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Lives Enriched by Living Abroad

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Lives enriched by living abroad

Two Linfield alumni found a new way of looking at life after living and working in Japan for a year.

It's been nearly a decade since their experience, but Dave and Anastacia (Sims) Dillon, both '89, agree their lives have been enriched by the priceless connections they made while serving as assistant English teachers at high schools in Hitachi-Ota, Japan, through the Japan Exchange Teaching program in 1995.

"There's a great connection between living abroad and the value of life-long learning that Linfield works so diligently to instill in its students," said Dave, a Linfield College trustee and executive vice president of the Oregon Farm Bureau.

Even before their marriage in 1990, Dave and Anastacia discussed the importance of living abroad.

So they jumped at the opportunity with JET. Dave resigned from his position as press and community liaison for former U.S. Sen. Bob Packwood and Anastacia took a leave of absence from her post as assistant director of financial aid at Linfield.

Although Dave said he expected to learn new things, make new friends and have new experiences in Japan, he did not anticipate the change of perspective that had the greatest impact on him.

"Being in another culture and away from familiar things at home gave me a chance to see the U.S. through a different set of eyes," he said. "When things become familiar, there's a tendency to stop examining them. Being plucked out of that familiar setting was a chance to see things new again."

As a Linfield student, Anastacia took four years of Japanese and studied abroad in Japan twice. Dave had little Japanese language training prior to their departure, but carefully observed the cues around him in Japan.

"Paying attention to how things are done is as important as vocabulary," he said. "Often, what is not said, but what is intimated or gestured, is more important than the actual words that are said."

Anastacia often draws upon skills she acquired in Japan in her current job as associate director of student financial services at Lewis and Clark College, where she occasionally works with students preparing to study abroad and international students studying in Portland.

"I can relate to the confusion international students sometimes experience," she said. "They can come to me for help."

The Dillons returned to Japan in 2003 with their son, Nathan, 7, and visited Tsutomu (Ben) Kusama Yamaguchi, a Kanto Gakuin University student whom they hosted at Linfield in 1993. Ben and his wife, Megumi, have a three-year-old daughter, whom they refer to as Nathan's Japanese sister. Both Dave and Anastacia agree travel will remain a priority for their family.

"We're happily infected with the travel bug," Anastacia said. "Once you've done something that's outside your regular comfort zone, it makes other barriers look smaller."

— Laura Davis

Dave and Anastacia (Sims) Dillon, both '89, third and fourth from the left, and their son Nathan, front row, left, visited friends in Kamakura, Japan, in 2003. Tsutomu (Ben) Kusama Yamaguchi, second from left, was a Kanto Gakuin University student whom they hosted at Linfield in 1993.

