am today and I'm sure the same could be said for countless more. I'm an alumnus of the TOMODACHI TOSHIBA Science and Technology Leadership Academy. During the program I met many impactful people but I remember one person in particular - one of the teaching assistants, Taka Shibata. The program starts and I still remember: he walks in tall lanky and with bright red hair. So Naturally I'm thinking to myself "who is this guy?" but towards the end of program he was really there for me; as a mentor and a friend.

We had our final presentations coming up and I was having trouble preparing. Everyone had already gone to sleep. The lights were long out and the only things glowing were our computer screens. It was just me Taka and the computers. After a long day of TOMODACHI programming we were both exhausted but he stayed up giving me advice on my speech and my presentation. He showed me that he cared and so on the last day I went up to him and thanked him for all that he had done for me his response: "Don't mention it we're TOMODACHI."

It was there that I realized how important the relationships I made with my fellow TOMODACHI were. I knew that this was a network that I wanted to continue to be a part of. After the program, I thought about how I could better serve this community and I reached out to the Alumni Manager for an internship role. At the time, she was just developing the Alumni Regional Framework and so my experience there allowed me to have a level of input that no other internship could ever provide.

Fast forward to after my internship. At that point I was seeking more leadership roles to use what I had learned. And when the opportunity came up I jumped at the chance to plan the next TOMODACHI Summit.

The TOMODACHI Generation Summit 2017 was held on September 10th. Over 270 people gathered in Tokyo to connect with fellow alumni old and new, engage in discussions about how our generation can further US Japan relations and potentially collaborate on exciting new projects in the future. It was the first ever summit planned by alumni for alumni.

So It's the day of. I'm at the reception, the last event for the day. The large room is filled with lively conversation people from all regions of Japan and the US mixing and mingling. It was there one of the volunteers came up to me. He was a high school student interested in asian relations and wanted to know how I became involved in TOMODACHI. He was seeking advice. Through my time at TOMODACHI the once participant that sought help from Taka, was now able to provide guidance to younger alumni... and so I did. I shared with him my experience at The TOMODACHI Initiative and how he could start being more involved as well.

Neither one of us had red hair, but talking with him reminded me of my late-night talks with Taka, and so when he thanked me I told him: "Don't mention it we're TOMODACHI."

Thank you.

SAWA SHIMOKAWA

When I was a child, I loved to learn about engineering and I had a dream that I would like to study in the United States, home to some of the most advanced technology in the world! I'm from single parent family and my mother raised three children by herself. Unfortunately, however, my mother suffered from leukemia and my sister has a congenital heart disease. I had almost completely give up on studying in the United States because traveling abroad and doing research was expensive and my family couldn't afford the tuition fee due to my mother's and sister's medical expenses. However, I didn't stop studying hard and I believed I could still make my dream come true someday.

Therefore, when I found out about the TOMODACHI STEM @ Rice University Program, I was so excited and applied for the program right away. Through this program, I was able to conduct research for 4 weeks in the U.S. and met a lot of Japanese and American professionals; many of them women. In my department at Osaka University, there are no female professors, so it was a precious opportunity to talk with female students, researchers and professors in the U.S. We talked about careers opportunities as a civil engineering student and I was pleased to meet many great people who became my role models. Thanks to the research experience at Rice University, I became more interested in my major, and I started conducting research about the effects of tsunami on bridge piers when I returned to Osaka University.

Also, I took part in the TOMODACHI Alumni Disaster Resilience Training Program and I could learn about disasters from refugee's points of view. Even though I didn't experience Great East Japan Earthquake directly, this program taught me there are a lot of things I can do. From this experience, I realized how important civil engineering is for everyone and how effective to consider solutions from various points of view. I became more interested in interdisciplinary research and other infrastructure that is stronger and more disaster-resilient.

Now, I am planning on applying to study in the United States next year as an exchange student and I would like to try doing research again because I was impressed the strong relationships and cooperation between industry and academic research. I would like to make our world better by utilizing my knowledge and education. Therefore, I am eager to learn deeply about my field through hands-on experience and approach all challenges as learning opportunities. I would like learning and the growth that comes from international experiences to be a part of my life forever! Thanks to the TOMODACHI Initiative and the TOMODACHI STEM Program at Rice University I had the opportunity to take the first step towards making my childhood dream come true. Thank you.

KATE ALEKSANDROVA

Hi. To share my story with you, I'll be playing a game called two truths, one lie. I will be telling you three facts and I hope that by the end of this, you will be able to tell which one is the lie.

My favorite food is white peaches

I am a nursing major.

Before TOMODACHI, I knew exactly what my passion was.

For the two weeks, I was in the J&J TOMODACHI Disaster Nursing program, I became family with Japanese nursing students as we heard stories of survivors, first responders, and professionals on healing after the events of 3/11, 9/11, and Hurricane Sandy.

Probably like most of you, I've always heard about disasters through the news - seen numbers pop up about the number of casualties. Seen images of destroyed homes, entire cities gone. Yet I really had no idea what they were really going through or I could help.

This all changed when I met Jim. Jim is a 9/11 survivor. He shared that the morning of 9/11 it had been a cloudless and perfect day - the kind of day where it felt like nothing could ruin your good mood. His revealed that his brother worked in the south building of the world trade center, the second building that would be hit that day by a hijacked plane.

As the buildings began collapsing, Manhattan watched as their city was covered in a dense cloud of smoke. He mentioned "Being so far away from an event, you really don't understand the impact until you hear a story." Recalling that fateful day, we relived the slow realization that his brother was not coming back home. To keep his brother's memory alive, he has been telling his story for 16 years now. Jim went on to volunteer in aiding victims of 3/11 in Japan to give aid to families who have lost homes and the flow of daily life in an instant, who were going through the same loss his community had come to know too well. To this day 9/11 victims are still being provided with physical and mental aid and I talked to healthcare professionals about the struggles victims were facing and the interventions health professionals could aid victims with.

So have you found out the lie yet? I'll give you a hint, it's not about the peaches and you already know my major.

The truth is that, before Tomodachi, I admit thinking about leaving my nursing program. Through the program, I was able to see the value nurses were able to bring through being able to compassionately connecting to someone, giving them the chance to open up about their struggles and heal. Nurses talk to patients during their most vulnerable - whether the happiest (having their first child), or most tragic of times (receiving the heavy diagnosis). This connection had been hard for me to make while solving medical case studies, which seemed so much simpler on paper.

TOMODACHI has not only reignited my passion for nursing, it has given me the tools to understand how I can help others, and a community of passionate leaders in my field and other fields like all of you here today.

The questions I asked myself over and over as I was finding my path which may help you at some point are, what is your passion? Who are the people you impact through your passion?

RIO FUJII

*Two roads di verged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.
(Slide with Robert Frost quote)*

Two years ago the TOMODACHI Metlife Women's Leadership Program inspired me to take that road less traveled.

This empowering mentorship program introduced me to women leaders with global careers and connected me with 50 talented female college students all across Japan. I learned about leadership and the power of a strong network, and took me to NY and Washington DC. I met crucial role models that significantly changed the path of my life.

In Japan there is strict path that everyone follows through school and into their careers. That is the path that I was on before TOMODACHI.

During the TOMODACHI program, I met Dr. Sachiko Kuno who was listed in Forbes Magazine as one of the 50 most successful women in the United States. She is an unusual Japanese woman. Not only was she a woman studying in the sciences, but she explained how her incredible success was due to taking that road less traveled. She had studied abroad and said that it was a life changing experience.

I thought I had already traveled too far to change my path, but she made me ask myself if that was really true. Nobody from my community had taken such a risk, so I was scared. At the time I was shy and I wasn't confident in my English.

However, this great successful Japanese women right in front of me took a risk and found reward. I knew I could do it too.

I was also inspired and supported by my TOMODACHI peers. I remember clearly...

After Ms. Kuno's speech, we went back to the hotel and my peers and I started working on our final group presentation on women empowerment. Late at night, our group discussion heated up. My teammates passionately discussed the social pressures for women that exist in Japan: get educated, get a job, get married, have a baby.

And, in Japan society expects you have to do it before you turn 25 because after 25 you start to lose value.

Unlike me, my teammates had already traveled and studied abroad. To be honest, until then I hadn't even realized that this was a possibility.

Because of the TOMODACHI MetLife WLP, I found empowerment through Dr. Kuno's example and the perspective of my peers.

I knew my parents couldn't afford to pay for University in the United States, but I was determined to figure out how to change the path I was on.

So here I am, currently taking a gap year from college, which is very uncommon in Japan and seen as very risky.

I realized my dream and got a full scholarship to study abroad for one year at Bates College in Lewiston, Maine.

TOMODACHI has taught me to take risks and take that road less traveled.

Thank you

AZIA RUFF

I hope you're enjoying the presentations. It's been an absolute gift for me to be here and get to know these wonderful people on this panel with me. Like them all, I too participated in a

TOMODACHI program. But unlike most of them, I am not a college student. After I got my GED, I completed a year and a half's worth of courses until the stress of my aunt's passing had shaken me so strongly that, for my sanity's sake, I had no choice but to take a hardship withdrawal. And so I did. But a wise man recently told me, "With every challenge comes opportunity," and I decided that I was going to use that challenge that made me quit school and turn that into an opportunity to devote my time doing what's most important to me: making the foster care system a better place for the next generation of youth that will face it after me.

This is where TOMODACHI comes in.

I quit school in February, and in March I was accepted into the TOMODACHI Foster Youth Leadership Program. In this program I became a part of an alliance of foster care alumni, both in the United States and in Japan, and would go to Japan in the fall to immerse myself in the world my Japanese colleagues told me about. Immensely proud and with a fire in my heart, I knew this was just the opportunity I needed to come out of that time of hardship on top. I remember thinking to myself over and over: "What better opportunity for you than to expand your horizons and begin to make GLOBAL impact?"

Busy with my local foster care reform work, and my program membership, it wasn't before long that the hole I felt like I belonged and sure that dropping out was the best decision of my life.

In September, our team made the trip to Japan. We were there for 9 days. We attended the TOMODACHI conference in Tokyo, where got to meet my TOMO participant-peers. All dynamic, innovative young leaders, most of which were college students. Talking to them, and seeing how the world opened up for them through their college education brought me back to a time I going to college is was my biggest dream. I imagined myself with my head buried in books, and nourishing my mind with information. I wanted that. But after 6 months away from college, I didn't know if I still had what it takes to be a good student. And so I put that day dream in my back pocket, and returned back to this moment, back to Earth.

Then I met a woman named Maia. Maia works at the US-Japan Council. She told me about the way the council helps many college make their dreams of international study a possibility with the Watanabe Scholarship. To me, the scholarship sounded like an elite luxury, one granted to only the finest of students. But as I continued to meet these young leaders, I realized how many people- in that room alone- studied abroad. Seeing all of them, I thought to myself, "If all of these people were able to study abroad, why can't I?"

I realized in that moment, that there WAS no reason why I couldn't do it too. I realized that the experience wasn't going to come to me until I went after it. It was in that moment I decided I was time for me to go back.

The TOMODACHI Foster Youth Leadership Program was the best thing I could've done with my time after quitting school. Thanks to TOMODACHI I was able to expand my horizons. Physically, I travelled abroad for the first time. Professionally, I widened my reach to on an international front. But they say, "Nothing opens up the world more than education" and it was my time in TOMO that gave me the spark and the confidence to give education another shot.

I start classes again in January. Wish me luck!

YUKA IWABUCHI

What does TOMODACHI mean to you?

When I get this question, my answer is always this: Family.

In 2013, I joined the TOMODACHI Dallas Sendai Young Ambassadors Program and met a host family that welcomed me as one of their own. They were a very passionate and energetic family who supported me and showed me how people-to-people relations go beyond cultures and languages. This experience kicked off my interest to become a bridge between Japan and other countries.

On the program, we were called “young ambassadors” and it was my role to represent my hometown and deepen the friendship between our sister cities: Sendai and Dallas. At the time, it had only been a little over two years since the Great East Japan Earthquake and our entire team felt it was our duty to make sure what happened in Tohoku was not forgotten.

I consider myself one of the lucky ones as my entire family was safe, but our house was considered unlivable. To my host family in Dallas, I decided to share another story.

A story about my friend Azusa who was from Shiogama, a coastal town in Tohoku. On March 11th, when the waves came, they swallowed up her family business and took her grandparents. Azusa was at school when it happened.

One day, she told me how guilty she felt for not being there to save her grandparents. I was at a loss for words. I was overcome with emotion, unable to say a comforting word, and feeling guilty for my inaction. I shared this story with my host family, and told them that I felt I had not done enough for Azusa, I was unable to give her the words to comfort her then.

Listening with tears in their eyes, my host mother held my shoulders and said “thank you for sharing that. Don’t doubt yourself. You are here to share these stories now. We will never forget.”

My host mother taught me the value of empathy and love beyond words, and I knew then, that I wanted to become someone to support these people-to-people – and eventually country-to-country – relations.

After I got back from Dallas, I participated in 14 TOMODACHI Alumni Programs because I felt that I wanted to challenge myself more and looked for opportunities to think creatively. Through these experiences, I have made many ties that are truly like family. They have not only encouraged and empowered me, but created a place that allowed me to stop and exhale.

In the future, I want to do what my host family did for me – be a leader who consoles and supports and who empowers one another towards a better world.

What does TOMODACHI mean to me? Family.

JONATHAN CANFIELD

Connecting people between local communities. These are some of the words that resonated with me after my experience in TOMODACHI.

To start I’d like to share a little bit about myself. I’ve been learning Japanese language and culture since an immersion program in 2005. Since then, there hasn’t been a year, where Japanese hasn’t been a part of my life. My first time traveling to Japan, during a class trip in 2010, opened a new understanding of viewpoints and experiences. From gracious homestay families in Osaka & Oamori who shared Japanese customs, to reflections at the Peace Park, to meeting with different American

and Japanese dignitaries, I've been significantly impacted by the special connections between our countries.

At the TOMODACHI Daiwa House conference, I gained new perspective on how to foster connections between people at the local level. Over breakfast with Admiral Sekiguchi, of the Japanese Self Defense Force, he shared insights on how the alliance grew after the 3.11 earthquake. In the course of our conversation, his words of how American & Japanese forces were able to come together quickly, in spite of bureaucracy, to initiate ground searches for survivors & bring food to communities stuck with me. After hearing this, I left thinking how I could foster such close interactions between communities & people.

I was also inspired by Mr. Grilli, from the Japan-America Society. He spoke of the music programs that brought together Japanese & American students for 3.11 relief concerts. The issues can seem very far and distant, and even complicated. But he was able to connect his local Boston community to the many efforts in Japan. I understood this as a catalyst for efforts between our countries – his story also got me thinking – what part I might play in bringing together different communities? How I could give back to my community and provide a return.

Attending this conference, I became a part of TOMODACHI's network of people who are dedicated to building these exchanges. In these stories, I tried to imagine my role; and I left encouraged by their determination to help connect people.

Empowered by the network, I was inspired to reach out to the US-Japan Caucus (lead by Congressman Castro & Congressman Reichert & their staff) over the summer to connect people within the D.C. community to Japan. Working with the Caucus, we were able to develop a briefing series to provide a learning opportunity for congressional staff. By connecting staff with different policy makers, fellows, and academics, we expanded their awareness and knowledge of Japan.

TOMODACHI instilled within me the leadership, communication, confidence to carry out this initiative, but it also left me reflecting what kind of individual part I could play to connect people (in the local context)?

Connecting different spheres of people & policy at the local level is crucial --- it brings new ideas and support that strengthens the overall US-Japan relationship. This is what TOMODACHI helped me realize.

AYAKA OBATA

Storytelling, an emotional double edged sword. It's something that brings me great joy, but with it comes sorrow and pain.

My hometown is Sendai, which was not severely damaged by the Great East Japan Earthquake. However, it took someone I love. I lost my dear uncle in Minamisanriku, a coastal town where I call my second home. He continued to work at the Disaster-Prevention Center to help everyone else to evacuate, and he is still listed as "missing". After the disaster, I embarked on a campaign to share the lessons of my uncle's death with others.

However, I was conflicted. I kept asking myself two questions. "Am I qualified to talk about Minamisanriku, even though I was not living there?" and "Should I continue to share my story, even

it brings so much pain to me?”. I did continue with this campaign while bottling up my sorrow and guilt. However, my endurance was about to reach its limits.

Around that time, in 2014, I decided to take a part in TOMODACHI MUFG International Exchange Program visited Los Angeles for two weeks. During the program, I promised myself to tell my story from the disaster to my host family. I was really frustrated with my lack of English skill. But my host family was patient, tried to understand, and hugged me with tears. I never forget that moment. It was not the campaign to share the lessons of disasters. I was able to share my story.

It was that moment that I found the reasons as to why I should share. I realized that if I shared, my uncle would stay alive in people’s hearts, more people would come to know a small, yet very beautiful town in Tohoku, and more importantly, the warm words from the people motivated me to live despite the sorrow.

After I came back to Japan, I decided to be a storyteller who can tell not only the tragedy but also the positives overshadowed by the disaster. These experiences led me to take a part in a half-year internship in Onagawa, a coastal town, also severely damaged by tsunami. I found happiness introducing the town and was encouraged by kind comments by visitors saying “thank you for introducing us this special place”. I was not an outsider anymore. I built my confidence to play my parts to contribute to the towns.

Storytelling, an emotional double edged sword. Immediately after the disaster, I wanted to put the disaster behind me. However, but the TOMODACHI taught me it is ok. TOMODACHI taught me that my sorrow from the disaster is the important part of me and I can move forward with sorrow in my heart.

So today, I stand in front of you and promise to continue to share my story beyond today and well into the future.

Thank you.

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